# The Belizean Conundrum: Globalization, Tourism and Livelihoods in Placencia, Belize

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# Abstract


## The Belizean Conundrum: Globalization, Tourism and Livelihoods in Placencia, Belize

By Myriam Thériault

During the last decades, around the world, globalization has been the driving force behind the development of tourism. Pushed by a few international organizations, tourism rapidly became a way for Third World countries to reach development. Yet, the perceptions locals have of tourism, and the impacts it has on them, are not always positive.

Placencia, Belize, was a small fishing village until tourism became the main source of income for most of its villagers. It is important to understand how tourism impacts the livelihood of Placencians to see if tourism is helping, or hindering, the development of Placencia. Using a livelihood approach, this report describes how the natural, social, physical, human and financial assets of Placencians are impacted by tourism.

September, 2007




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"Development does not come from a nation of waiters, bell hops and chambermaids, and far less from prostitute and pimps. Although such assertions clearly go beyond economic criteria, they are at the heart of many criticisms of tourism development"

(Harrison, 1992: 18)



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# Chapter 1: Introduction

When I was 13, I visited Cuba with my family. This trip was my initiation to international tourism. I immediately fell in love with the Island and its people. On our last day, a hurricane hit the Island and required us to stay longer, giving us the opportunity to help a few Cubans in ways we could. The experience I had there made me very conscious of how tourism impacted the life of the people working at our hotel and I realised how tourism allowed for the meeting of people living in very different worlds. I remember thinking that both the tourist and the host seemed to be interested in each other, since they both passed their time scrutinizing the other, but that they did not really share anything else than a few simple words. Cuba made me aware of the fact that what most people see while travelling is only a pale imitation of what really happens in the country they are visiting. I started then to understand that tourists do not fully realize what is going on in the country they are visiting. Through other varied trips, I began to ask myself if tourism is really beneficial for the people that live in tourist locales. In my mind, tourism and development are linked, for better or for worse. They are often simultaneous since one usually creates the other. But is tourism-led development always beneficial for a community?

Around the world today, tourism is regularly used as a means of economic growth. Many countries take advantage of the industry to boost their economy, using tourism as an economic development strategy. This strategy seems to be gaining popularity in many



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developing countries where there are interesting natural features, products or culture. However, if tourism-led development is usually seen as a good way to improve the GNP of a country, it appears that this development strategy is not always advantageous for the communities that have to deal with the hordes of tourists appearing in their village. Tourists' destinations usually see their environment, their society, their infrastructures, their beliefs and their finances slowly change because of tourists' arrival. The main problem comes with the fact that many of the transformations tourism causes in a society are unplanned, and that they often turn out to be uncontrollable. Using tourism as a means of development is therefore a questionable approach and it is important to see if it should still be used as a prime way to develop.

The impacts of tourism are numerous, and many different approaches to study its impacts have been produced in the last thirty years. Unfortunately, many of these approaches concentrate mainly on the financial gains that a country can make with tourism. Surely enough, financial gains made with tourism are important for developing countries. Yet, many other aspects of tourism need to be studied and the livelihood approach seems to be the only approach allowing such a complete understanding. Beyond the financial impacts that tourism has on a community, the livelihood approach allows us to look at the human, social, physical and natural impacts of tourism from the point of view of the people having to deal with tourism. Getting locals' opinions and perceptions is the basis of this



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report, and we will therefore aim at observing how locals' livelihoods are affected by tourism.

I decided to concentrate on a relatively small village where tourism is still emerging. This would give me the chance to see how people are reacting to the industry while remembering what the village was like before. I found a village called Placencia, of approximately 600 people, located at the end of an eleven mile long peninsula in Belize. Placencia really developed tourism in the last decade. The village went, in only a few years, from being a fishing village to the third most important tourism destination in Belize. Placencians living in the village today have lived through the entire process of tourism development. They also have learned to cohabitate with many foreigners and have learned to live with the daily arrival of tourists. I decided to spend 6 months with them in order to understand if tourism puts them on a sustainable livelihood path.

This report will answer this question: Is tourism helping or hindering development in Placencia, Belize?

This report will describe how tourism impacts Placencians' livelihoods and will describe how each of their assets was changed by tourism in the last decade. I found that since Placencians consider the growing tourism industry in Placencia as a relatively easy way of making important amount of money, many of them choose to diminish or ignore the



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problems linked with the industry. Yet, I found that tourism negatively impacts each asset of Placencians' livelihoods.

To begin this report, I will define what development is and then will relate it to tourism. Subsequently, I will explain briefly how globalization generates a craze for tourism development. Since tourism really started to be studied only 30 years ago, I will then present the oldest and more known models explaining people's perception of tourism and mainstream tourism development. Bearing in mind that an improvement of livelihoods is really what development is about, the livelihood approach will be presented and each asset will be briefly defined. Using these assets, a review of the different tourism impacts found around the world will be presented and classified.

Placencia is part of Belize, and even though it has a very special place in the country I thought that it would be important to depict Belize quite extensively in order to understand Placencia's situation. In this third chapter, I use the five livelihood assets to portray the country of Belize. The country's thriving tourism industry is then briefly depicted, to allow a better understanding of the industry importance. I will then present the methodology I used while on the field, depict the village of Placencia, and describe the results of my six months empirical research.



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In the fourth chapter, I will provide my understanding and discussion of the impacts of tourism on the development of Placencia. My assessment is mainly based on what was portrayed by Placencians. Yet, since Placencians are very secretive and proud, this analysis is also tempered by my own observations, feelings and experiences.

I will briefly conclude this report in the fifth chapter, adding a few remarks and general thoughts on the subject of tourism impacts on community development. I will then briefly explain how this research can be applied to other communities and I will present a few suggestions for future researches.



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# Chapter 2: Literature Review

Through the years, many researchers have looked at the impact of tourism on villages and communities around the world. Villagers have seen their day-to-day life being completely transformed by the development of a tourist industry that brought numerous tourists in their neighbourhood. Interestingly enough, a considerable amount of research has been carried out in the last decades on the perceptions' locals have of tourism development. These researches have mainly tried to explain how the hosts' perception of tourists changed since tourism developed. Meanwhile, other researches were conducted considering the impacts of tourism on specific aspects of the villagers' life. However, it is not surprising to find that the financial gains made with tourism are the most commonly studied subject in this field. It is a shame to observe that only a few researchers have tried to get an overall view of the numerous changes created by tourism on the development of small villages. Most of these researches were produced in the last 10 years. Rare are the researchers who ended up asking the question: Is tourism helping or hindering development?

It is important to mention that development and tourism development seem to be, in many places, intrinsically linked. Tourism development appears to be a cause of general



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development and its consequences seem to deeply impact the life of the people living in the zone getting developed to cater tourists[1].

This chapter will link tourism development and development itself and will explain how this specific type of development can be observed in a tourism influenced village. It will also introduce and define terms like: development, globalization, tourism and livelihoods. The main theories developed to analyse tourism will shortly be presented and discussed. Finally, the livelihood approach will be reviewed and used to analyse the various impacts of tourism that are found in the numerous texts produced on the subject.

## 2.1 What is development?

A good description of development is difficult to find. Everybody has different views on what exactly is development and how it can be reached. Through the years, development

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[1] The United Nations and World Tourism organization's definition of the term **'Tourist'** is wide, covering all who travel for such purpose as recreation, holiday, business, religion, sports, family reasons, professional or intellectual pursuits. Tourists, for them, have to stay at least twenty-four hours abroad; i.e., overnight, but not more than one year. Excluded from this tourist definition are the permanent emigrants, diplomats, consular services, armed forces personnel, and in transit visitors.
An **International Tourist** is a visitor who travels outside of his/her own country of residence either without or within a defined geographical region; e.g. An American visiting Belize
A **Regional Tourist** is one visiting within a defined geographical region such as a Belizean visiting Jamaica, Trinidad, or Guatemala.
A **Domestic Tourist** spends at least one night away from his/her normal place of residence, but is within his/her own country of residence; e.g. a person from Belize City visiting Placencia.
(Belize Tourism Board, 2004 : 20 & 22)
An alternative definition of tourist is given by Crick (1989) who explains that "to be a tourist is to opt out of ordinary social reality, [and] to withdraw from everyday adult social obligations. Instead of duty and structure, one has freedom and carefree fun" (Crick, 1989: 328).



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theorists have followed theories of structuralism, industrialism, dependency, modernism, underdevelopment, marxism, neo-marxism, socialism, liberalism, basic need, neoliberalism and capitalism and made definitions of development accordingly. During these years, some theories have been criticized enough to be forgotten, while others are still widely applied today. In today's world, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank are two of the most important and influencing organizations who tend to dictate what is development, and how developing countries should go about it. These two organizations, controlled by proponents of neoliberal development strategies, force structural adjustments upon countries who need to borrow money in order to develop. Developing countries are asked, among other things, to reduce their state economic intervention and to promote market oriented growth. Both of these structural adjustments, asked to developing countries, have particularly helped to the development of international tourism[2]. Tourism is perceived by many as a source of outward-oriented growth and is, therefore, privileged by the IMF and the World Bank (Brohman, 1996).

Despite the power of the IMF and the World Bank, new forms of development, not necessarily based on economic growth, have slowly gained a place in the development world since the 1970's. Theories like post-structuralism, post-modernism and another

---

[2] Tourism is defined by the World Tourism Organisation WTO) as being a: "Travel that involves a stay of at least one night but less than a year away from home. It therefore includes travel for business as well as for holiday and leisure (including visiting friends and relations) and domestic tourism as well as international tourism" (Bennett, Roe & Ashley, 1999: 6).



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development gave birth to the belief that development is not necessarily linked to some sort of economic improvements. Proponents of these theories argue that the idea of development is imperialistic and claim that the concept is based on an Eurocentric point of view. For them, development should not be forced upon countries. Tucker explains that "development is the process whereby other peoples are dominated and their destinies are shaped according to an essentially Western way of conceiving and perceiving the world. The development discourse is part of an imperial process whereby other peoples are appropriated and turned into objects. It is an essential part of the process whereby the developed countries manage, control and even create the Third World economically, politically, sociologically and culturally. It is a process whereby the lives of some peoples, their plans, their hopes, their imaginations, are shaped by others who frequently share neither their lifestyles, nor their hopes nor their values" (Tucker, V. *In* Munck & O'Hearn, 1999: 1).

Our definition of development should therefore, not be defined using simply a Western point of view (and an economic basis), but should take into account other factors influencing people's lives. If hundreds of definitions of development have been created through the years, most development definitions that could be used in this research are inspired by the definition of sustainable development given in the Brundtland report, saying that sustainable development is: "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This



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definition contains the key concept of "needs", which in our case, are the essential needs of the world's poor.

Many variations are possible when it comes to define development and make it applicable to this project. I believe that a good definition of development should also include that development "[is the] use of an area within its capacity to sustain its cultural or natural significance, and ensure that the benefits of the use to present generations do not diminish the potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations"(Australian Government, 2001). Considering this project, a definition of community development also seems to be of importance. Thus, community[3] development "is more than just economic development (although economic development is included). Community development is the process or effort of building communities on a local level with emphasis on building the economy, forging and strengthening social ties, and developing the non-profit sector"(NewFoundland and Labrador (n.d.) : Community Development definition). Meanwhile, the definition given of local development at the Evocast Conference and Workshop (2002) seems to bring a livelihood influence also important for this research. For them, local development should be defined as "a sustained and sustainable process of social, cultural, economic, political and environmental change

[3] "Communities are smaller in size (than societies), natural in origin, and based on personal ties among their numbers" (Aramberri, 2001: 748).



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which is specifically designed to improve the lives of those who live in a particular area of town"(p.32).

The definition of development used in this research will therefore be an amalgam of these definitions and will be:

*"Development should meet the needs and aspirations of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It should help to improve the livelihood of a population by improving its financial, physical, cultural, social and environmental assets".*

## 2.2 What is the relation between tourism and development?

Sustainable tourism is "leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems" (World Tourism Organization, 2005 : 6)

Since the 1960's, tourism has grown to be an important component of the modern economy and is now often perceived as a passport to development. Perceived by numerous countries as the easiest way to reach development, it has been used by many to improve a struggling economy. Tourism has been described by the WTO (2005) as being



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the world's largest industry and it generates, at the present time, more than 10% of the global economic output (World Tourism Organization, 2005; Salazar, 2005). Indeed, the number of tourist arrivals was up, in 2005, by 5.5%, and reached 808 million international tourists, compared to 766 million in 2004. So far, the year 2006 has proved to be important for the industry: for the first time in history, international tourists spent an average of more than 2 billion dollars US$ a day (World Tourism Organization, 2006).

Opinions differ regarding the impact of tourism on the development of Third World countries. Hampton (2005) explains that international tourism helps the construction of each country's national identity and that it changes the perception that other countries have of them. People who believe that the secret of a country's development is to reach economic viability will argue that tourism is one of the easiest ways to develop. On the other hand, it is easy to find people who believe that tourism is detrimental to development. It is often argued that tourism ends up depleting most of a country's resources. Mowforth & Munt (1998) argue that "all forms of tourisms are tied into the growth and expansion of capitalist relations of production" (p.44) and that "tourism takes place in the context of great inequality of wealth and power" (p. 45). Yiping Li (2002) might be the author who best resumes the impacts of tourism for a small society. He explains that tourism can "attract foreign capital investment, create job opportunities, improve living standards and enhance community life by offering better consumer goods and services. It can also bring social and cultural changes: social instability, prostitution



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that could lead to rapid increase of venerial diseases and HIV, family crisis, conflict between local residents and outsiders" (p. 9-10).

Two main questions arise when it comes to defining the relation between development and tourism. First: should tourism led development be primarily looked at from an economic point of view? If it were, tourism could be perceived as a success. Yet, as Ashley (2000) explains, "well being is not only about increased income. Other dimensions of poverty that must be addressed include food insecurity, social inferiority, exclusion, lack of physical assets and vulnerability[...] an assessment of tourism's impact on local people depends not only on its direct costs and benefits, such as profits and jobs generated, but on a range of indirect, positive and negative impacts" (p.15-16). The second question that therefore has to be asked is: Is development something that we reach by improving livelihoods? If it is, demonstrating that tourism is a good way to reach development is not an easy task. Not only does tourism change the economy of a country, but it also transforms, and often alters, the environment, modifies social values and habits, and puts pressure on physical settings. Having the economie aspect of development weighting so much on one side of the balance, it is difficult to decide if tourism ends up helping or indering countries on their quest for development.

Being a very wide topic, and influencing in many different ways the development of a community, tourism is a difficult subject to understand and analyse. Stronza (2001)



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believes that "we have yet to develop models or analytical frameworks that could help us predict the conditions under which locals experience tourism in particular ways" (p. 264). To this, Tosun (2001) adds "[...] existing impact studies are seen as quasi-intellectual findings pretending worldwide validity, but which in fact do not go beyond small-talk at a social gathering" (p. 233). Moreover, Tosun (2001) argues that tourism impacts cannot be universal since development can take many forms. He explains, as did Burns in 2004, that there is a real difficulty and complexity in finding a theory or a framework applicable to each country and each kind of tourism.

The first anthropological study on tourism was made in 1963 and the first conference on the subject was in 1974. Needless to say, the theory on the subject is still relatively new. Going through the different researches, it is interesting to observe how, in most of them, economic impacts of tourism are perceived as mostly positive, while socio-cultural and environmental impacts are perceived as negative. This, actually, is one of the only hypotheses most authors seems to agree on.

This research is of a very soft post-modern kind and believes in the individuality of each person and in the multiplicity of worldviews. Yet, it recognizes the possibility of common knowledge and beliefs. Using these premises, this research will observe, not only the economic development brought by tourism, but also, the numerous impacts tourism development has had on the livelihood of Placencians. This research has no pretention to



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develop a model or framework that could be used to analyze the impacts of tourism on development. Nor will it try to find a worldwide validity to its findings. This research will simply try to describe how tourism development has affected the development of a community. Wall's theory (presented in the "review of past theories" of this chapter) will be linked to a livelihood approach, which seems to be the only fitting method to understand the various influences that tourism has on community development. The livelihood approach will give us an explanation, given by the locals themselves, on how their life is impacted by tourism. It should also give them the chance to explain how it changed the development of their community.

## 2.3 Tourism and development in a globalizing world

It is impossible to talk about tourism and development without looking at the role that globalization plays in today's world. Globalization is defined as being the "multiplicity of linkages and interconnections that transcend nation-states, and societies which currently make up the modern world system [...] it is a process through which events, decisions and activities in one part of the world can come to have significant consequences for individuals and communities in quite distant parts of the globe" (McGrew, 1992 : 65). It seems therefore possible to assert that international tourism as it exists today is only possible because of the western worldviews and globalization. In fact, globalization facilitates the development of tourism as tourism forces globalization in the most remote places. Because of globalization, the largest hotels and tour operators are able to get



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established everywhere, and the transnational advertising agencies work to increase tourists' demands. The development of a global culture and the ideology of consumerism are consecutively pushed forward by travellers. Globalization helps in the creation of a new worldview where everything, and every destination, is easy to access.

Critics of globalization argue that globalization "creates job insecurity and instability, financial volatility, income inequality, helps to the formation of weak states, weakens trade unions, and that it helps to the development of big corporations" (Bell & Wishart, 2000: 18). Globalization also leads to a "rapid homogenization or hybridization of the world cultures" (Teeple, 2000: 165). To this, Petrella (1997) adds that "globalisation creates a weakening of social links and provokes the waning of community wealth" (translation from : Petrella, 1997 : 26). Interestingly enough, these critics are usually mentioned when it comes to criticizing the impacts of tourism.

The transnational capitalist class, commonly helping to the promotion and development of tourism, has a high level of education, consumes luxury goods and services, has access to exclusive clubs, expensive resorts and restaurants as well as gated communities (Sklair, 2000). The needs and tastes of this transnational capitalist class obviously influence how tourism is developed. This influence explains that "no social movement appears even remotely likely to overthrow the three fundamental institutional supports of global capitalism that have been identified, namely the TNCs, the transnational capitalist class



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and the culture ideology of consumerism" (Sklair, 2000: 81). Therefore, people developing the tourism industry have such an influential and complete control of it, that small communities might not stand a chance to influence their own development.

Another problem arises when it comes to analysing the impacts of tourism on development in a globalizing world. How can we be sure that tourism is the main reason for the changes observed in the host community? Couldn't these changes be, in fact, the effects of simple growth and general globalization? Butler (2000) and Poirier (1995) both explain that it is impossible to separate the effects of tourism with the natural development processes of a place. They argue that local populations and outside factors are always impacting the environment and that it is therefore almost impossible to draw a neat line between the changes due to globalization and the changes due to tourism. I would argue that, however difficult it is to identify the exact impacts tourism has on development, it is clear that tourism can play an obvious and important role in communities' growth and development. The complexity of the subject is probably the reason why many different theories were developed through the years.

## 2.4 Brief review of past theories

Only a few authors have tried to explain the impacts of tourism on local populations by developing a theory. Moreover, most of the hypotheses and theories developed through the years have been widely criticized. None provide a complete view, and most have been



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described as simplistic. Hernandez, Cohen and Garcia (1996) note that most theories in tourism impacts and perceptions should not be perceived as contradicting each other, but should rather be considered as complimentary. They also argue that it is better to use most theories conjointly.

### 2.4.1 The three most common theories

Doxey's "irridex model", Butler's "cycle of evolution" and the "social exchange theory" are the most commonly used theories to observe the impacts of tourism considering the perception of the host community. Every research made on tourism refers at least to one of these theories. The main problem with these models is that they do not allow an understanding of the impact of tourism on the development of a community but rather, present a way to understand what influences people's perception of tourism. Meanwhile, if the goal of this research is to understand how tourism impacts the development of a community, it can be important to understand how the perception of the people interviewed is influenced.

#### 2.4.1.1. Doxey's irridex model

Doxey's irridex model illustrates the level of irritation the host goes through while tourism develops. With the increase of tourism, Doxey's irridex model moves from



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euphoria to apathy, to annoyance and to antagonism. Doxey's scheme helps to analyse and foresee locals' feelings toward tourism development.

Inexplicably, Doxey's irridex model has not been as criticized as Butler's cycle of evolution. The main critic of the model is that it doesn't recognize the complexity of residents' perceptions of tourism (Hernandez, Cohen & Garcia, 1996).

### 2.4.1.2 Butler's cycle of evolution

In 1980, Butler presented a model explaining the attitudes of the residents regarding the increase of tourism in their regions. In Butler's model, as the number of visitors grows in a locality, residents develop increasing reservation concerning tourism. From the stage of discovery, Butler's model goes through the stages of involvement, then through the stage of development (or consolidation), through the stage of decline and finally through the stage of rejuvenation (or stabilization or stagnation). These stages are linked to the attitudes residents have with tourists.

Many authors, like Akis, Peristianis & Warner (1996), Domroes (2001) and Lundtorp & Wanhill (2001) have analysed and presented Butler's stages of evolution cycle from different points of view. Since many different analyses of the stages were presented, it is fair to say that the cycle of evolution might not be specific and clear enough to analyse the complex field of tourism. It is therefore a problem when the model is applied.



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Lundtorp & Wanhill (2001) also critic the model for being more descriptive than normative. Butler's cycle can still be of interest to identify - in an unspecific way - the stages of tourism development in different places. It can also help to predict how locals' perception will evolve.

### 2.4.1.3 Social Exchange theory

The Social Exchange Theory allows an analysis of the exchanges and interactions going on between the hosts and the tourists. It also helps to explain how these interactions influence the perception hosts have of tourism[4]. Apps (1992) explains that "residents evaluate tourism in terms of social exchange, that is, evaluate it in terms of expected benefits or costs obtained in return for the services they supply" (Hernandez, Cohen & Garcia, 1996 : 760). The interaction's costs and benefits and the comparison with the alternatives they could have, are analysed by the host. The quality of the interactions usually influences the perception the host has of tourism. It is therefore possible to assume that a host benefiting or being dependent of tourism, and who is willing to take part in its development, will evaluate its impacts as positive whereas, someone who does not have many interactions with the tourists industry and is not dependent of it, has more chances of having an overall negative perception of the phenomenon. According to this theory, the level of power an individual has in the industry changes the way he perceives

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[4] The social exchange theory was adapted to many fields, including tourism, and stem originally from Gouldner, 1960.



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it (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf & Vogt, 2005; Gossling, 2002; Hernandez, Cohen & Garcia, 1996; Korca, 1998).

This theory is criticized by Andereck, Valentine, Knopf and Vogt (2005), who believe that nothing is simply black and white and explain that someone who has mainly positive interactions with tourists is still able to criticize its negative impacts. They also argue that residents who view economic development as the most important part of tourism are usually the ones who have a positive opinion of the industry.

### 2.4.2 Wall's Segmentation approach (1983)

Wall argues that the opinions and reactions of the people affected by tourism are not homogenous. He states that most models ignore the complexity of the industry, and the impacts and reactions it creates for local people. Wall therefore believes that most residents' point of view are not understood and analysed properly in tourism researches and argues that there might be as many views on tourism impacts as there are residents in the area being changed by tourism (Hernandez, Cohen & Garcia, 1996).

Wall's segmentation approach has not been as popular as other models. Yet, his approach is of primary importance. Wall's approach is at the opposite of Doxey's and Butler's simplistic models. The problem with Wall's theory is its applicability. It is impossible for



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a researcher to present everybody's opinion on a particular subject and his approach is therefore very difficult to apply in a research context.

### 2.4.3 Impact and attitude toward tourism

Many researchers have tried to define what influences locals' perception of tourism. Gursoy, Jurowski & Uysal (2001) say that locals' views of tourism are changed by many factors. Among other things, locals' levels of participation in recreation, their attachment and their length of residence in the community, the interaction they have with visitors, their knowledge of the industry, the type of contact they have with tourists, their sociodemographic characteristics, the political and demographic position they hold in society, the types and forms of tourism developed, tourism concentration, the state of the local economy, the importance of the industry to the locality, the costs and benefits created by tourism, the residence proximity to the business zone and finally - and most importantly- the economic benefits of tourism, are all things that influence locals perception of tourism (Korca, 1998; Madrigal, 1995).

This approach to tourism impact seems to bring answers to many questions concerning locals' perception of tourism. Yet, it still does not describe the impact tourism has on the development of the community. Moreover, the findings are not conclusive and many hypotheses have been found to be unique to specific places. It has therefore not been possible to develop a real theory or a model using these premises yet.



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## 2.5 Livelihoods approach

The livelihood approach is not a method specialized for tourism research but it is one of the few methods which provide the researcher with a tool complete enough to observe globally the impacts something has on a society. In a tourism development context, the livelihood approach allows to understand what aspects locals like and dislike about tourism and gives them a chance to explain how tourism affects the development of their community. The livelihood approach, which is mainly qualitative, gives them the chance to describe themselves how their life is affected by the changes brought up by tourism development. More importantly, the approach allows locals to express, in their own words, what is important to them and gives them the chance to explain their worldview. Since the livelihood approach has no set rules for addressing development concerns, it allows a wide exploration of development impacts using locals' own perception. This model has the advantage of being very flexible and can easily be adapted to the people studied.

Often used to analyze the effectiveness of a development project, the livelihood approach can also help to identify and analyze the key assets[5] and activities critical to have a decent

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[5] Assets: "Cash, savings, health, labour, knowledge, skills, friends, family, natural resources" that are parts of someone's life. The assets constitute a stock of capital. "It can be stored, exchanged, depleted, put to work..." (Rakobi, 2002 : 10).



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livelihood. The approach is also a tool that helps to analyse where the problems - and benefits- of a situation are (Ashley, 2000). Rather than analyzing numbers, a researcher using a livelihood approach looks at how people believe their livelihood has been enhanced or worsen after the development of a project by interviewing them and trying to understand their worldviews.

A livelihood is a "means of living or of supporting life and meeting individual and community needs" (Singh, 1996: 20) and comprises "the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base" (Cleaver, 2001: 2). The livelihoods are also a "recognition of the multiple activities in which households engage to ensure their survival and improve their well-being" (Rakobi, 2002: 5). The livelihoods are described by the Stockholm Environment Institute (2001) as "the creation of conditions that are (self-) supportive of sustainable development in human, natural and economic systems, which, whilst safeguarding resources and opportunities for future generations, provides individuals with means to provide themselves with food, shelter and acceptable quality of life" ( ¶ 4).

Basically, the livelihood approach explains how people are undertaking activities which change their human, natural, financial, social and physical assets to reach certain



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outcomes. People's success in improving their livelihoods depends on the total asset stocks they have access to (Odero, n.d.) Moreover, the assets and outcomes are influenced by the context in which people live. The economic, environmental, social and political context of a place determines the assets of people (Rakobi, 2002). People's preferences, the policies and the institutions surrounding them also play a role on their capabilities to reach a sustainable livelihood (Ashley, 2000). In fact, the livelihoods are only sustainable when "they promote an accumulation of all forms of capital" (Lindberg & Johnson, 1997: 7). A sustainable livelihood is formed by a complex "web of functional inter-relationships in which every member of a system is needed and participates" (Singh, 1996 : 5) and it provides "meaningful work that fulfills the social, economic, cultural, and spiritual needs of all members of a community – human, non-human, present and future and safeguard cultural and biological diversity" (Singh, 1996 : 27).

Even if the livelihood approach is sometimes perceived as a check list, the approach is supposed to highlight what is going on between a community and the various institutions surrounding it. It should allow an understanding of how an event, a program or a project can affect people's life and their livelihood. Ashley (2000) has been using the livelihood approach to understand how tourism impacts communities. She believes that one way to assess the impacts of tourism on the livelihoods is to study a place before tourism appears, and then to observe the changes that happened since it developed.



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A few people have criticized the livelihood approach. Odero (n.d.) believes that the five conventional livelihood assets are not sufficient and argues that a sixth should be added. For him, the asset "information" is as important as the other ones. He argues that the access to information is important to improve poor people's livelihoods and that without it, they cannot find the information they need to improve their assets. Ashley (2000), who used the approach in the tourism context, says that the method raises a problem of results' comparability and lack quantitative results. The fact that the livelihood approach "differs from conventional evaluations in its central focus on people's lives rather than on resources or defined project outputs" (Ashley, 2000: 15) means that opinions vary when it comes to acknowledge the benefits of the approach. If the focus on people is often perceived as an advantage of the approach, it is also often criticized as lacking seriousness.

If tourism impacts have often been observed, the results have all been presented in different ways. The following impacts have been collected from many different researches and placed under the five main livelihood assets: financial, human, physical, environmental and social. Each asset will be first described, and subsequently, the positive and negative impacts of tourism development, observed in different places of the world, will be presented.



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### 2.5.1 Financial assets of livelihoods

Economic sustainability is reached when the "level of economic gain from the activity is sufficient either to cover the cost of any special measures taken to cater for the tourist and to mitigate the effects of the tourist's presence or to offer an income appropriate to the inconvenience caused to the local community visited" (Mowforth & Munt, 1998 : 99). The financial livelihood asset is "the medium of exchange and [is] therefore central to the functioning of a market economy. Its availability is thus critical to the successful use of the other factors/assets" (Odero, n.d.: 2). The financial asset includes income, wealth and wealth disparity, access to credits and savings.

#### 2.5.1.1. Positive impacts on financial assets

Proponents of tourism development argue that tourism is one of the easiest ways to improve a country's economy (Brohman, 1996; Hawkins & al., 1999; Korca, 1998). Tourism can provide a country with a favourable balance of trade and fetch foreign exchange that can be used to buy imported goods (Brohman, 1996; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000). An increase in tourism can also give countries a better access to credits as well as better commercial opportunities (Ashley, Roe & Goodwin, 2001).

#### 2.5.1.2 Issues with financial assets

Perceived by many as a neo-colonialist enterprise, tourism is not always seen as a good form of development. It has been argued that the tourist industry is owned by the First



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World and that it does not give much to the Third one. Tourism increases, in developing countries, brings an excessive foreign financial and political domination. This gets to be a problem when developing countries are unable to control their own development (Brohman, 1996; Crick, 1989; Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000). Tourism development leads to a high rate of foreign ownership, which in turn often results in the development of enclaves[6] (Aramberri, 2001; Brohman, 1996; Crick, 1989; Hampton, 2005; Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000).

Tourism also opens a breach for the transnational corporations (TNCs), consequently contributing to the development of monopoles. The development of monopoles, when linked with an increase in tourism, brings a price increase for lands, goods, shelters and food that impacts locals' livelihoods. This inflation usually forces many locals to move away from their community because they cannot afford to live there anymore. (Aramberri, 2001; Ashley, Roe & Goodwin, 2001; Brohman, 1996; Crick, 1989; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Hernandez, Cohen & Garcia, 1996; Koch, De Beer & Elliffe, 1998, Korca, 1998; Yiping Li, 2002; Madrigal, 1995; Stonich, 1998). Usually, the business as well as the control locals once had over tourism is slowly lost to non-locals, businessmen and tour operators.

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[6] Enclaves are geographical areas often literally of figuratively closed to locals. If the enclaves are not simply gated, the living styles of their inhabitants is so different from the locals' one that they don't feel welcome or free to visit.



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(Ashley, Roe & Goodwin, 2001; Brohman, 1996; Stonich, 1998; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000).

Moreover, it is often argued that tourism does not necessarily improve a country's economy. It has been found that in many cases, most tourism revenues do not stay in the host country. Tourism creates substantial overseas leakages that never come back to the country. This is explained by the fact that most tourists expect to find, even when visiting developing countries, the same services and goods they find at home. A leakage problem is created when these luxury goods have to be imported from other countries. Important amount of capital benefit are, as a result, lost to these other countries. This problem is generalized to the entire tourism business, where it is not uncommon to see international products being bought to furnish hotels, restaurants or bars catering to tourists (Aramberri, 2001; Brohman, 1996; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000). The leakage problem can be very important for some countries. For instance, in the Commonwealth Caribbean, leakages are as high as 77% (Koch, De Beer & Elliffe, 1998: 910).

Tourism also rises the competition between the local population, the local elite and the multinationals to gain control of the industry. This competition is usually unfair to local populations since rich businessmen can easily control a community not used to the business world. Locals, more often then not, have no real power over the multinationals



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who are rapidly taking over everything they once owned (Crick, 1989; Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Stonich, 1998).

### 2.5.2 Human assets of livelihoods

When it comes to the human assets of the livelihoods, human sustainability is defined as "maintaining human capital. Human capital is a private good of individuals, rather than between individuals or societies. The health, education, skills, knowledge, leadership and access to services constitute human capital." (Goodland, 2002:1)

Odero perceives the human assets as the most important factors. For him, "it is the people who are both object and subject of development" (Odero, n.d.: 2).

#### 2.5.2.1. Positive impacts on human assets

Tourism development creates employment and is supposed to generate better income and working conditions than those that used to prevail before tourism developed (Aramberri, 2001; Brohman, 1996; Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Gossling, 2001; Korca, 1998; Madrigal, 1995; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000). Hernandez, Cohen & Garcia, (1996) believe that employment is the primary benefit of tourism and that young people as well as women are the main beneficiaries of this increase in the number of jobs. Meanwhile, Brunt & Courtney (1999) and Korca (1998) explain that tourism development gives to the



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receiving population a chance to get a better education and a better knowledge of what is happening around the world.

### 2.5.2.2. Issues with human assets

Tourism's seasonality is a problem for most developing countries' economies. Tourism's low season is often linked with an increase in poverty[7] and suffering for the locals. This is caused by the fact that locals working in the tourist industry often lack alternative work during tourism's low season. Since many tourist's areas are developed in what were formerly poor neighbourhoods, previous occupations have been left behind in order to satisfy tourists' demands. During the low season, locals have no job to fall back on (Ashley, Roe & Goodwin, 2001; Donald, Macleod & Roy, 2006; Koch, De Beer & Elliffe, 1998).

Another problem that people have to face, living nearby a growing tourist destination, is that the best jobs in the tourist industry are often reserved to foreigners while locals are predominantly hired for unskilled or semi-skilled work. Locals' wages are usually considerably lower than the ones given to foreigners (Aramberri, 2001; Department of

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[7] "Houselholds and individuals are considered as poor when the resources they command are insufficient to enable them to consume sufficient goods and services to achieve a reasonable minimum level of welfare" (Rakobi, 2002 : 4). A key feature of poverty is "a high degree of exposure and susceptibility to the risks of crises, stress and shocks, and little capacity to recover quickly from them" (Rakobi, 2002 : 14).



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Economic and Social Affairs, 1999; Hampton, 2005; Stronza, 2001; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000).

### 2.5.3 Physical assets of livelihoods

The physical assets of livelihood refers to the "man made assets such as housing, roads, and other forms of physical or hard capital making up the built environment" (Odero,n.d.: 2)

#### 2.5.3.1 Positive impacts on physical assets

In many developing countries, tourism is the main reason behind the improvement of infrastructures and services. Transport systems, sanitation systems, health care and paved roads are examples of infrastructures that are usually improved around tourists' destinations. These improvements benefit locals and are usually possible because they are being offered for free or at a reduced cost by foreign businessmen. The improvement of infrastructures and services are important for locals for whom the increase in health services, the improvement of the sanitation system, or the accessibility to other villages can significantly improve every aspects of their life (Ashley, Roe & Goodwin, 2001; Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Madrigal, 1995).

The new infrastructures usually bring new entertainment and recreational opportunities to locals. Indeed, if new infrastructures make life easier and often safer, they also make it



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more interesting (Gossling, 2002). Tourism development also raise population's awareness for the preservation and reconstruction of archaeological sites and historical building, which in turn helps the population to realise what their culture is about (Korca, 1998).

### 2.5.3.2 Negative impacts on physical assets

If proponents of tourism-lead development argue that the improvement of infrastructures is an asset for a country's development, the detractors of tourism-lead development argue that the building of infrastructures forces Third World countries to borrow money and to increase their dependence on foreign countries. Crick (1989) argues that Third World countries are getting indebted to develop their infrastructure and this, not to improve locals' life, but mainly to answer to tourists' demands.

Moreover, most infrastructures in Third World countries are not important enough to receive an increased number of people. Tourism development causes congestion in many places and existing infrastructures are usually not sufficient nor big enough to serve everyone. The rapidly increasing tourism industry frequently ends up creating pressures on the country's infrastructure and the increase in tourism is often disadvantageous to the locals who have to share their already insufficient structures with an increasing amount of people (Gossling, 2002; Hernandez, Cohen & Garcia, 1996; Koch, De Beer & Elliffe, 1998; Madrigal, 1995).



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A destination's popularity is often a reason for population dislocation. This is current practice for beggars, street hawkers or for villagers who see their home change from a simple village to a booming tourist area. The poorest people are usually asked – or forced- to move, giving tourists a better view or a sense of security. The construction of new infrastructures is known to be one of the main reasons for the displacement of locals. These displacements rarely results in something positive for the displaced people (Ashley, Roe & Goodwin, 2001; Crick, 1989; Mowforth & Munt, 1998).

### 2.5.4 Natural assets of livelihoods

The term "natural assets" of the livelihoods usually refers to "the biophysical elements such as water, air, soils, sunshine, woodlands, minerals, etc. These are naturally occurring assets that are largely renewable" (Odero, n.d.: 2). It is, in other words, everything that is included in the term "environment".

#### 2.5.4.1. Positive impacts on natural assets

Tourism has the advantage of giving locals a reason to protect their environment. Spoiled areas wouldn't attract tourists and locals are usually well aware of this. Hawkins & al. (1999) believes that tourism is an important incentive for locals to preserve their reef and their environment. Moreover, the tourist industry sometimes funds projects, or develops tools, that would usually be inaccessible to locals and that help the protection of the environment.



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### 2.5.4.2. Issues with natural assets

Tourism is, more often than not, considered as environmentally unsound. Tourism and the following increase in population, is known to cause destruction of natural beauty, deforestation, land deterioration, erosion and pollution. Tourism also leads to an increase in the use of non-renewable resources and creates more wastes and sewages (Aramberri, 2001; Brohman, 1996. Departement of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999; Poirier, 1995; Stonich, 1998; Stronza, 2001). Declining water availability and a deterioration in water quality are also important problems arising from the increase of tourism (Stonich, 1998).

Tourism usually leads to a competition and an overuse of the resources. The increase in people using natural resources ends up polluting and destructing the environment. It also often leads to a problem of scarcity that is detrimental to the local populations (Departement of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999). The cycle of ecosystem degradation caused by an increase in the number of tourists exemplifies this. Gossling (2001) presents a model of the cycle of ecosystem degradation which explains how tourism development impacts the ecosystem and demonstrates how interrelated tourism and environment are to each other.

### 2.5.5 Social assets of livelihoods

The social assets of livelihoods entails "the social networks and associations to which people belong" (Odero, n.d.: 2). They are the "rules, norms, obligations, reciprocity and



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trust embedded in social relations, social structures, and society's institutional arrangements, which enable its members to achieve their individual and community objectives" (Rakobi, 2002: 10).

On the other hand, the term "social sustainability" refers to "the ability of a community, whether local or national, to absorb inputs, such as extra people, for short or long periods of time, and to continue functioning either without the creation of social disharmony as a result of these inputs or by adapting its functions and relationships so that the disharmony created can be alleviated or mitigated" (Mowforth & Munt, 1998: 99).

Rakobi (2002) explains that the social capital is found mainly in communities, where people have to interact. He believes that it is harder to find or describe social capital in urban settings, where the social structure is not as structured.

The concept of social assets brings the idea of cultural sustainability, which is described as being the "relationships within a society, interactions, style of life, customs, traditions [that] are subject to change through the introduction of visitors with different habits, styles, customs and means of exchange" (Mowforth & Munt, 1998 : 99). Social and cultural impacts of tourism are therefore "the ways in which tourism is contributing to changes in value systems, individual behaviours, family relationships, collective



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lifestyles, moral conducts, creative expressions, traditional ceremonies and community organization" (Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996: 503).

### 2.5.5.1. Positive impacts on social assets

As mentioned in the physical assets, with tourism development, locals are often getting the chance to have new activities. Indeed, the new infrastructures built for tourists usually brings them new entertainment and recreational opportunities (Gossling, 2002).

### 2.5.5.2. Issues with social assets

The social assets seem to be the most importantly impacted assets when we look at tourism impacts on a society. Cultural alienation (Brohman, 1996; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999), acculturation (Brohman, 1996; Stronza, 2001), commodification[8] (Crick, 1989; Stronza, 2001), change in norms and family values (Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999;

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[8] Commodification is the « process by which things come to be evaluated primarily in terms of their exchange value, in a context of trade, thereby becoming goods » (Stronza, 2001: 271). Culture commodification follows the idea that culture is like a natural resource and that it can be bought. Crick (1989) explains that "culture is being packaged, priced and sold like building lots, rights of way, fast food, and room service, as the tourism industry inexorably extends its grasp. For the moneyed tourist, the tourism industry promises that the world is his/hers to use. All the "natural resources", including cultural traditions, have their price, and if you have the money in hand, it is your right to see whatever you wish. Treating culture as a natural resource or a commodity over which tourists have rights is not simply perverse, it is a violation of the peoples' cultural right" (Crick, 1989 : 336). This idea is shared by the Department of economic and social affairs (1999) which states that tourism commodification disrespect human rights.



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Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996), transculturation[9] (Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Stronza, 2001), and Americanization or Westernization (Poirier, 1995) are some of the changes caused by tourism development in developing countries. Social inequalities (Aramberri, 2001; Brohman, 1996, Crick, 1989) due to the emergence of new economically powerful groups are also problems linked to the rise of tourism (Brunt & Courtney, 1999). Tourism is even perceived as a form of imperialism, or as neocolonialism, where locals tend to become the tourists' servants (Aramberri, 2001; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999; Hampton, 2005; Stronza, 2001; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000).

Overcrowding, increasing crime, prostitution[10], increase in alcohol and drug use, and gambling problems are also problems that have been linked to tourism development (Brohman, 1996; Mathieson & Wall, 1982; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999, Gossling, 2002; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Yiping Li, 2002; Poirier, 1995; Stronza, 2001; Tosun, 2001). Moreover, child labour and child taking part in the sex

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[9] Transculturation is the "process by which local communities adapt themselves to the cultural mores and habits of those with whom they interact" (Mowforth & Munt, 1998 : 251).

[10] The notion of "beach boys" is important when we talk of prostitution in a tourism context. Many countries are now receiving women travelers, creating a new market for "romance tourism". Beach boys are the men who are often perceived as prostitutes but who are not asking money for sexual services. Beach boys develop relationships based on courtship and romance with women travelers. For these women, they are perceived as week long boyfriends. Many beach boys see their relationship with women travelers as a chance to live as tourists do for, or as the opportunity to develop a relationship that could give them a chance to leave their country. The beach boys usually gain social status among their group of friends for the relationships they develop with the most beautiful, or the biggest number of tourists. This relatively new form of sex tourism is slowly getting known in tourism circles and is just starting to be studied (Herold, Garcia & De Moya, 2001).



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industry are often found in tourists' destinations (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 1999).

Crick (1989) as well as Mathieson & Wall (1982) argue that tourism helps to perpetuate and reinforce stereotypes. They explain that the hosts and guests are usually in mutual contempt of the other instead of really learning to know and interact with the other. These authors all agree on the fact that this kind of behavior usually reinforces the beliefs of tourists and locals instead of helping them to really understand each other.

## 2.6 Conclusion

Tourism can have many conflicting effects on development. A particular feature of this industry is that it is usually influential enough to impact every aspect of a society, consequently hindering or improving its development. Indeed, if on one hand, tourism is usually financially beneficial for most countries, on the other, its impacts can be severe for the environment and the social aspects of society. Many authors, through the years, provided models that explain how tourism evolves and how people perceive it. Yet, no models usually used to analyze tourism allow a complete understanding of how tourism affects the livelihood of a society. The livelihood approach is the best tool to analyze a society and the opinion of its residents. It also allows a better understanding of how tourism can influence development.



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Once a small fishing village, Placencia is now one of the three most important tourist villages in Belize. Tourism developed in the village only in the last few years, which made it the perfect place to ask people what they think of tourism and how they believe it changed the development of their village. Using the livelihood approach will allow to better understand how tourism impacted every aspect of Placencian's life. Having Placencians analyze each of their livelihood assets and getting them to talk about different subjects should bring them to tell their story, analyze what their life has become since tourism developed, and maybe even bring them to criticize what is happening around them.



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# Chapter 3: The country of Belize and Placencia's fieldwork

## 3.1 Belize[11]

This chapter briefly presents Belize's politics, economy, environment and population before presenting Belize's tourism industry and its economical and socio-cultural impacts across the country. The results gathered from the fieldwork in Placencia will then be presented following the methodology used to do this research.

Belize is just beginning to be known as a tourist destination. Hutchison, in his 2004 tourist book, described Belize as being "a smorgasbord of landscapes, from mountainous tropical rainforests with abundant wildlife to fertile subtropical foothills where sugar, rice, cattle and fruit trees are cultivated, and bird-filled coastal wetlands and cayes with beautiful beaches. The country, measuring 174-miles north to south and just 80-miles across, nestles on the coast between Mexico and Guatemala, with a land area of about 8,860 sq miles, including numerous small islands known as cayes. The reef and cayes form a 184-mile barrier reef with crystal clear water, and are a major attraction for world-class diving, snorkelling and sport fishing. Inland rivers and rainforests invite you to head out on land or water, trekking, paddling and biking through the above ground ruins or caving in the spiritual underworld of the Maya. Tropical breezes encourage the laid-back attitude of the small but ethnically diverse population, who are, according to the literature,

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[11] Due to copyright difficulties, I am unable to add a map of Belize to this thesis



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"as warm and friendly as the climate" (Hutchison, 2004:706). Certainly, this type of idyllic description, resembling the ones found in all the other Belize tourist books, is probably greatly helping the development of the tourism industry around the country who is striving to be the next big destination.

The location of Belize between Mexico, Guatemala and the Caribbean sea, gives Belize a special place in Central America. The country is often considered as part of Latin America as well as part of the Caribbean countries. Belize is the second smallest -and only English speaking country- of Central America. It is renowned for its luxurious jungles and for its 240 km long barrier reef, which is also famous for being only second in size to the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. The country is just getting to be known in North America and in Europe's tourism circles, and tourism numbers are rapidly growing throughout the country.

### 3.1.1 History

Belize's achieved self government in 1964. The country gained its independence from the United Kingdom on September 21, 1981. The country of Belize, now part of the Commonwealth, still uses the Westminster system of law and is a parliamentary democracy. Belize City was the country's capital for many years until hurricane Hattie, in 1961, almost wiped out the city. The government's buildings were so badly destroyed that the country was left without government rule for a few weeks. This resulted in the



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transfer of the government buildings to Belmopan, in the interior of Belize. The country is divided in six administrative districts: Belize, Cayo, Corozal, Orange Walk, Stann Creek and Toledo. Belize has two principal parties : The People's United party (PUP) in power since 1998 with prime minister Said Musa, who is known to be leaning to the left, and the United Democratic Party (UDP), often identified with Creoles and considered as leaning more to the right.

### 3.1.2 Economy

Today, the Belizean government has growing concerns for the trade deficit and the increasing foreign debt of the country. Belize's external debt went from 475 million in 2003, to 1362 million in June 2004 (CIA World Factbook, 2006). While the government has to deal with a growing debt, it also has to worry about the 33% of its population still living below the poverty line[12]. In 2002, the government of Belize produced a poverty assessment report stating that 10.8% of the population was very poor or indigent and that 33.5% of the population was poor (Government or Belize, 2004 : 12).

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[12] The poverty line was recognized to be at 105.82 BZ$ a month for a family of five in 1995. Five years later, in 2000, the overall average family income was of 206.58 BZ$ a month. Even if there was an important raise in the overall average of family income, there are no indications where the poverty line stands in 2000 (Young, 2003). In 2001, a maid gained approximately 16 to 20BZ$ a day, while a day labourer and a resort worker made between 20 and 30BZ$ and a carpenter made between 40 and 50 BZ$. Meanwhile, a primary school teacher can be expected to make 9,600BZ$a year, a nurse can expect to get 12,000 BZ$ and a doctor between 20,000 and 40,000BZ$, The minimum hourly wage were in 2001 -and still are today from what I was told- in between 2 and 3 BZ$ an hour (Sluder, 2001: 235).



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Sluder (2001) presented Belize from an interesting point of view that also can help to understand the financial state of the country: "Imagine a country about the size of the state of Massachusetts. But instead of having the population of Massachusetts, about 6 million, this country has only 240, 000 people, about the population of Savannah, Georgia. Instead of having the resources of Savannah, this country has the resources of a town of 25,000 people, with a per capita income of just 2,600 US$, about one tenth of the United States' per capita income. Belize has the financial, educational, and structural resources of Tinnyille, USA" (p.13).

Belizean society, as most developing countries, is marked by important inequalities in the distribution of wealth, power and prestige. The elite class is fairly small but it is a socially distinct group which controls the main government institutions and businesses. The middle sector is formed by the working semi-skilled class consisting of small businessmen, professionals, teachers, civil servants, small holders, government workers, skilled manual workers and commercial employees. The lower sector of the society is formed by the bulk of the Belizean population. This sector consists of the numerous unskilled and semi-skilled workers, as well as the unemployed. The unemployment rate is high and increased from 9.1% in 2002 to 12.9% in 2003. These numbers include the employed population who "were engaged in an economic activity for at least ONE hour



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during the reference period" [13] (Belize Government's webpage, n.d.). According to Barry (1992), unemployment is particularly important for rural females and for urban youth.

### 3.1.3. Human and Physical Assets

The Belizean government is still struggling to give its population adequate assistance. In 1998, a sanitation system was available to 59% of the population living in urban areas while it was available only to 21.4% of the rural population. Meanwhile 85% of the entire population had access to good drinking water and a few villages – including Placencia and Belize city- had a treated water system (Belize Government's webpage n.d.; Sluder, 2001). Public hospitals, rural outposts, health centers and clinics are available throughout the country. Belizeans have officially access to health services, but this access has deteriorated to the point where even the government recognizes a growing health inequity gap. Consequently, many Belizeans believe that treatments abroad are better and cheaper than the health care offered in the country and choose to visit Guatemala city or Chetumal (Mexico) when in need of medical care.

Nowadays, an important health problem is arising in Belize. "AIDS has become a serious epidemic in Belize [...] Although government figures are lower, AIDS workers estimate that as many as 7 000 people in Belize are HIV positive. Given Belize's small population

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[13] The reference period is not indicated in this research. It is therefore possible that someone who would have worked an hour in a week, or maybe even in a month, would be considered has being employed.



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of 240 000, this estimate means that one in 34 Belizeans is HIV positive, thought to be the highest infection rate in Central America. Worldwide, about one in 120 persons is believed to be HIV positive. In Belize, nearly ¾ of HIV infection is spread by heterosexual contact. The highest number of reported AIDS cases is in Belize City and Stann Creek districts." (Sluder, 2001: 98). Indeed, Belize has the highest rate of AIDS in Central America with 2.4% of reported people having AIDS, more than twice the percentage of Guatemala's 1.1% and 8 times Mexico's. AIDS is the fourth leading cause of death in Belize (Global Fund Organisation (n.d.).). The district having the second highest number of AIDS infected people in the country is Stann Creek, the district in which Placencia is located.

### 3.1.4 Natural Assets

Belize is renowned around the world for its ecosystem. "Belize has a variety of reef formations within its territorial limits unparalled in Mesoamerica. With varied mangrove forests (3.4% of the national territory) and viable population of crocodiles, manatees and many commercial species, the coastal zone of Belize can also be the source for valuable bio-prospecting. [...]The Belizean water reef is considered one of the seven underwater wonders of the world and is currently designated as a World Heritage Site"(The government of Belize, 1998: 8-11). Yet, if Belize is renowned for its environment, it now has to deal with increasing environmental problems. Frequent hurricanes; deforestation; water pollution from sewage; agricultural runoff as well as solid and sewage waste



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disposal are all problems happening through the country. Still today, many villagers are disposing of their sewage at sea and there is no treatment system in the country.

The tourist industry is creating many environmental problems in Belize. "The booming tourism industry and the pressure to speed up the country's pace of development, however, represent potential threats to the country's land and sea environments" (Barry, 1990a: 51). The reef already showed signs of overexploitation in 1990. Today more than ever before, the reef's marine life is threatened by the tourist, seafood and the fishing industries (Barry, 1990a). Coastal zone development, often linked with tourism and the growing population it causes, is the main cause for loss of natural habitats in Belize today (The government of Belize, 1998).

### 3.1.5 Society

Belize's population density is the lowest in Central America. In 1995, Belize had a population of 9.2 persons by square kilometre. In comparison, the surrounding countries of Guatemala and El Salvador had respectively 87 persons by square kilometre and 252 persons by square kilometre (CIA World Factbook, 2006). The Belizean population is formed by Mestizos, Creoles, Garifunas, Mayans (Yucatecan, Mopan and Kekchi), East Indians, North Americans, Europeans, Lebanese, Arabs, Chinese and Mennonites. This interesting and complex mix of people is utterly divided and there are conflicts and/or competition between several of these ethnic groups. The most important tensions are



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found between the Mestizos and the Creoles, who are the two most important ethnic groups of the country. The tensions between these two groups can be explained by the growing number of Spanish people in the country and the power struggle it triggers. Yet, even if Belizeans define themselves by race and color, most ethnic groups are intermarrying and mixing (except for the Mennonites). The frequent intermarriages and mixing, consequently, slowly help to ease the numerous ethnic tensions. Racial stereotyping is an important part of the Belizean culture, but their "live and let live" way of seeing life helps them to live in relative harmony (Barry, 1992).

If the notion of family is important in Belize, the reality is often otherwise. "Though they often are loath to admit it, Belizeans are known to have dysfunctional family relationships. Many children are born out of wedlock, and kids in a family may come from several different parents [...] In 1990, 59% of the children were born out of wedlock" (Sluder, 2001: 60). The Belizean family has undergone drastic changes over the last few years. The heads of households are getting younger, there is an increase in the number of teenage mothers (20% of all births) and the absentee parents and abandoned children are more common now then ever before. In addition, "many Belizeans men think it is perfectly acceptable, even expected from them, to have lovers outside marriage" (Sluder, 2001:16). The decline of family values in Belize is mentioned in many researches. "Many Belizeans of more than thirty years of age noted the breakdown of traditional notions of authority, respect, and propriety and the obsessive fascination of



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Belizean youth with North American material culture. Others blamed mass emigration for the dissolution of the Belizean family and a subsequent rise in juvenile delinquency and crime" (US Library of congress, 1992: social dynamic).

There is an increasing number of urban crimes in Belize's cities. The rising number of crimes is usually blamed on poverty and on the increasing number of drug related crimes. Indeed, the country has a growing involvement in the South American drug trade and an important number of drug related crimes. The drug trade, if not considered in Belize's GDP, is an important contributor to the country's economy. Belize is an important marijuana producer, it is a transhipment route for drugs (mainly cocaine), it is a source, a transit and a destination for trafficking persons and is a money laundering centre (CIA world Factbook, 2006). Consequently, Belize's main jail is overpopulated and has gained a bad reputation. "The Hattieville Prison (the national jail known locally as the Hattieville Ramada), has been called one of the worst prisons in the world" (Sluder, 2001: 34).

### 3.1.6. Tourism

Officially, it is in 1950 that the first tourist camp was opened near Belize City by an American. The rare tourists in Belize were adventurous and coming to the country to go on fishing trips and jungle tours. In 1979, the private sector met to discuss tourism and talked about forming a hotel association. On April 26, 1985, the hotel association became



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the Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA), which is still representing the industry in the country today. Being an intermediary between the government, the private sector and the international organizations, the BTIA gives Belizeans a tool to develop their growing industry. It is in the late 1980's that the government designated tourism as the second most important industry of the country after agriculture. In 1984, Belize received 88 000 tourists (McMinn & Carter, 1998). By 1991, Belize had a Tourist Intensity Ratio (TIR)[14] of 111.5%. This ratio was the highest in North and Central America, even when compared with the insular Caribbean, which, in second place, reached a ratio of 98.3%. To fully understand how important the TIR was in Belize, it is important to mention that the third position went to North America (including Mexico), with a TIR of 19.9% and that Costa Rica's fourth place had only a TIR of 16.3% (Stonich, 1998).

In 1998, the government released the Blackstone Report Strategy, its first major tourism development plan, aspiring to a slow tourism growth of 4% over the following five years, thus avoiding the trap of mass tourism. The government recognized the risks linked to mass tourism, aware that Belize's popularity was mainly due to its natural sites and that a large amount of visitors could bring an important deterioration of the environment. The strategy aimed to reach a target of 120,000 visitors per year by 2003 and 140,000 by 2008. However, the amount of tourists received in the country in the following years reached unpredicted highs. In 2003, Belize received almost 800,000 visitors and tourists

[14] Tourist Intensity Ratio (TIR) is the percentage of tourists to the resident population.



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exceeded 1,000,000 in 2004, of which only 162,675 were overnight tourists.[15] The last available numbers are showing further increase in tourist arrivals in 2005. The global tourism growth was of 5.4% in 2005. The Caribbean countries obtained a growth of 3.3% while Belize reached 9.4%. The hotel revenues augmented from 92,5 BZ million in 2004 to 103,2 BZ million in 2005, a growth of 11.6%. (Belize Tourism Board, 2006). Meanwhile, the tourist industry is said to generate approximately 6450 direct full-time jobs throughout Belize and this number grows to 15,422 when the "spin-off" are considered. As a matter of fact, one in every four jobs is linked directly or indirectly to tourism in Belize (Belize Tourism Board, 2005).

Since 1988, tourist expenditure in Belize has grown by 500% (Belize Tourism Board, 2004). Tourism is now the single largest contributor to the country's economy and is the largest foreign exchange earner providing 25% of the country's foreign exchange.[16] The government gets important tourism's returns from various tourism taxes. Tourists have to pay a room tax (also called hotel tax) of 7%, a departure tax of 20 US$ (including 1,25 US$ of security tax and 3,75 US$ for the Protected Area Conservation Trust) and a sales

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[15] Cruise ships tourists went from 14,000 in 1998 to more than 851,000 in 2004 (Belize tourism Board, 2005). Cruise Ship passengers do not spend much in the country compared to the overnight tourists. In 2002, tourists spent 120.6 US million in Belize, an average of 604.35$US each. Meanwhile, the cruise passengers spent 12.2 US million, an average of 38.26$ each (Caribbean tourism organisation, (n.d.)). The number of overnight passengers were recorded only at the international airport and therefore do not consider the tourists coming trough Belizean borders.

[16] Foreign exchange earnings are used to pay appliances, gasoline, oil, food, beverages and machinery that have to be brought to Belize from other countries. It is also used to maintain tourism development and the Belizean embassies abroad.



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tax of 8%. Tourism also represented 18% if the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2004.

With such important economic numbers, it is not surprising that tourism development is an important goal for the private sector and the Belizean government. The Ministry of Tourism and Culture is the government office responsible for tourism. The Ministry works closely with other ministries as well as with the Belize Tourism Board, the Belize National Tourism Council, The Belize Tourism Industry Association (BTIA), the Belize Hotel Association (BHA), the Belize National Tour Operators Association (BNTOA) and the Belize Tour Guide Association (BTGA) to develop the industry. "The country's competitive advantage for tourism is not in grandiose all inclusive like much of the Caribbean where the customer arrives at the destination, is whisked to the beach, and remains there for seven or more days. Belize's tourism product has to do with exploration, adventure, and experiencing Belize's nature, history and culture in various locations throughout the country"(Launchpad Consulting & Russell, 2005:28). By promoting sustainable tourism, the government slowly gained international approval. Yet, as Mowforth and Munt (1998) mention : " Two decades after it won independence from Britain, Belize finds itself yoked to another kind of colonial enterprise ; the foreign-dominated ecotourism trade... Although Belize is one of the most environmentally conscious countries in the world, a significant percentage of its ecological wealth is concentrated in the hands of expatriates and foreign investors [...]. In 1998, the Belize



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Department of Environment Report found that foreign owned resorts and hotels were overlooking environmental laws, causing damage to coral reefs and fishing grounds[...] It appears, therefore, that the Belizean government's stated commitment to community tourism development is becoming more elusive as foreign control of the industry takes over" (p. 284). Indeed, 80% of the hotels across the country are owned by foreigners and 65% of the BTIA was formed by expatriates in 1998.[17]

The government recognizes that tourism has direct socio-cultural impacts on the Belizean culture. In 2004, the BTB made a list of the positive and negative impacts of tourism for its population. Among the positive socio-cultural impacts brought by tourism was the recognition that "tourism can be a force of peace"; that tourism is at the origin of a broadening education, that it can bring people together and that it can strengthen communities. Tourism can also bring general improvement in the quality of life, a higher standard of living and often helps the development of better infrastructures and transport. It can also enhance the appreciation for one's culture, encourages pride and brings down many barriers (language, socio-cultural, class, racial and religious barriers).

The BTB also concedes that tourism can have a few negative impacts on its society. They admit that tourism is an important cause of Belizeans' acculturation. The Belize Tourism

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[17] There is an important number of retired expatriates in Belize. This is partly due to the Retired Persons (Incentives) Amendment Act of 2001, which encourages the inflow of foreign capital to Belize by allowing retired people to move to the country, giving them tax and import incentives. These retired expatriate often end-up starting small businesses – often related to tourism - once they live in Belize.



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Board (2004) acknowledges that "the presence of stronger Western ideas influenced by tourism means that the process is largely one of assimilation of the weaker host culture" (p. 91). They believe that tourism can bring a culture clash, create work friction between the high paid and low paid people, generate hostility towards tourists and that it can generate crime, prostitution and gambling problems. They also acknowledge that tourism can bring people to damage their own cultural resources. To these criticisms, Young (2003) adds that there is a recrudescence of children found in prostitution and that sex tourism is popular, particularly in the districts of Orange Walk and Stan Creek, as well as in Belize City. "Belize city reported that almost on a daily basis they have cases of out of school children engaged in prostitution and sex tourism" (Young, 2003 : 22). In addition to all of this, Sluder (2001) observes a growing Belizean resentment against foreign investors and wealthy foreigners buying the prime beachfront property across the country.

The various impacts of tourism in Belize can be illustrated by the development of tourism in the village of Placencia, in the Stan Creek District. Indeed, Placencia development seems to be following the same path that Caye Caulker and San Pedro took a few years ago. These destinations are now the two most important destinations in Belize and the tourism industry in these "villages" is now fully developed. Since Placencia is still in the process of developing the industry, it is the perfect place to see locals' adaptation to it. The village is still inhabited by people that were there before tourism and who are now living to see the village growing and changing every year. Their perception of tourism



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and its impacts was partly formed by what they saw happening in Caye Caulker and San Pedro, but now lies primarily in what they hope their community will become.

## 3.2 Fieldwork

I spent six months in Placencia, Belize: from October 2005 to April 2006. Placencians have seen their fair share of students coming to Placencia to study their lifestyle, their fisheries and tourism. Most students never sent back any of their findings, disillusioning nearly every Placencians when it comes to researchers. Most Placencians now refuse to be interviewed or simply laugh at the idea of having yet another student asking questions. Many times I was told that informal interviews were all I would be able to get. It was also often explained to me that I already knew what the people I was hoping to interview were thinking and that I could therefore write whatever I wanted about them. I already knew enough they said. I was often told, in different ways, what a Placencian who refused to be interviewed simply said: "So, why do you want to interview me? You already know what I will answer anyway!". Placencians love to talk but they are also exceedingly secretive when it comes to their personal life.

## 3.3 Methodology

During the 6 months I spent in Placencia, I was able to get twelve interviews varying between 40 minutes and 1hour 40 minutes. These interviews were made with people that had been living in Placencia for at least 2 years. All interviewees were over 18 years old



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and under 70 years old. Ten Placencians were interviewed –including 2 Belizeans who have decided to move to Placencia a few years ago- as well as two American peacecorps. To conduct these interviews, I used an open ended livelihood approach questionnaire. When the interviewee came for the interview, they first had to read and agree with the consent form I presented to them[18]. The interviewees had in front of them a paper with all the themes that I wished to talk about. These numerous subjects were divided under the five assets of the livelihood approach[19]. These subjects were influenced by previous readings in relation with tourism impacts as well as by the life I had been observing in the village. Often, interviewees insisted on some subjects that were important to them or added subjects/information that they found essential. Since the interviews were voluntary, I encouraged interviewees to talk as much as they could about each subject, but they were also allowed to disregard the subjects they did not wish to talk about. Only one Placencian chose to completely disregard a subject that was too personal to him. I rapidly realized that the recording machine influenced the behaviour of the interviewees, who were reticent to talk in front of it. Many times while I was interviewing, the interviewees asserted some things while looking at me, smirking, and letting me understand they were lying. This is why informal interviews took such an importance in this research.

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[18] The informed consent form is presented in Appendix 1.
[19] The interview model is presented in Appendix 2.



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Countless informal interviews were conducted during the six months I spent in Placencia. Many Placencians refused to be formally interviewed and insisted on the fact that I had talked with them enough to know what they thought. These informal interviews are simply conversations that I had with Belizeans. Every night, I sat down and wrote the information I had heard and that could be important for this research. These informal interviews usually took place on the beach, on the docks, in restaurants or at my place, depending on the person I was talking to. These informal interviews were really important for this research and allowed to get information that I could not have acquired in more formal ones. I rapidly realized that the information I received in these interviews was often more accurate than the one received in the open-ended interviews. These conversations were more natural and my interlocutors did not feel any pressure. Therefore, they talked more freely about their life and their experiences.

Numerous hours of observation were made throughout the village. The first few months I spent in Placencia were helpful to understand what it is to be a tourist in the village and made me understand how locals behave toward tourists. When Placencians got to know me, their actions toward me changed. A few, seeing that they would not get what they wanted out of me, started to ignore my presence while others became friends. It was then that I was able to sit on the beach or in restaurants and quietly observe how locals act with tourists. I decided to live "at the back" of the peninsula, where all Placencians live, "the front" being almost entirely reserved to tourist's house and services. I lived as



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Placencians do, in the part of the peninsula where you very rarely see a tourist, which is hidden from the rest of the village by a small stripe of jungle. This allowed me to meet many Placencians and Mayas that I would not have met otherwise. Further interesting observations were made on the beach, where all the tourists gather. Likewise, the football game on Sunday afternoons and the following party at "Tipsy Tuna", the biggest events of the week for Placencians, were also very interesting places to observe the relation between tourists and locals. Indeed, these weekly happenings are the only places where you can see Placencians of all ages and all backgrounds come together while interacting with tourists. These two events were therefore important to feel and understand the relationship Placencians have with tourists.

Not being considered as a villager, it was hard for me to get a copy of some of the village council meeting minutes. I was able to get the minutes of the village meeting of March 2nd 2005, august 3rd 2005 (specifically on Hurricane preparedness), August 23rd 2005, December 5th 2005 and January 18th 2006 (on sanitary and storm water sewage). Most of the other official information concerning the village was found in the "Placencia Breeze", the community paper, offered free to villagers and tourists every month. I also chose to read "The Amandala" every week since it is one of the Belizean weekly newspapers and that it is the only one known to be non-partisan. "The Amandala" helped me to better understand the Belizean society and gave me information relating to tourism development across the country. In the village, it was also possible to buy CDs of two studies produced



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to improve Placencia : one produced by engineers concerning the village's only road (BECA Consultants, 2005) and a plan designed by urban and regional planners to improve Placencia by 2020 (Dyett & Bhatia, 2005). Finally, a paper written by Carol Jane Key in 2002 was really helpful to find out more about Placencia's history and tourism development.

## 3.4 Fieldwork in Placencia

"It's a strange place with strange people now... This is not home anymore" (A young Placencian during an informal interview, Notebook p.18).

Placencia is a Creole community of approximately 600 inhabitants[20] at the end of the nineteen kilometre Placencia peninsula, in the Stann Creek District. Placencians proudly claim that they have the longest and nicest beach on the mainland of Belize. The village is surrounded by water, with the Caribbean Sea on one side and the Placencia lagoon on the other, giving the village the same feeling that you would feel on an island. Yet, at the same time, Placencia has the advantage of being able to offer tourists many different excursions. Tourists in Placencia can decide to visit a caye, the barrier reef, Monkey River, the Cockscomb Wildlife Sanctuary and Jaguar Reserve, the Garifuna village of

[20]The exact number of inhabitants in Placencia is unknown and reports are varying between 367 and 800 inhabitants. The last census (2000) does not provide numbers for Placencia. When asked, most Placencians answer that there is more or less 600 Placencians inhabitants. This number does not take into account the number of tourists.



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Seine Bight, Maya ruins, Dangriga, the Placencia Lagoon or Mango Creek and Independence on a day trip. No other tourist destination in Belize can offer such different types of activities.

Until recently, Placencia had always been a fishing village. The Garbutt, Westby, Eiley and Cabral families came to the peninsula after the pirates and, from the late 1800's, slowly developed the village. These families rapidly gained the title of "Royal family" around the country, by association giving to Placencia the name of "Royal village", because Placencians used to marry with their own cousins who were also living in the village, hence preserving "the blood". These four families are still the main families in the village today and everybody is, to some degree, everybody's cousin. Tourism slowly began developing in the 1970s, when the village was still only accessible by boat. In 1974, the "Rum Point", first hotel of Placencia, was opened. The industry slowly grew in the 1980's and 1990's to reach a peak in the early 2000s.

Tourism has been impacting the development of the village in many ways. The growing population – Placencia has seen its population more than double since 1980- has an important influence on its surrounding environment. Socially, the increasing amount of tourists has an impact on Placencians who have to adapt their lifestyle to the tourists' invasion. The village's infrastructures have to be improved to provide adequate services to tourists and the rapidly growing population. Most importantly, the village sees its



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economy completely changed by the influx of tourists. In fact, the arrival of North Americans and Europeans, who shamelessly buy the lands around the peninsula, creates problem for many Placencians who are unable to afford to buy land on the peninsula anymore.

### 3.4.1 Placencia's tourists

There are two main types of tourists in Placencia: rich tourists, who come to the village for a week or two, rent a cabana and go on trips almost every day, and backpackers, who come to the village for a few days and pass the time on the beach. Placencia is usually perceived as a very charming place and many tourists declare that they would like to come back one day or they simply decide to stay longer. Many tourists take Placencia as a departing point for other touristic destinations and come back to the village in time for drinks at one of Placencia's numerous bars.

During the hurricane season, there is an important number of sailors who live on their boat anchored in Placencia's bay. These sailors are usually people living on their boat year 'round. The hurricane season can be dangerous for them when at sea, and Placencia's bay is supposed to be one of the safest havens in Central America. Amongst sailors, there are numerous stories of boats being attacked along the Moskito Coast by pirates. Placencia's harbor is therefore a very popular spot for these travelers. Moreover, Placencia has the advantage of offering everything that is needed to a boat captain who



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could be seeking a haven: all types of foods, vegetables and fruits, bars, coffee places as well as friends waiting for them year after year. In fact, there are many tourists returning to Placencia each year. Placencia has often been described as being a second home by returning tourists coming back to the village. Many regular tourists come back to friends and are able to get deals for day trips and for places to stay. Others come back for the same type of trips every year, employing one particular guide.

### 3.4.2 Placencia's natural assets

Placencia's environment has drastically changed in the last few years. Hurricane Iris hit Placencia in 2001 and completely changed the appearance of the village, destroying most buildings and houses and removing many trees. Iris' impacts were severe and the village had to be almost all rebuilt after its passage. Placencians had to slowly rebuild the village almost from scrap – uninsured people used broken planks- and the village was reconstructed. Hotel owners made their hotels bigger, restaurants developed new looks, Placencians painted their new homes... The village became more "tourist-ready" and lost some of its "end of the road" feeling.

Placencians were asked if they believed their environment had deteriorated or, on the contrary, if it had been improved by tourism development. The answers to this question varied with the interests of each respondent. Contrary to what could have been expected, most people agreed to say that the beach is not a concern when it comes to pollution



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because it is not getting polluted by tourists. Placencians explained that there is less junk on the beach and around the village than there was before tourism. In fact, because of tourism, the village got richer and the village council is now able to hire a few villagers to walk around the village and pick up the garbage. Environmentally conscious villagers are also now having "cleaning days", where you can see the entire beach being swept by kids and their parents. Today, the village's cleanliness is perceived as important by most villagers who are or environmentally conscious, or want to please tourists. Many garbage cans are placed around the sidewalk so that people walking through the village have a place to leave their trash. A few interviewees complained about the other Belizeans, saying that the garbage found on the beach were, more often then not, left by Belizeans visitors coming to Placencia. On the other hand, international tourists are usually perceived as being environmentally conscious.

If Placencia still looks like a pristine place, Placencians recognize that environmental problems have been growing through the years. Many interviewees complained that the coral reef cannot support the increasing amount of people diving and snorkelling around it. The barrier reef and the cayes' most visited diving spots are suffering from the growing number of tourists. Even if most tourists are warned not to touch corals or not to walk on them, many choose to ignore the warnings and will try to bring a souvenir back home. Others will break corals with their fins without even realizing it. Sunscreen, perfume and other products are also harmful to the corals. The increasing amount of people swimming



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around popular diving spots is slowly affecting coral's health and Placencians say that they can see an important difference in the corals that were there only a few years ago.

Placencians are also worried about the business done by the international company "the Moorings". The Moorings is known as being the world's premier charter yacht company and possesses a fleet of sailboats and catamarans rented to rich tourists leaving from Placencia. Placencians are worried that most captains renting from this company do not know the area where they are taking the boats. According to them, there are many stories of unknowledgeable captains dangerously breeching the reefs. "I think there has been some negative impacts [on the environment] from the boating primarily, from "the Moorings". I know there are lots of incidents where those boats go out and damage reefs and people don't take responsibility for it. If they do, they end up paying a fine but the fine really isn't enough to cover the damages that they caused to the environment... So I think that is probably the most serious consequence of tourism on the environment" (Interview 2). A breeched reef will usually cause harm to the surrounding reef and as a chain reaction, the damaged breech becomes even larger.

Most tourists rarely visit the lagoon because it is the side of the peninsula where most Placencians live. The peninsula was made larger many years ago[21] on the lagoon side. A

[21] No documentation was found on the peninsula enlargement and no Placencian could tell when it was done.



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part of the lagoon was filled up so that land could be made available for Placencians. The boundary line between the real peninsula and the man-made one is evident. You walk from a sandy-white earth to a reddish Prince Edward Island-type one. The lagoon is important for its ecological diversity and is a habitat for crocodiles, manatees, dolphins, rays, many different species of birds and many different types of vegetation including four types of mangroves (red Mangrove *Rhizophora mangle*; black mangrove *Avicennia germinans*; white mangrove *Languncularia racemosa* and Buttonwood *Conocarpus erecta*. The development of the peninsula on the lagoon side meant that many mangroves had to be removed. The cutting of mangroves is only getting to be recognized today as an environmental problem and Placencians do not regret the peninsula enlargement.

Today, Placencians are mainly worried by the development project "Ara Macao"[22]. The Ara Macao Resort, with its 294 villas and 458 condos, is a big construction project taking place to the north of Placencia. The owners have plans for condos and villas, as well as for a casino and a golf course. The owners are planning to breach the peninsula, dig a passage for boats and consequently build a protected port inside the lagoon. Many environmental problems can arise from such a project. The two main problems being the salty water coming in the lagoon directly from the ocean, which could drastically change the lagoon environment, and the fact that this breach would make of Placencia, and the

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[22] The Ara Macao is also sometimes called Scarlet Macaw. The website is www.destinationsbelize.com/scarlet_macaw.htm or www.aramacao.com



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southern part of the peninsula, an island. Placencia, located at the end of the peninsula, has the longest sandy beach of inland Belize. The main problem with such a project was well explained by a Placencian: "the peninsula is built of sand and the sand comes from the mountains. It's not coral sand, it's quartz. It comes from the mountains and in order to reach the peninsula, it can't be obstructed; it has to have a continuous flow. So if you cut that canal, then you are cutting the sand from reaching and you are going to have massive erosion because the sand needs to be replaced every time it erodes. It is natural that it erodes. And it's natural that it replenishes you know..." (Interview 1). If there is a breach in the peninsula, many Placencians fear that the sand will not reach Placencia anymore and that their beach will slowly disappear. The sentiment of loss of control that happens in such cases also happened a few years ago when a Canadian owner of a Placencian "time-share" decided to build a pier in Placencia Bay, against Placencians' protests. No pier had ever been built in the Bay and Placencians were afraid of the environmental impact it could have. Despite many protests, they were never able to prevent the building of the pier. Indeed, the pier now proudly stands in the bay.

Placencians, who have had to deal with the eccentricities of the rising number of foreign residents on the peninsula also have had to deal with an increasing amount of sewage. When asked what they thought about their sewage system, Placencians explained that the village is doing rather well. Many interviewees compared Placencia to Seine Bight, the only neighbouring village. Many people in Seine Bight do not have indoor plumbing and



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are still using buckets as a toilet. It was explained to me that in the morning, you can see people emptying their bucket in the sea or in the lagoon. "Night waste" continues to be disposed off by residents into the sea and the lagoon. This is a critical problem. The population in Seine Bight has at least doubled (possibly tripled) in four years, when fecal coliforms counts were already very high[23]. A few kilometres further down the peninsula, all Placencia's houses have indoor plumbing. Yet, most Placencians do not believe it is a big deal if the water coming from the tap is emptied just beside their house. The toilet waters, however, are usually sent to a septic tank. If most houses in Placencia now have sceptic tanks, many people are complaining about septic tanks overflowing or leaking. The main problem lies in the fact that the septic tanks are usually not deep enough and that sand cannot fully absorb their leakage. Most septic tanks are overused and the increasing amount of people coming to Placencia every year could end up being problematic. To resolve a part of this problem, the biggest hotels on the peninsula received, in 2005, a notice from the Department of the Environment, asking them to upgrade their traditional septic tanks to treatment plants. This created some problem for hotels who had not planned this improvement and who did not have the funds to change their tanks.

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[23] With the help of the government and the Peace Corps, there are now some talks about getting composting toilets in Seine Beight.



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Some Placencians mentioned their worries for future access to drinking water. One of Placencia's assets, when it comes to people deciding to permanently move to the peninsula, is that its tap water is drinkable. The water comes from the mountain and is brought to the village via pipes crossing the lagoon. Yet, the tourism peaks (like Christmas and Easter) come with water problems for many residents of the peninsula. The water debit slows down and Placencians living on second floors usually do not receive water for a few days. With the constantly growing demand for water, some people are worried that the water supply will not last much longer and wonder what will happen if it ever dried out.

### 3.4.3 Placencia's social assets

Placencia used to be a small village owned mainly by four founding families. The days used to go by with people sharing food and stories on the docks. Everyone knew everybody's business. Fishing was the main activity in the village and Placencians were known for – and proud of- their ability to fish. The legend says that Placencians alone used to "supply almost a million pounds of fish annually to Jamaica! And that's just fish! We were supplying probably about a thousand pounds of lobster to the United States, plus conch, plus fish fillet, plus shrimp..."(Interview 1). People working as fishermen are not the majority in Placencia anymore. Most fishermen turned to tourism to make money and now go fishing with tourists, for fun during their spare time or during the low tourist



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season. Tourism development changed the way most Placencians live and by doing so, changed most social interactions through the village.

In today's Placencia, both men and women can be seen cooking, doing the laundry or taking care of the children even if it was originally women's work. If tourism changed the family's habits, it did so by allowing more people to find jobs[24] and therefore, made sex role division much less defined clearly. Men who used to be fishshermen are now guides, captains, dive masters or businessmen. Women who used to be at home with the children now started their own businesses, or more commonly work in shops, hotels and restaurants[25].

The diversification of work created an unsuspected problem for many Placencian families. All interviewed women mentioned a problem they have seen growing with tourism. As in many countries where tourism became important, it created a problem of infidelity in Placencia. Men won't talk about it, or will say that people were always promiscuous before. Women, on the other hand, like to blame tourists for the problem. Tourists visiting Placencia for short periods of time usually do not know how they are perceived, often do not care, or do not realize how harmful their behaviour can be for

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[24] According to the Belizean Tourism Board (2004), the number of hotel employment in Placencia went from 147 in 1998 to 373 in 2003 and this does not present all the other sectors linked to tourism where Placencians find work.

[25] The village booming touristic industry also gives work to many Mayans and Spanish people coming to the village on more or less long term.



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local women. An interviewed woman explained that "women here hate white girls, because all white girls are husband stealers. They all come here to sleep with whomever. It's not important. They will never ask if the guy they are sleeping with has a girlfriend or a wife. They come here, and they don't know the life history of the guy they met two days ago. They don't know if the guy has a wife or not. They all do the same mistake... They just don't try to find the information. [...] Travellers will just believe what the guys in front of them say! They are being told things that they want to hear, sweet things, so they want to believe it. And anyway, they don't care, they don't have anything to hide and they won't be here anymore in 15 days!" (Interview 11). Placencians usually meet tourists while working, they also meet on the street, and later meet again in one of the few bars of Placencia. Most family men do not fall for tourists, but there are some men who are known across the village to be particularly good to get tourists in bed. Jealousy caused by such behavior gave birth to a few stories that are told to whoever wants to listen. There are stories of tourists getting beaten up by jealous locals, as well as numerous stories of men being stabbed by their wife or their girlfriend when they come back home after a night out.[26]

The social support mechanisms are not what they were before, either. If people used to sit and share their stories and catch of the day, they now struggle to get as many tourists in

[26] Stabbing seems to be relatively common and many men are proud to show you their scars.



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their business as they can. Competition between businesses sometimes brings problems between families. This new type of competition brought some people to say that the networks are not as strong as they were before and that people will not help each other as much today as they used to. Yet, the community still gets together when someone is in need. As an example, a young Placencian was accepted in a Canadian art school two years ago and Placencians are still struggling to raise money and help him with his tuition and lodging.

The once very confident feeling of personal safety has declined in the village. People in Placencia do not feel scared to walk on the beach or on the street at night, but villagers used to know everyone around them and they don't anymore. The village used to have no boundaries, everyone was allowed to walk everywhere and visit everyone. Today, you can see gated parks and fenced houses. Villagers now take the time to lock their front door if they plan to go in their garden. This would never have happened before tourism. A Placencian explained when harassment became a problem in the village: "Well, to tell you the truth, it wasn't like that before at all. At all. It started to develop after the hurricane, more tourists started to come in, then they, you know, they keep on harassing the tourists especially. So, that's the number one key problem" (Interview 4). It is now common for tourists to be harassed. While male tourists are often harassed for money, or to buy ganja (marijuana), female tourists are harassed by men who are trying to pick them up. "[women and men have] different type of harassment. Mine is all about "you want



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weed? Dude, you want some weed?" Or "Can I borrow a dollar?" But for you guys its like "Want to sleep with me? If you do, here I am! Come on! I'll cook for you, I'll feed you, I'll massage you, I'll make your bed... Don't you want to sleep with me?" (Interview 8).

Criminality is also on the rise in Placencia. The village has seen its number of petty crimes grow in the last few years. In fact, robberies were rare, but maybe more important, before tourism – with boats and canoes being stolen. Today, there are lots of petty thieves in Placencia, walking the beach to steal from tourists while they are in the water, or getting into tourists' houses to get pocket money or passports. Some Placencians believe that the increase in criminality has been due to the opening of the road[27]. Belizeans now have an easy access to the village and it can be relatively easy to come overnight to rob tourists and go back home without getting caught. The village is also perceived as one of the richest places in Belize and is the principal tourist destination not located on an island, so, Placencia attracts a growing number of thieves coming from surrounding cities and villages. Other Placencians argue that the increasing number of tourists in the village inevitably brings more people, and therefore more crime. "Any place that has tourism is

[27] The road was built on the peninsula in the 1990's. The construction of the road helped to the rapid development of the entire peninsula. Placencia was only accessible by boat before the road was built and everything from lumber to food had to come by boat across the lagoon. The road gives a much easier access to the villages of the peninsula, which led to an important increase in the number of tourists. The road should soon be paved but the project keeps being delayed.



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not going to be as safe as they were before [because of everything] that comes with tourism. Crimes come along with it. Drugs come along with it" (Interview 5).

Drug addiction is actually increasing in Placencia. Marijuana, also called "ganja" by the villagers, is not considered as a drug by most young Placencians, probably because there is an important number of Placencia born Rastafarian[28]. The use of ganja is more or less accepted by the "older folks" but is mainly popular among the youngest generation. If smoking ganja is common in the village and in the entire country, the use of crack is an entire other thing. You do not need to be in Placencia very long before you get warned against the "crack heads" living in the village. Most crack addicts are known by the entire community and are usually accepted and relatively controlled because they are "part of the family". Considering the size of the village, there is an important amount of crack addicted people in the village and the drug is really easy to find. It is much safer for the "crack heads" to stay in Placencia, where everyone is family, than to go to Belize City, where crack addiction is an important problem. When asked if tourism could be a reason for the increase of drug use in Placencia, answers differ. The village legend says that many boxes of cocaine were found on the beach many years ago, coming from a trafficking boat that had been pursued by the police. To be sure not to be caught with the drugs, the drug dealers had thrown their load in the ocean and the tide would have

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[28] There is in Belize, and in Placencia, an important number of Rastafarians. Many Belizeans do recognize themselves in the Jamaican culture and follow the beliefs of Rastafarism.



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brought many bundles to Placencia. The story says that some Placencians made lots of money by selling the bundles in Belize City, while others would have started to consume them. If tourism does not seem to be what brought drugs to the village, a few interviewees explained that "crack heads" are probably able to keep on consuming because of the money they can make with tourists. Only one interviewee argued that the drugs came to Placencia only to answer the needs of tourists and that, following tourists' arrival, a few Placencians became addicted.

When asked if alcohol use was more important now than it was before, the responses varied between two main answers. Most people believe that Placencians were always heavy drinkers and that tourism did not change anything for the villagers' alcohol consumption. It was explained to me that Placencians used to go out fishing and stayed on cayes for days, fishing and partying. Yet, a few interviewees believe that tourism effectively increased alcohol consumption in the village. "Tourists come and go and, a lot of people, if you take them out on a tour and they really have fun, they invite you out for a beer, or a drink. You know... and you go out for a beer or a drink with them and the next day you take out the next group of people and the same thing happens continually. If you don't push your stop–button, before you know it – you are going out there on your own for a drink" (Interview 1). It is also believed that the raise in income might have been a reason for the increase in alcohol consumption. Likewise, the increased number of bars in the village made alcohol more accessible to villagers.



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Contrary to what one might think, prostitution does not seem to have been on the rise because of tourism development. Prostitutes were available in Placencia for British soldiers many years ago. "Early, before tourism, there was prostitution... A lot of prostitution! Because we had a British Force Base here. So a lot of people would go and earn money. I guess that group got old now and the other group had more pride!" (Interview 1). Most Placencians are not aware of prostitution in the village nowadays. Others explained that a restaurant owner is known to have young girls of 13 or 14 years old, coming from a neighbouring village, to prostitute themselves in the restroom of his restaurant. Interviewees who mentioned those girls all agreed to say that these prostitutes were not for tourists but for villagers. Yet, it is difficult to talk about prostitution in Placencia without mentioning the "beach boys" phenomenon. The "beach boys" are very present in Placencia and the prostitution question arises when it comes to determine if they are prostitutes or not. "It is not like in Jamaica here, where a girl knows that she'll find a guy for two weeks. "Rent a dread" if you know the expression. We almost have the same thing here. "Rent a dread". But here, no need to rent... They come for free!" (Interview 11). I came to the conclusion that the "beach boys" in Placencia couldn't be considered as prostitutes because they do not get paid for sex and because Placencians themselves do not consider their numerous sex experiences as being a form of prostitution. Yet, these men are replacing the need for prostitutes.



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Placencia culturally changed a lot in the last few years. It went from being a quiet fishing village to a tourist-entertaining one. It would be easy to believe that the changing culture in Placencia is due to tourism. However, most people believe that the introduction of television in everyone's life, in the late 1980's or early 1990's, is what mostly influenced the community. Before television, Placencians used to meet on the docks and the beach to meet together at night. The community was then very tight. The arrival of television in Placencia changed this tradition and today, no one meets on the docks at night anymore. Now, Placencians usually go out to bars or simply stay at home. They now "have the world in their own livingroom" and do not need to go out to entertain themselves. A few young Placencians stated that television shows on MTV were probably what influences them the most for their style and what they aspire to become in the future. It seems that tourists are not as much of an influence for them.

To please tourists, the village council made a few rules that are not always welcome by most villagers. A few years ago, a new law appeared saying that pigs were not allowed in the village anymore so that their smell would not disturb neighbours and tourists. If Placencians talked about the "pig law" with a smile, most of them became more serious when they talked about the alcohol law. A few locals complained about not being able to drink alcohol on the street anymore and missed the time where they could sit with



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neighbours on their doorstep and talk over a beer[29]. Now people worry about what tourists will think. The once usual parties on the beach are now banned. A young man explained that there is a division in the village between the "the old folks", living south of the village and the "young and relaxed people", living more up north. "Old folks", it seems, are always the ones complaining about everything and are the ones making the laws in Placencia. "[With the "old folks"] you are out of the law all the time, out of THEIR law. They make their own law, in their meeting" (Interview 11). The new rules ordered by the village are not thoroughly followed by residents and are at the basis of some resentment.

The growing number of people moving to Placencia is also perceived as a problem for many Placencians. There are two main kinds of immigrants in the village: the "Spanish" and the "expats". The Spanish are the Spanish speaking people, coming from the surrounding countries of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras as well as Spanish speaking Belizeans. Most of the "Spanish" people are construction workers coming to the village because of its booming expansion. Spanish people bother Placencians because they are perceived as lowering the job salaries. They come to Placencia to earn more money than they would at home, and are still asking far less then most Belizeans would for an equivalent job. Placencians feel they are loosing jobs to Spanish people and blame

[29] Drinking alcohol in the street is prohibited but the law is usually not respected, even by the policeman who have been blamed for doing so quite a few times.



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them for the rise of most social problems in the community. The other immigrants in Placencia are the "expats", the American, Canadian and Europeans who bought a residence in Placencia and have moved there permanently. Many Placencians believe that "expats" do not respect their host country and are trying to change them with projects and rules. "You can't come here and try to change what we have here! For right now, we have a few foreigners that came and started living here and it looks like all they want to do is change everything. [...] With some of the bad mentality they have, they should stay home! 'Cause then, they try to bring their style from over there to come live here. You came here, you should come and join that lifestyle. You shouldn't try to change it!" (Interview 10). Many "expats", through the years, were able to get fully accepted among Placencians. Yet, other "expats" decided to build their own village to the north of the peninsula and are living in an almost segregated community. These "expats", and the ones who refuse to live "Belizean style" are the people Placencians complain about. On the other hand, the "expats", contrary to Spanish people, are not perceived as stealing Placencians jobs, but as creating jobs by opening new businesses.

Placencia was historically known as being a racist village. Placencians were often criticized as being racist creoles who refused to see Garifunas coming to their village. If racism is not as obvious today as it was before, Placencians still are sometimes blamed by their neighbours as being racists or snobs. People from Seine Bight believe that Placencians feel they are better and superior to others Belizeans because tourists chose to



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visit them over other villages. They also blame Placencians for acting as if they were white people. "Most people hate Placencia people because of the way they are so "gravalicious", they are so greedy. They are so self-centered. They think only about themselves... and money" (Interview 9). Most people who criticize Placencians are able to admit that their critics often come down from envy. Belizeans often envy Placencians for the money they make and the "good" life they get to live. Placencia is known around the country to be a rich and beautiful village. Many young Belizeans chose to move to Placencia to find jobs in the tourist industry. Some of them believed that Placencia would make them live the good life. "I used to think that Placencia was for rich and famous. 'Cause, like, everything is rock bottom way out there [...] I use to get jealous of people living here, yes" (Interview 3). Hence, Placencia's thriving economy tends to bring up some jealousy. Placencian kids who are going to school at Independence usually have more lunch money than the other kids while other kids say they are better dressed. Placencians are also perceived as lucky because they get to hang out with tourists. A Belizean who moved to Placencia a few years ago explained "I would say that anybody who lives in Placencia, San Pedro, Caye Caulker and in the other Cayes, basically have a lot more than the people who live just in the City, or in Dangriga and other places" (Interview 3). A Placencian once said that he had heard other people saying "you've gotta go to Placencia! Placencia, it's The place! Everybody there is rich!" and then explained "but that's not true. The investors that are coming here are rich but we still gotta work for them!" (Interview 6). The perception most Belizean have from Placencia is therefore



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screwed, influenced by the perception they have from the life being lived in the village, which is not always representative of the truth, but is strong enough to create envy and bring some Belizeans to make the important decision to move to Placencia.

### 3.4.4 Placencia's physical assets

The growing number of people choosing to live in Placencia is a problem in itself. Most land in Placencia is now occupied and the price of land has risen drastically in the last years. An "expat" in Placencia explained that within 20 years, the price of a lot in Placencia went from 2,000 US $ to 50,000 US $ if located by the beach. He also firmly believes that unless something happens, the prices will keep on growing. Many "expats" chose Placencia to live because Belize is an English speaking country, they can find year long warm weather, the food is similar to American food, the water is drinkable, the environment is beautiful and the lands are still affordable for people coming from North America and Europe. For Placencians, this popularity and the raise in land price are getting to be the most important problems they have to deal with.

Most Placencians are now unable to buy lands on the peninsula. Many people in Placencia decided to sell their land to "expats" in the last few years to gain what they considered lots of money. Today, most of them wish they had waited longer to make more money out of their land. More importantly, they now worry about the young generation and wonder where young Placencians are going to live in the future. Each lot



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available on the enlargement of the peninsula was sold to families in need years ago by the government for 5,000 Bz$ (2,500 US$). An important number of Placencians now live in this area of Placencia, also known as "the ghetto". Many families, who bought the 5,000 Bz$ lands, made the choice to sell their small piece of land to expatriates for more or less 30,000 US$. They consequently had to find somewhere else to live. It is therefore possible to see, throughout "the ghetto", a few big houses owned by "expats" while the neighbour's land is filled with as many houses possible to fit on the piece of land. This section of Placencia is more densely populated than the rest of Placencia. Interestingly enough, this part of Placencia is cut from the rest of the peninsula by a thin line of tropical forest that hides this section of the peninsula to unadventurous tourists.

Today still, there are talks of having more digging in the lagoon to create more land for the villagers who cannot afford to buy land in Placencia. "The creation of land for village residents who do not own property (and cannot afford to purchase property at current market levels) has been planned for several years on the Lagoon side of the Peninsula near Turtle Inn. However, private parties have become interested in the same property" (Placencia News, 2005 : n.p). With all the land being sold to "expats" and foreign investors, young Placencians wonder if they will ever be able to buy land or if they will have to be renters their entire life. Many Placencians mentioned that they would not accept having to live in another village. "No, I ain't thinking to move. If I have to move, it's gonna be within a dirty situation. It wouldn't be a good reaction" (Interview 10).



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The increasing number of expatriate owned land in Placencia is a source of worries. "Any discussion about how Placencia might or might not develop is kind of silly because at some point, someone might come and buy the whole freaking village if they want. I mean, it doesn't cost that much money for somebody to come in and say "you know what? We'll buy all this land and pay everybody off and send them on their way and start building resorts" They could turn the place into Cancun!" (Interview 2). Placencians are aware that the popularity of their village could end up being very problematic for the community. A Placencian complained: "[Placencia is] all natural... You don't want to come and try to make it into a concrete jungle! You know... Look at this! Ain't it beautiful? All natural! But they want to turn it into a concrete jungle. That's going to be crazy!" (Interview 10). Indeed, the number of relatively massive buildings is increasing on the beach side of the peninsula and most new buildings are owned by expatriates who are not always complying with the village laws. In fact, building condominiums is prohibited in the village and some foreign investors came and were able to sell their "non-condominiums" as "share of a corporation" playing with words to avoid the law.

### 3.4.5 Placencia's human assets

When asked if tourism had changed Placencians' healthiness and health system, most interviewees said that it had not changed much. In Placencia, there should be a nurse found at the clinic at any time and a Cuban doctor is supposed to visit frequently.



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However, the nurse and the doctor are not always present. Many Placencians complained that the hospitals are far from Placencia and that the village is lacking good health services. I was explained that many Placencians choose to be treated in Guatemala or Mexico instead of being treated in Belize when in need. Some Placencians believe that the treatments are better and less expensive in these surrounding countries. If tourism development did not help the improvement of the health system, it has at least given them access to an emergency team ready to help when there are problems at sea. There is also a pharmacy that offers many products that were not offered in the village before.

The Belizean growing concern about AIDS had to be mentioned during interviews so that people would talk about the problem. Placencians are well aware of the AIDS epidemic. Yet, most of them do not believe that AIDS is a problem in Placencia. "If anyone had AIDS right down here in Placencia, we don't really know about it. Up 'till now from the time I heard it came to Belize about 19 years ago, I haven't known or seen anyone fall dead from it up to now" (Interview 6). AIDS is still a hidden problem in Placencia and most Placencians do not believe there are infected people in the village. "Well... I personally haven't seen anybody die here from AIDS. I have known for one person who came from America with the HIV infection and now he is quarantine, he is not living in the community anymore" (Interview 5). Many Placencians believe that AIDS is found mainly in Dangriga (a two hour bus ride from Placencia) and that Dangriga is the only reason why there is a high percentage of AIDS in the district. No one seems to believe



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that AIDS can spread to the regions. "It's like having leprosy back in the days in the bible. You know... No ones want to deal with this situation. No one wants to talk about it. Everybody is just scared of it" (Interview 10). An HIV positive man I met in Belize City explained that AIDS is everywhere in the country. Himself coming from Placencia, he explained that there are many infected people in Placencia and in Seine Bight but that people just choose to ignore the problem. If the problem of AIDS is hidden in Placencia, the fact that some Placencians end-up being promiscuous with an important number of people (including tourists and local people), probably helps to the spreading of the virus. Moreover, white girls are often believed to be "clean" and many men choose not to wear condoms when having sex with them.

### 3.4.6 Placencia's financial assets

Maybe the biggest change brought by tourism development for Placencians is the financial impact created by the arrival of tourists. Placencia's geography and Placencians' business sense allowed the development of an envied tourism industry in Placencia. The village effectively looks better than other surrounding villages. When asked if Placencians were richer than other villagers, a Placencian answered: "[Some Belizeans] are paid as low as, like, 250 Bz$ a week. [but] Sometimes, I make 250 Bz$ in one day! [...] The tourist business is very good. Very good!" (Interview 4). Yet, someone else explained: "The situation is... here, it is more expensive then in any other place. Placencia is a very expensive place. That's why they think we are making big money. We



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are making big money but we are spending big money at the same time. So it is the same (Interview 10)". The prices are effectively higher in Placencia then they are in other parts of the country. It would be easy to believe that prices are higher because Placencia is a tourism centered village. Yet, many people believe that prices are higher in Placencia because it is geographically far and that there are more costs associated to product transport[30].

Wealth in Placencia is mainly concentrated in the hands of a few families and is often associated with the possession of land. Some people sold their land at the beginning of tourism development and received a few thousands American dollars for it. People that hold on to their land now have more chances to make a lot of money when they decide to sell it, or they can decide to use the land to start their own business. Some frustrations in the community are heightened by the fact that some families have inherited land that is more valuable than others. It goes without saying that the people who were able to develop a business in the tourism industry or who had valuable land also ended-up having more money than the people serving tourists.

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[30] The San Francisco State University found that as a consequence of tourism development, Belize's price for goods increased by 8% (Belize Tourism Board, 2004).



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## 3.5. Conclusion

When asked if tourism, taken as a whole, had been a good or a bad thing for the community, no one could give a definite answer. Each respondent were ambivalent concerning the impacts of tourism development. Everybody seemed to agree that the main positive aspects of tourism development are linked with the amount of money it brings to the village. Most people in Placencia work in a tourism related business and interviewees believed that approximately 75% of the population works for the industry[31]. Many Placencians argued that tourism came at the right time for the village, when it started getting harder for fishermen to deal with the growing problems of overfishing. Being fishermen was not always easy and many respondents believe that tourism is an easier source of revenue than fisheries were. Environmentally, many people believe that tourism has been benefiting Placencia because it forced the villagers to develop their knowledge of the environment and forced them to recognize the importance of protecting it.

On the other hand, tourism brought numerous problems. If some say that the environment was improved for tourists, other say that the increased amount of people and the following increase in waste created on the peninsula is detrimental to the environment. For others, tourism comes with a low season that is an economically hard time of the year for everyone. A few Placencians are afraid for Placencia's economy, which is almost

[31] Each of the interviewee was asked to give an approximate percentage of villagers working for tourism.



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entirely based on tourism. This could indeed be an important problem if the interests of international tourists for the village came to drop. The social problems, like the increased alcohol and drug use, the infidelity trend, the worries linked to crime as well as the fear of losing all the properties on the peninsula are some of the setbacks that were discussed concerning tourism. Finally, the uncertain future, the fear of loosing control over the village and the fear of seeing it become the next Cancun is a common concern.



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# CHAPTER 4: Discussion

The main question to be clarified with my research was: *Is tourism helping or hindering Placencia's development?*

My definition of development was that "Development should meet the needs and aspirations of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Development should help to improve the livelihood of a population by improving its economic, physical, cultural, social and environmental assets".

## 4.1 A short analysis

Beside the livelihood theory, the social exchange theory was, by far, the most useful theory when it came to understand Placencians' perception of tourism. If Doxey's and Butler's models resulted in a very imprecise analysis, the social exchange theory permitted a better understanding of Placencians' opinions by considering their jobs and their background. Indeed, identifying each respondent's background helped to be aware of what could influence their comprehension of tourism. Wall's segmentation approach was also very important in this research since it explains what I profoundly believed in when I decided to go to Placencia. This approach -giving no model- just confirmed that everyone's opinion could not be the same.



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It is difficult to make a definite statement saying if Placencia tourism development is beneficial or not for Placencians. Indeed, the short and long term impacts of tourism are poles apart for the villagers. Short term impacts are mainly considered to be the financial ones and are therefore perceived to be positive. Indeed, most Placencians benefit financially from tourism development and most of them seem to have a problem when it comes to criticizing the impacts of the industry. For some Placencians, tourism is similar to a dear friend that you cannot criticize. Tourism is like a generous friend who sometimes behaves badly. You tend to forget him for his mistakes. That's what tourism is for most Placencians. When asked, Placencians almost always affirm that the impacts of tourism on the village are good. The fact that Placencians are really proud people, only means that it is even more difficult to get them to talk about the village's problems.[32] This can also be explained by the fact that sociocultural and environmental impacts are often negative and can only be perceived on a longer term. The only way to make Placencians analyse and discuss how tourism really impacts their life is to get them to reflect on issues and worries they have. Then, problems linked with tourism slowly come up through the conversation. I realized that reality probably stands amidst everyone's truth, which makes it quite difficult to pinpoint.

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[32] MacCannell (1989) refers to this phenomenon of as the "stage set", divided in six stages between the "front region" (stage 1) which is a place completely constructed for tourists and the "back region" (stage 6), that tourists very rarely get to see and where the real life is lived. The stage sets are relatively important in Placencia, seeing that tourists are allowed to go everywhere, but that it is rare that they will get the complete truth about the villagers' life.



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In the literature review, we saw that tourism is frequently imposed on Third World countries by North Americans and Europeans. After a few months in Placencia, I truly believe that Placencians do not consider that tourism was imposed to them by others... so far. Tourism developed in Placencia at the same time as the problems linked to over fishing arose. Therefore, tourism almost came as a relief for Placencians who could not foresee much other source of revenue[33]. Tourism simply replaced fishing for most people in the community. Hence, tourism wasn't pushed on Placencians by foreigners. Tourism was more probably the easiest business to turn to, since fishing was declining.

Placencians like to think that they are free people and that no one can control them. Yet, increasing pressure from outsiders could mean that a growing and slow but constant outside control is developing on the peninsula. The development discourse used by many expatriates and businessmen is only now beginning to be perceived as dominating and to influence what some Placencians believe to be development.

The biggest problem that Placencians might have to face in a near future is the lost of control over their environment. The loss of control over tourism development on the peninsula could mean that their life will drastically change in the next few years. The growing popularity of the village means that more expatriates should be moving to the

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[33] Placencians' revenue has to be linked to the sea since the peninsula is too narrow and to sandy to allow any type of agriculture.



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village. Usually from North America and Europe, they will come to invest in Belize, buy the lands, build hotels or start restaurants. The main tourist spots in Belize are indeed losing control of their businesses and resource to the world elite. Placencia is now joining the ranks of these few popular villages in Belize. A transnational capitalist class is slowly moving to Placencia. These investors and expatriates can be a threat for Placencians. Once international companies, investors and expatriates take control of the peninsula, Placencians will not have much of a voice to influence their own development. Globalization, in that sense, becomes problematic, since it is what allows all kinds of investors to reach Placencia. Seeing that Belizean society is already divided by inequality of wealth, power and prestige, we can wonder if most benefits made through tourism will favour the government and businessmen, or if it will trickle down to the entire population. A few Placencians families, because of tourism, are much wealthier now than ever before. Yet, if no actions are taken, one can wonder if they will survive the competition brought by the ever growing number of resorts on the peninsula.

Defining what is at the basis of development in Placencia is tricky. Drawing a line between the changes caused by normal development and the changes originating from tourism is problematic. Yet, it is difficult to neglect the fact that Placencia developed more in the last few years than ever before, and that it all happened at the same time that tourism increased in the village. It is also obvious that development in Seine Bight and Independence has not been the same as in Placencia. Only a five minute walk is needed to



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see the difference between each of them. This could be a good enough reason to say that tourism is the cause of development in Placencia. Interestingly enough, most Garifunas from Seine Bight seem to be both jealous of Placencia's development and, at the same time, very proud to say that they are not loosing their culture and their village to outsiders as Placencians are doing now.

## 4.2 Considering the livelihoods

Now that we know what is happening in Placencia, we can wonder how much longer the village will be able to see tourism as a benefit and how well it will recover – if it ever does- from tourism drawbacks. The five principal assets (natural, social, physical, human and financial) observed in Placencia show that the life of Placencians changed in every area since tourism developed. If the livelihoods are only sustainable when "they promote an *accumulation of all* forms of capital" (Lindberg & Johnson 1997: 7), Placencia is not on a sustainable path at all. Next, I will try to determine if the five different assets have been deteriorated or enhanced by the touristic activities in Placencia.

### 4.2.1 Natural assets

If Placencians agreed on one thing through the interviews, it is that the increasing amount of hotels and of people on the peninsula will end up being detrimental for their environment. Tourism development gave birth to environment awareness for many



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Placencians but even with an increased awareness, the community does not always have the tools to prevent environment deterioration.

Many problems concerning the environment on the peninsula are linked to deficient infrastructures or to the development of infrastructures that are not adapted to the surroundings. Placencians are currently talking about improving the sewage systems so that the ever increasing amount of sewage produced in the village does not end up leaking in the sand. A few particular buildings are known to have sewage problems and their current tank cannot treat all their waste. There is a new law on the peninsula forcing big hotels to change their sceptic tanks for treatment plant. The problem with this law is that it asks only big hotels to comply. Most hotels in Placencia have only a few rooms, which means that a lot of the businesses having the leakage problem across the village are not big enough to be asked to comply to the new law. They are often medium or small size hotels who have many clients but who do not have the financial means to install the expensive treatment plants. The law will therefore not affect most hotels and restaurants who should be asked to comply. The Department of Environment decided that, by September 2005, all the new developments on the peninsula would have to install their own sewage treatment plants. This new law came as a surprise for many hotel owners, for whom these upgrades are unplanned and too expensive. "Rum Point Inn", one of the biggest hotels in Placencia with 10 beachfront cabanas and 12 suites, was asked to improve its sewage system without previous warning. The owners argued that they would



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not be able to pay the 75,000 US$ needed for the improvement and that this new law would put them out of business (Placencia News, 2005: n.p). We can believe that in the long run, the sewage law will positively influence the environment of Placencia. Yet, the problem remains for most small businesses who might already have sewage leakages and who do not have the money necessary to make a system improvement. Moreover, the problem will persist since there are still many houses in Seine Bight without plumbing and their inhabitants still use the lagoon and the sea to throw their feces. The growing population in Seine Bight, partly due to its proximity to Placencia, should therefore be a concern when it comes to the environment and the necessity of asking for adequate infrastructures throughout the peninsula.

Many environmental problems are linked to tourism. These problems will probably keep on growing with the increasing amount of tourists welcomed in the village each year. The growing population on the peninsula and the increasing use of non-renewable resources means that there is more pressure on the environment than ever before. Placencians know the importance the environment has on their well-being. They know that having an unspoiled environment is important for tourism development and are working at keeping their environment as pristine as they can. Yet, they also realize, looking at the decreasing amount of fish available around the village, at the dying corals and at the dredging being dangerous for the lagoon wildlife, that the environment will not always provide them with what they need if they do not take care of it. Yet, it is rare that Placencians are fully



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conscious of their lack of capital and political power which will eventually prevent them to protect their own environment against TNCs and the growing popularity that now threatens the peninsula.

### 4.2.2 Social assets

Placencians do not tend to link the social problems of the village to tourism. Yet, the slow growth of a few social problems can easily be explained by the emergence of tourism. Placencia's society has greatly changed since tourism developed. Obviously, a village that used to be living on fishing and where there has been a major shift in occupations in the last decade will see important social changes happen. Moreover, the behaviour of any close knitted group of people will change with the arrival of important numbers of foreigners. Yet, the sentiments of acculturation, commodification or transculturation are not recognized by most Placencians. While Garifunas from Seine Bight are proud of their culture, Placencians are more Americanized. In both villages, the "Jamaicanization" of the population is evident. Indeed, Placencians mostly adopt the "gangsta" style or wear rastas, while most tourists have no particular style. It is therefore possible to suppose that the main culture changes happening in Placencia are effectively caused, as would assert Placencians, more by television than by the tourists' influence.

Social inequalities are not too obvious in Placencia. There are some families that are richer than others, but social inequalities do not seem to be among Placencians worries.



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The only inequalities mentioned during the interviews were the inequalities created by the arrival of rich "expats" who tend to act as if they owned the peninsula. Placencia's popularity in the last few years brought many outsiders to build a home in the village. These foreigners slowly made their place among the Placencian population. However, even people who moved to Placencia many years ago are never really considered as Placencians and their acceptance among the population varies. Expatriates who decide to participate in the village meetings and who try to bring ideas to change the village -in any ways- are often criticized. Placencians usually see as an affront the way outsiders want to change their village. This reaction is understandable considering that Placencians realize they are loosing control of the BTIA and that the biggest businesses around the village are often owned by foreigners. Moreover, most associations in Belize are pro-tourism, of some sort or other, which means that it might be difficult to have an opinion against tourism development respected. Placencians realize that it is getting harder for them to have their opinion count in the decision making system.

Another social problem that seems to have amplified in the last decade is the family crisis linked to infidelity. Placencians were not too talkative about this question. Yet, it was, with drug use, the most observable social problem on a day to day basis. Placencian men did not give much importance to it while women complained about it only when amongst friends, making the subject a sort of taboo. Placencians, as people in many other tourist destinations, meet new people almost everyday. Most tourists do not know the personal



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history of the villagers they meet and are therefore usually not fully aware of what they are doing when they have careless sexual encounters. The impact of this is that many Placencian women dislike and distrust most white girls. Meanwhile young men approach them on the beach or at bars and win them over by proposing free trips out at sea. Sexual opportunism creates an obvious form of social instability in Placencia. It creates disharmony among villagers and seems to be at the basis of many physical fights and psychological crisis.

The increase of petty crime and drug use in Placencia seem to have created a general feeling of anxiety. Placencians use to live in a very safe environment where they could trust everybody. Today, people in Placencia refuse to say where they live, lock their door at all times and are always worried their possessions might be stolen. The increase in petty crime probably developed at the same time as their village grew more popular with foreigners and that a few people discovered that they had the chance to make easy money in Placencia. As for the increasing drug use among villagers, the increased amount of money addicts can make by working with tourists could be one of the reasons why they can keep on buying hard drugs.

Tourism development led to an unpredictable change in the Placencian community. In Placencia, most community laws and unwritten rules were created in the last few years and were formulated to protect the community against problems linked with tourism



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development and the village growth. These laws and rules created a division between the generation of "older folks" and of younger Placencians. The older generation is the generation predominantly in control of what happens in the village and the younger generation does not always agree with the new conservative laws that they are establishing. Some people now describe the village as divided between the north and the south, leaving the southern part to more conservative people and tourism businesses, and the northern part of the village, to younger Placencians and businesses aimed at serving mainly Placencians. These laws could be perceived as being simply part of the village "modernization" but they were developed at such a fast pace and asked Placencians to change such rooted habits that it is hard not to link them with tourism development.

Tourism might indeed have bred disharmony in the village. It is difficult to ascertain if social problems that arose at the same time as tourism are completely linked to its development. Yet, tourism seems to have aggravated problems that were already present in the village. The rapid population growth and the relatively new easy access to the village may also be at the origin of such problems.

### 4.2.3 Physical assets

Placencia benefited from tourism growth when it comes to infrastructures and services development. The Belizean government now perceives Placencia as an important asset for the country's tourism industry and is now ready to help to the improvement of its



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infrastructures. The peninsula developed considerably after the opening of the road. Placencians can now drive to their home instead of leaving their car on the other side of the lagoon. The road allows trucks to deliver required material to build new infrastructures. Today, Placencia has a bus company that brings tourists and locals in and out of the village, three times a day. Consequently, it is much easier then it was before for Placencians to travel to Dangriga, Belmopan and Belize City. The road, which is still a dirt road, should be paved shortly. The project to pave to road has been planned for a long time but there always seems to be problems and lack of money for its completion.

Today, water in the village is treated properly- possibly helping with the improvement of the villagers' health- and one can drink it out of the tap; a new police station is being constructed and two banks and one ATM machine are now available to villagers. Villagers also have access to many grocery stores and to many kinds of products that are not necessarily accessible in surrounding villages. There is even a new pharmacy, two competing hardware stores, French, Italian and Spanish restaurants and an Italian Ice Cream shop. Today, Placencians can get almost anything they need right in the village – even if it is at higher price than elsewhere- while they use to have to get everything by boat from the other side of the lagoon. It is possible that these new services are only available to Placencians because of tourism, which created a rapid increase of Placencia residents and gave a new buying capacity to the villagers.



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If most infrastructures and services were improved in the last years, the increased amount of people using them on the peninsula might end up being problematic. Population growth is good for businesses and it helps to pay for services, but the overuse of some of these services could end up compromising their benefits. In addition, the growing number of restaurants and hotels deserving tourists might also get to be a problem for Placencians. Many Placencians are worried about loosing their peninsula to TNCs, investors and expatriates. This scenario could happen quite easily. From a sustainability point of view, the growing popularity of Placencia is an important problem since most Placencians will not be able to afford land or housing on the peninsula if things keep on going as they do now. Indeed, most Placencians are already unable to buy land on the peninsula for themselves or for generations to come. To resolve the problem of land on the peninsula, a proposition to enlarge – once more- the peninsula has been made. The idea to make the village larger by filling the lagoon and build more housing could be environmentally disastrous and the odds are that the new land would end up in foreigners hands anyway, creating further social inequity.

### 4.2.4 Human assets

Most Placencians, old enough to have been fishermen but young enough to be in the tourism business today, seem to agree that work is easier today than it was when men had to go out fishing. Seeing the popularity of Placencia among young Belizean circles and seeing that many Belizeans take a chance by moving to the village, we can assume that



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tourism is indeed an easier kind of work and is more rewarding than most jobs available throughout the country. If people working in the tourist industry have to put a lot of time in their business, most of them do not have to do back breaking work and they sometimes even get to enjoy the same things as tourists. Moreover, even the lowest paid jobs in Placencia are usually better paid than in other region of the country.

Tourism created employment for most villagers and for many other Belizeans. Many Mayans come to the village every day from surrounding Mayan villages to sell their arts and crafts and there is an important number of "Spanish" construction workers throughout the village. Cooks, maids, boat captains, "dive masters", businessmen (hotel, café, internet place, specialized tours, restaurant owners) are all jobs that did not exist, or were not important before tourism, but they are now available to Placencians. Placencians are also finding new ways of making money. A few people rent small houses that they built next to theirs, other have specialized in some sort of baking of cooking. Every evening, after school, a young Placencian walks around the village with a wheelbarrow to sell the Creole bread his mom made during the day. These are all jobs that are now possible -and worth the time- because of tourism.

Tourism off season is felt in Placencia and for a few months, many restaurants have to close, hotels are almost empty, tour services have no business and most people in Placencia are waiting for tourists to return. The seasonal work is problematic for the



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people who are unable to save money for the low season. Even fishermen cannot sell their fish as easily as in the high season, when restaurants are buying their catch. The dependence on tourism for most Placencians is clear during the low season and gives an idea of the problem that would arise if ever tourism came to an end.

The money that tourism brings to the village probably improved villagers' health in an indirect manner. Again, it is difficult to determine if health was really improved in Placencia because of tourism development but the construction of the pharmacy – known to be offering drugs and tourist products- allowed Placencians to get medication and products that were not easily available in the village in the past. Placencians can also now get the advice of an educated pharmacologist who is often more popular than the village nurse. On the other hand, Placencians were always known to be healthy. Most of them grew up eating mainly rice, beans and fish. It is difficult to say if the increased popularity of junk food and candy is due to its availability for tourists or due to the village newly gained accessibility (with the road) but it looks like young Placencians are not eating as much nutritional food as they were before.

It is probable that there are fewer safety problems out at sea today then there were before. If globalization brought safety equipement to the community, it is possible that Placencians would not be able to afford them if it were not from the money tourists bring to the village. The safety equipement also appeared on boats to reassure tourists. With the



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increasing amount of tourists in the country visiting the cayes, snorkelling and diving, villagers are now more educated about what to do if ever something happened while on the water.

Placencians do not believe that the rising incidence of AIDS in Belize has reached the village yet. Since there are no numbers available on the rate of AIDS in Placencia, it is difficult to compare the village with the rest of the country and analyse if tourism can have an impact on the epidemic. Yet, we can assume that there are a certain number of HIV positive inhabitants on the peninsula. The reality is that Belize has the highest rate of AIDS affected people in Central America and that Stan Creek district is the district with the second most important number of HIV positive people in Belize. It is difficult to believe that all the people with AIDS are found only in Dangriga, even if Placencians would argue that fact. The secret surrounding AIDS in the village, and the beliefs surrounding the disease, often lead to very dangerous behaviours. Moreover, the conviction that "white girls are clean" probably leads to even riskier behaviours and probably helps to spread the disease. This kind of thinking could easily lead to an increase in the number of sexually transmissible diseases. The secrecy surrounding STDs and the difficulty to get secretly tested in the village should be acknowledged.

One of the benefits of tourism in Placencia is that the village's school receives many books from tourists acknowledging the need, and wanting to do something, for the



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community. A Canadian sent computers to the primary school so that the children could learn how to use them. Some tourists get really attached to the village and do what they can to help. If tourism does not directly impact the way children are thought in Placencia's school, it gives them some material that allows and facilitate an improvement in their education. It is therefore interesting to note that Placencians do not recognize that tourism helped in that way.

### 4.2.5 Financial assets

Most Placencians seem to believe that the financial aspects of tourism overrule the other assets in such an obvious way that they do not feel they need to talk about it. Placencians do not criticize tourism because it improved their finances. Yet, price inflation is important and even if Placencians feel like they are much richer now then they were before, they are not making enough money out of tourism to be able to buy their own land anymore. So if we think about financial sustainability, their economic gains are not sufficient to cover the costs or to mitigate the effects of tourism development.

The ever growing number of foreign owners in Placencia shows two possible dangers for Placencians. First, the village's growing popularity means that the land in Belize is now recognized as a good place to invest. Condos are being built and foreigners will keep on investing. Second, most land being bought in Placencia is now bought by foreigners and not by Belizeans. Since land is getting to be too expensive for Belizeans, the creation of



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enclaves for foreigners risks of being more and more common and Placencians will slowly loose access to parts of the peninsula. Placencians will end up having to rent or even will have to share an apartment on the peninsula for the rest of their lives. In the worst case scenario, they might have to move outside the peninsula and transit by boat or bus to come to work. Today, renting a small place in Placencia is really expensive and many young Placencians already find themselves having to share a small place to be able to live in the village.

Considering that many hotels and restaurants are owned by foreigners, we can assume that economic leakages represent an important loss for the village. Many businessmen have businesses in Belize but are still living outside the country. Moreover, the most exclusive hotels prefer to import food and decorations from other countries. As an example, the "Turtle Inn", a hotel owned by the film producer Francis Ford Coppola, is proud to announce that the decorations of the hotel come from Bali. Moreover, the most luxurious hotels usually offer all inclusive vacation packages, which means that tourists spend very little in Placencia village. There are also important economic leakages from restaurants who import their food supplies from outside the country in order to please their clients. This means that Placencians and Belizeans lose an important amount of money tourists could bring to the country. There are more export leakages created when investors, who finance the resorts and hotels from afar, repatriate their profits.



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## 4.3 Critique of future development

The future of Placencia is quite uncertain. We can still wonder if the costs of tourism are proportional to the benefits received. Placencia's popularity in international circles might very well lead the village to enter a decline. Placencians do realize that their peninsula is at risk when it comes to its environment and the fear of being the next Cancun is very present in Placencians' mind. Yet, most Placencians seem to believe that they still have control over the development of the peninsula. However, I believe the control is slowly being lost to expatriates, investors and TNCs who are not equally receptive to Placencians' opinions and who can pretty much do what they please with the land they are buying.

### 4.3.1 Ara Macao Project

The Ara Macao project will certainly play an important role in the realization of what kind of political power the inhabitants of the peninsula have, and how easily their future can be changed. To the 2,000 inhabitants of the peninsula, the project wants to bring 13,000 more. It is believed, as reported by Lisa Carne (Amandala, 15-05-06), that the consultative firm writing the Environmental Impact Assessment for the project tends to lessen the environmental effects that the project will have on the peninsula. Indeed, the solid waste, the waste water, drinking water and electricity necessary for the project are believed to be downplayed, which rightfully worries Placencians. The environmental impacts of the projects should be extensive and most Placencians are aware of it. Yet,



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even if everyone from the peninsula joins to protest against the project, there are very low probabilities that it will ever be stopped, on the premises that it will bring more jobs to the area and more money to the country. It seems that the Belizean government is so avid for development and money that it is even ready to accept projects that are environmentally unsafe. Meanwhile, the government is playing the card of ecotourism in international tourism circles.

Placencians, as scared as they are of the impacts the Ara Macao Resort can have on their environment, will probably never be able to stop the project that already began on the northern part of the peninsula. Too much money and probably enough political inducement have already been invested so that the project cannot be stopped. Placencians are now seeking international professional environmental help to prove that the project will deteriorate the lagoon as well as the coral reef; but it just might be too late. On a peninsula where there is water shortage during the high tourism season, where there are problems with the sewage systems and where there is an ever growing lack of space, we can wonder how the peninsula will be able to support 13,000 more tourists and the people needed to serve them.

### 4.3.2 Dyett and Bhatia's Development Plan

Dyett and Bhatia, in 2005, made a few interesting recommendations concerning Placencia's development. They believe that Placencians should:



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"Adopt the plan's land use concepts to promote traditional residential development and compatible visitor-oriented uses;

Amend village bylaws to avoid over-building and protect community character and the environment;

Create a funding program for affordable housing, new parks, and community facilities;

Protect the inner lagoon from haphazard dredging and landfill;

Seek designation of the lagoon and village as a World Heritage Site"

(Dyett and Bhatia, 2005: 6).

Dyett and Bhatia's plan promotes sustainability and proposes ways to improve Placencians' life. Most of their ideas are worth looking into, yet the plan suggests a few recommendations that should simply be rejected by Placencians.

The plan proposes to accommodate more residents in Placencia by providing more housing. Dyett and Bhatia recommend further growth for Placencia and even go as far as proposing to double the existing population. Indeed, the plan recommends to further develop the peninsula, allowing it to go from 500 to 1200 residents, reaching a ratio of 3 residents for 2 foreigners. Dyett and Bhatia seem to believe that even with such a growth, Placencians would be able to preserve their culture and their control over the village. This is purely utopian. Placencians are already loosing control over their community. Foreigners, with their political and financial power, already have an important influence



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on everything that happens in the village. These foreigners, probably being the richest people on the peninsula, would end up being the group owning most of the businesses, and would probably have the biggest influence in political meetings and decisions concerning the peninsula. Placencians would slowly loose the small political and economic power they have left.

The plan also proposes to give Placencians 30% of the village's land for housing. Out of this 30%, land would have to be divided between local housing, shops, and commercial services. Meanwhile, 40% of the land would be given for resort use and foreigners. On a peninsula where the land is already insufficient for Placencians, it is difficult to agree with a plan that proposes giving less than 30% of the land to villagers[34]. How could Placencians agree to give to foreigners 40% of their land when they already don't have enough? Of course, the money Placencians could make by selling their land would be a big incentive to this type of development but what would happen of Placencians after they have sold their land? It is also interesting to see that the plan proposes to build houses and businesses a few feet from the sidewalk. Yet, there are already many houses and businesses near the sidewalk and the plan does not provide information on what would happen to these houses, which would probably have to be moved.

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[34] The last 30% will be used for protected areas.



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The realization of Dyett and Bhatia's plan would bring important further development to the tourism industry on the peninsula and it could create many more jobs for Placencians and Belizeans. Yet, one could argue that all Placencians who want to work today can find a job. The growth proposed in Dyett and Bhatia's plan would only mean that the Placencians who own a business would see more competition appear in the village. The odds are that most Placencians business owners would see their business swallowed by the increasing – and probably financially advantaged -competition.

There are today a number of NGOs, firms, groups, corporations and individuals working at the development of Placencia. Each of these groups and individuals have their mind set on some personal goals which they believe would benefit Placencians. Placencians often find themselves in the middle of all these projects, having to judge how these projects could impact their future. There is a lot of money to be made in Placencia and even consultants may have something to win in Placencia's development. If a handful of the people working at Placencia's development think about the environment and believe that Placencia should not develop any further, many others have their mind set on the money to be made and do not recognize the various problems that can be linked with the developments they wish to see for the peninsula.



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## 4.4 What could be the solutions to preserve Placencians sustainable livelihoods?

Seeing that the Belizean government, who usually promotes ecotourism, seems to use a different approach in Placencia, I would argue that the best way for Placencians to develop tourism would be to go back to a slower and simpler kind of tourism that would be mainly serving backpackers. Indeed, Placencians should concentrate on alternative tourism, described by Brohman (1996) as being a: "smaller-scale, dispersed, low-density developments. Often these developments are located in and organized by villages or communities, where it is hoped they will foster more meaningful interaction between tourists and local residents, as well as be less socially and culturally disruptive than enclave-type resorts. Second, ownership patterns in alternative tourism are weighted in favor of local, often family-owned, relatively small-scale businesses rather than foreign-owned transnationals and other outside capitals. By stressing smaller-scale, local ownership, it is anticipated that alternative tourism will increase multiplier and spread effects within the host community and avoid problems of excessive foreign exchange leakages. Third, alternative tourism encourages community participation in local/regional planning concerning tourism and related development. By creating democratic institutions to allow local residents to participate in decision making, it is expected that more appropriate forms of tourism development will be established that will be viewed positively by local residents. Fourth, alternative tourism emphasizes sustainability, in both an environmental and cultural sense. Alternative tourism ought to be ecologically



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sound and should avoid the types of environmental damage and conflicts over resource use that have often marred mass tourism developments. Finally, alternative tourism should not denigrate or damage the host culture; instead, it should try to encourage sensitivity and respect for cultural traditions by creating opportunities for education and cultural exchange through interpersonal dialogue and organized encounters" (p.64). Interestingly enough, many aspects of alternative tourism are already present in Placencia. Placencia was, until recently, a small-scale touristic place with hotels and restaurants owned only by residents. In just the last few years Placencia became popular enough for foreigners to develop an interest in the peninsula.

Alternative tourism is not based on 4 or 5 stars' resorts but on small hotels, often deserving backpackers or low budget tourists rather then rich ones. This kind of tourism would present advantages for Placencians. First and foremost, it would ensure the development of small businesses in Placencia that the villagers would be able to own. Low budget tourists usually like to eat in small restaurants (as opposed to pricy and foreign owned restaurants that are popular in Placencia today) and sleep in inexpensive hotels. The popularity of small businesses would give the chance to more families to start their own small tourism enterprise without creating too much competition or having to raise important amounts of money to start the project. The goal of these businesses would not be to serve tourism as if they were in a big international touristic destination but to



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simply serve backpackers and tourists who are ready to live as the people in Placencia usually do. This would also prevent leakages to other towns or other countries.

Moreover, concentrating on alternative tourism could be very advantageous to ensure Placencia's sustainability. Seeing that Placencia cannot grow as much as many other tourist destinations due to the fact that it is on a peninsula, this type of tourism would ensure that there wouldn't be any more international hotels constructed on their land. To bring back tourism to what it was a few years ago could also stop the immigration of both "expats" and foreign investors. Only then, Placencians would maybe have a chance to slowly regain their land. This, in turn, would probably help to protect the peninsula against the rising number of crimes. Now, Placencia is known to be a place for rich people and petty criminals who are coming from surrounding villages to steal from tourists. Since most crimes are now perpetrated mainly in rented houses, these criminals would probably not be as prone to travel to the village if they knew that there wasn't much to steal anymore.

The only problem that could keep on evolving if Placencians chose to concentrate their development on an alternative tourism model would be the free-spirited nature of most backpackers. Contrary to most tourists going to expensive hotels, backpackers could maybe cause an increase in alcohol and drug use as well as maybe provoke more infidelity problem already present in the community.



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In light of what was observed in Placencia, we can argue that development has effectively been influenced by the North American and European residents and investors, mainly because of their financial advantage. The biggest businesses on the peninsula were developed by non-Belizeans. Development is indeed influenced by the "First World". It seems like development in Placencia is closely linked to what Placencians dream of – which is influenced by what they see on television- and what expatriates and businessmen bring to the peninsula[35]. Placencians now have a choice to make: either preserve their environment, their control over it and their land, or take the chance to make important amounts of money today and wait to see what will happen to them in the future.

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[35] I could even go as far as stating that if television was produced in Belize and that Belizeans had access to well-made Belizean television shows, representing their own culture, maybe they wouldn't aspire to develop in the same way as they do today.



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# Chapter 5: Conclusion

As we have seen, tourism and development often go together. Tourism, bringing important new amounts of money to an area, often leads to development. In fact, this development is usually needed and appreciated. Yet, tourist development can go wrong. It starts slowly while people are striving for it, hopeful that it will give them a chance to get what they want. Tourism then grows and, in some cases, becomes a burden. It can change everything in its neighbourhood, going as far as uprooting the people from their own land. If tourism is not controlled, it can rapidly become an overwhelming burden.

As we have seen, answering the question *"Is tourism helping or hindering development in Placencia, Belize?"* is not an easy task. Tourism creates such different types of impacts in its neighbourhood that some of these impacts tend to overweight the others for a while. Yet, it doesn't mean that the overlooked impacts are not important. Something that can be really advantageous for a place at the beginning of a project can end up being detrimental by the end of it. Having a global point of view and being able to predict how tourism will impact Placencia in the future is quite a difficult task.

In Placencia, tourism is still a relatively new business, but it is growing rapidly. As it has been mentioned already, the fact that tourism started to develop at the same time as fishing was slowing down turned out to be a kind of good fortune. Placencians were lucky, they had the longest beach of Belize to advertise, they had that "end of the road"



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feeling to promote. It was a paradise for the barefoot friendly tourist. There were coconuts in palm trees, and beautiful flowers were growing like weeds. It was a small, unknown paradise. The few tourists that were adventurous enough to find the hidden village were rapidly considered friends. Placencia slowly grew more popular. By word of mouth. Tourism was benefiting Placencians. It helped the development of their village, allowed an improvement of many physical assets, and gave the chance to most families to get wealthy or at least, to live comfortably. Until recently, Placencia was a success story important enough to make the surrounding villagers jealous. Knowing all this, it is understandable that Placencians do not tend to criticize tourism. Only recently, tourism showed its other facets.

I definitively do not believe that tourism, today in Placencia, is hindering development. Tourism development is a form of development in itself. Yet, if tourism development is not hindering development, it might be bringing a form of development that will end up being detrimental to Placencians. All development is not good and Placencia is a perfect place to show this dichotomy. Tourism development so far has helped Placencians to gain money, to start their own businesses and to bring an improvement of infrastructures in the village. Compared to most other Belizean villages, we can state that Placencia is developing. Yet, some social and environmental problems are now arising because of the growing tourism industry and the increasing amount of people it brings to the village. The environmental problems are just beginning to be acknowledged and studied while the



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social problems that have been magnified by tourism are still often hidden or ignored, which can only in the long run, aggravate them.

The future of Placencia is very unpredictable. Most businesses in the village are now linked to tourism. If for any reason tourism declined, most villagers would find themselves without work and would have nothing to turn to. Yet, as Placencians say themselves, the lack of space on the peninsula and the Ara Macao project are the main concerns they have right now. Soon enough, Placencians will probably have to face other problems linked to the ever increasing popularity of the peninsula among investors and foreigners. It is all the assets that are at risk for future Placencians. If Placencians loose control of the village's development, there could come a day when the village will not be their's anymore. If something like this happened, there is no doubt that the future generation could not meet their own needs. Everything observed in Placencia would therefore make me state that tourism is now leading Placencia to development, but that this development is far from being sustainable and could very well lead traditional Placencia into a decline.

The future of Placencia does not appear to be positive and bright, and some Placencians begin to realize this. Many important aspects of their lives have changed because of tourism and the problems the industry is creating are just starting to appear. Naturally, socially, physically, humanly and financially, tourism has impacted the community in



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ways that should keep on emerging in parallel with the growing village popularity, often creating a circle of impacts that feed and encourage each other. Placencians are generally aware of all the risks arising because of the popularity of their village in international tourism circles but they seem to prefer to ignore these risks. The main task for Placencia in the next years will be to resist the lure of overdevelopment.

The other reality that Placencians now have to face is the fact that they are no longer part of a small community anymore. People from all around the world, with many different backgrounds, are now influencing the village development. Placencians are no longer completely in charge of what happens around them. The numerous foreigners and businessmen who are slowly becoming Belizeans also have the right to be heard when the time comes to make decisions. Moreover, this growing group of people has often chosen Placencia as a place to invest, and its members are usually avid supporters of further developments.

I spent a lot of time lately asking myself if I wasn't an inherently negative person. I hate to admit it, but that might well be the case. I was always amazed when I asked interviewees, at the end of the interview, if they still considered tourism was good for Placencia. Generally, the answers I got came with a tone of voice making me think that I was asking a stupid question. Most Placencians believe that tourism improves their life. The financial aspect of tourism still appears to be the only one deserving their full



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attention. However, a few Placencians – often younger, environmentally inclined or softly rebellious ones - criticized the numerous impacts of tourism and acknowledged that problems are now starting to show up.

It is obvious that Placencians' state of mind might change in the next few years. After all, Doxey's model cannot be completely wrong! Most of them might start to realize and reflect on how tourism is affecting their family, their environment and the entire village. Only the future will tell if tourism will really be beneficial for the village or not. Until then, it could be a good idea for Placencians to rally around the people who can help them in the protection of the peninsula. Belizeans are well aware of what sustainability is. It just happens that Placencia fits more with the three "S", "sea, sun and sex" type of tourism, than most other Belizean destinations. This is where the biggest problem for the peninsula lies. Yet, there are many NGOs already working in Placencia whose objectives are to protect the environment or to help with the development of Belize. These NGOs should be urged to teach everyone on the peninsula about the effects of tourism and should help with the development of more sustainable practices. Moreover, the Peace Corps working on the peninsula could be mandated to create a document that would consider all the aspects and impacts of tourism through the entire peninsula. This document could be used by Placencians as a tool to protect what is still theirs. Placencians should also strive to have the government recognize the peninsula's popularity and create



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laws that would protect its inhabitants. These laws should particularly relate to who can buy land on the peninsula and under which conditions they can do it.

## 5.1 Placencia in a globalizing world ...

The need of the rich and powerful of our world to invest in foreign countries will probably keep on growing through the years. Buying land, building hotels or buying condos are great ways to invest. Yet, the failure to recognize, comprehend and empathize with the population of the places where the investors decide to invest is often central to the numerous problems they create. On the other hand, the financial support communities usually find in tourism make them overlook the numerous problems that can develop with such an industry. Moreover, most communities do not realize that the negative impacts of tourism can rarely be controlled.

If Placencia is special because of its geography as well as for the resourcefulness and the thriving life of its inhabitants, the experience they are living is relevant for the understanding of the impacts tourism can have in many other communities around the world. Indeed, if tourism development created many social, environmental, physical, human as well as some financial problems in Placencia, in spite of the fact that people were sure of controlling everything that had to do with the industry, the odds are that it might well develop in similar ways in other communities.



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## 5.2 Suggestion for future research

As suggestion for future research, I believe that a comparison between what is happening in Placencia village and Seine Bight could reveal more clearly the many changes that tourism creates on the peninsula. These neighbouring villages are so different and yet, are so close to each other, that it would be really interesting to try to understand how and why their development came to be so different. It would also be interesting to study tourism in the inside of Belize. Indeed, inland tourism takes a complete other form and is often being described as ecotourism. It could be interesting to know if ecotourism can really stay sustainable when a destination gets to be as popular as it is now in Belize. It would also be interesting to do the exact same research in a completely different destination to see if the impacts found in Placencia can relate to this other place.

Tourism and development are closely linked since one leads to the other. Yet, tourism-led development is often detrimental to locals, who have to tend to the needs of outsiders – tourists and businessmen- more than they tend to theirs. In Placencia, the beauty of the peninsula, the rapidly growing problem of overfishing, the search for development and the need of finding money were all reasons that led to the development of the tourism industry. Today, the financial advantage of tourism is the main reason why the industry is still uncriticized by many Placencians, who tend to disregard the social, natural, human and physical impacts the industry has on their community. It is these Placencians, the one often in charge of tourism development, that might eventually lead the peninsula to be



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lost for future Placencians.



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# Appendix 1: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form
The Impact of Tourism for Placencia, Belize.
Myriam Thériault
Department of International Development Studies

n

I am a graduate student in the Department of International Development Studies (IDS) at Saint Mary's University. As part of my masters's report, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Anthony Holland O'Malley and I am inviting you to participate in my study. The purpose of the study is to examine the impact of tourism on the fishermen of Placencia, Belize.

I will use participant observation, informal interviews and the drawing of some maps to help me understand what has changed around the village in the last few years. I will be in Placencia for six months and this research will take place within this time. I will be around everyday and the research will be done in a very casual manner.

This research will allow you to give your opinion about tourism in Placencia. Since I will send a copy of my report back to the village once it will be finished, this research will provide you with a better understanding of what is happening today in your community. It is a chance for you to explain what you feel about the community and have a say on how you want the village to develop in the future. There are no risks in participating to this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You may terminate the interview at any time and you may request at any time that this consent form be returned to you for destruction.

You have to be aware that some Placencians could recognize your opinions and ideas when the results of this research will be sent back to the village. This research will present the opinions of a group. As such, no individual participants will be directly identified in this thesis.

If you have any questions, please contact Myriam Theriault (principal researcher) at theriault_myriam@yahoo.com or simply come and talk to me whenever you see me in the village.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, you may contact



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Dr. John Young, Chair, Research Ethics Board at ethics@smu.ca or the research director, Dr. Anthony O'Malley, at (902) 491-6221 or at aomalley@smu.ca.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date:

If you agree to have your picture used in my thesis (without the use of your name) sign here :

Please keep one copy of this form for your own records.



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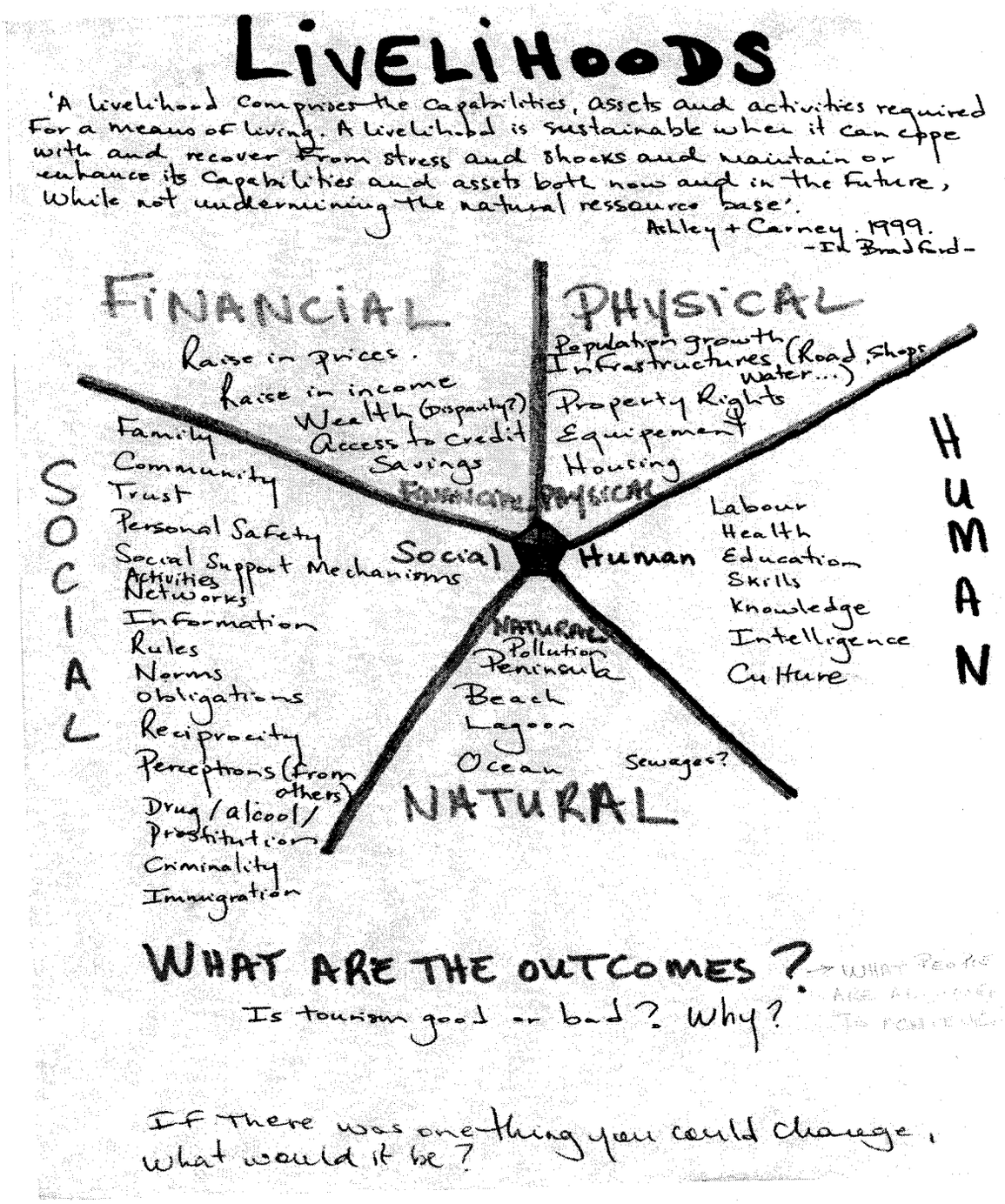
## Appendix 2: Interview model



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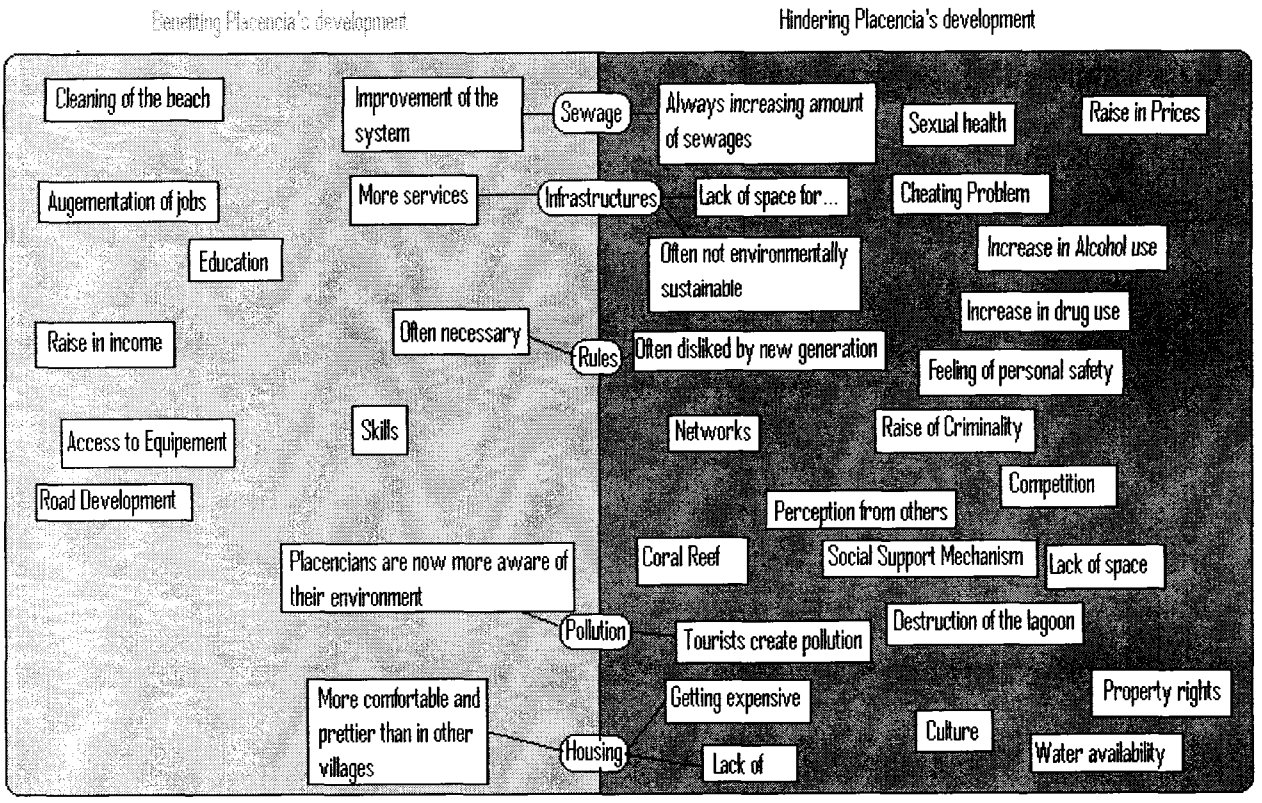
# Appendix 3: Comparison tool



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# Appendix 4: Poem : Bring Back Placencia How Eh Use To Be

By Therese Sierra

Bring back Placencia how eh use to be.
When we as parent's were worry free.
When we children use to roam ever so free.
Weh neva have to worry about drug seller trailing wee.

Bring back Placencia how eh use to be.
When children was full with respect.
We didn't dare to slip because the older folks was there to keep us in check.
So bring back Placencia how eh use to be.

TV was a real treat, in those days only a few money folks was able to own.
But never the less we had enough work to keep us occupied.
On weekend we take to the beach and make coconut doll's.
We swim until we were shribble as prune.
Most of the time we forgot about home and was made to remember with a shootie broom.
So bring back Placencia how eh use to be.

We didn't have big shopping malls' with air conditioning and all.
We had Mr. Habat Mini Shop.
He didn't have all the modern goods but he had all we need to grow to manhood.
He was the best butcher we could ever find.
When eh give a cut yuh could bet, not a ounce would left short.
Eh beat Running W by a long shot.
So bring back Placencia how eh use to be.

We didn't have to worry about imported oil.
Miss Estell and Albat was the best coconut oil maker we could ever find.
If we didn't have sall mout fih tea.
You could go to Miss Deli and get the best Guava Jelly yuh ever taste.
Eh surley meck Marie Sharp Jam tasteless to Deli one.
So bring back Placencia how eh use to be.

These were the days when doors could be left open any hours of the night.
These are the days we so desperately seek to get back.
We need more Police like Sanky use to be.
He care for his people he did his job to the best of his ability.
He surly neva tack any briberies.



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So bring back Placencia how eh use to be.

In those days we had a few nurses who came to our shores.
But there was one outstanding woman who deliver most man and woman here today without a frown.
She would not turn you down.
If you had no money to put inner hand when she says to move you must obey because you will be taking your own life in your hands.
Miss Atelo is a woman we should never forget.
So bring back Placencia how eh use to be.

We use to have entertainment nights when the whole village was press thight.
The poor school room was fill to the brim.
We look forward to seeing Miss Lily doing her thing.
When all the children with there brave little smile, captured our heart.
It let us realize how talented they were.
Those were the days people use to unite.
So bring back Placencia how eh use to be.

Yes we are thankful for tourism in our village.
It gives us more money and comfortable homes.
But we must never forget our fisherman parents who started our lives.
We must give them the highest of respect.
They taught us all the sea knowledge we needed to know.
They are our strength and back bone of this treasure we own.
So bring back Placencia how eh use to be.



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# Appendix 5: Acronyms

BCSIA: Belize Cruise Ship Industry Association

BETA: Belize EcoTourism Association

BHA: Belize Hotel Association

BNTGA: Belize National Tour guide Association

BNTOA: Belize national Tour Operator Association

BTB: Belize Tourism Board

BTIA: Belizean Tourism Industry Association

CHA: Caribbean Hotel Association

CTA: Caribbean Tourism Association

CTO: Caribbean Tourism Organization

DFID: Department for International Development

MMO: Mundo Maya Association

PTC: Placencia Tourism Center

TNCs: Trans National Corporations

WTO: World Tourism Organization



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