Perceived Effects
of
Residential Tourism in Belize

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Degree of Master of Arts in Geography

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Dedication

To the harmonious well being of Belize.
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Abstract

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Research based on contemporary flows of residential tourism is indicative of an influx in outward migration where relatively affluent groups including American expatriates are increasingly seeking the commodities and amenities offered in otherwise developing nations in their quests for a better way of life. Considering this shift, this study examines the case of Belize, a small Central American nation that is emerging as a leading host on the map of residential tourism. It explores the perceived effects of residential tourism within Belize through focusing on the lens of the expatriate as opposed to the perspective of the local members of the Belizean population. To better understand the influx and resulting social and spatial transformations, an in situ approach
applying qualitative methods is used. Open-ended interviews seek out members of the Belizean expatriate community living either part-time or permanently in three of the nation’s commonly sought after destinations including the mainland towns of Corozal and San Ignacio, as well as the offshore island of Ambergris Caye. Interviews with residents from this range of environments confirmed general motivations for settlement in Belize over other suitable destinations in Latin America to be based on climate, language, cost of living, investment opportunity, and social stability. Further, the interviews enable this study to identify individual visions of place and how recurring themes from life prior to moving abroad serve as influential determinants of a destination. Place of origin and lifestyle preference filter the degree to which expatriates perceive and categorize their presence as beneficial for the advancement of receiving communities or in contrast, carry an awareness of how their actions perpetuate social inequalities. While 97% of participants cited a desire to pursue or maintain full-time residency in Belize, only 1 of 32 total participants in this sizable representation renounced his passport to pursue Belizean citizenship. This suggests that for most, time spent abroad is complementary to a leisured lifestyle or residential tourism but remains supportive nonetheless, of evolving trends in tourism, migration, and mobility as the diversity amongst sites and perceptions in this study is reflective of the variance in human desirability for geographically diverse locales.
Introduction

Research based on contemporary flows of residential tourism is indicative of an influx in outward migration where relatively affluent groups including American expatriates are increasingly seeking the commodities and amenities offered in otherwise developing nations in their quests for a better way of life. Considering this shift, the Central American nation of Belize has been cited as a popular destination amongst American migrant and expatriate communities, emerging as a leading host on the map of residential tourism. Based on the rapid transitions in the emergence and escalation of aforementioned trends, this study examines the perceived effects of residential tourism
within Belize through the lens of the expatriate as opposed to the perspective of the local members of the Belizean population.

In order to better understand the prevalence of expatriate residency in Belize, their reasons for deciding upon one place over another must first be determined. In discovering that English is the primary spoken language in Belize, does the call for fluency in a foreign language deter settlement to otherwise suitable destinations? Further, do elements that are tied to comfort and familiarity in living amongst other expatriates once within Belize serve as influential determinants or is the embrace of local culture similarly sought after? This background information is pertinent for the development of this study through its ability to justify the rooted influences that drive residential tourism from place of origin, to a specific destination within Belize. More so, it works to capture the motives that drive the currently expanding existence of this trend and contributes to contemporary tourism research by lending clues to the paths residential tourists among others opting for a new life abroad may pursue in years to come.

The humanistic angle of the study calls for qualitative approaches to collecting data therefore, an in situ study focusing on open-ended interviews is applied to seek out members of the Belizean expatriate community who live either part-time or permanently in three of Belize’s most desirable destinations for residential tourism. These sites include the mainland towns of Corozal and San Ignacio and the offshore island of Ambergris Caye. Selected as promising sites that together offer the greatest likelihood for attaining an abundance of diverse expatriate perspectives, the interviews conducted at these destinations aim to transcribe and define whether expatriates perceive and categorize their presence as beneficial for the advancement of receiving communities or in contrast,
if they carry an awareness of how their actions (i.e. decisions driving migration, settlement, lifestyle pursuits) perpetuate social inequalities. Analysis and evaluation of common perceptions that arise throughout the interview process may highlight clustering of dispositions along the socio-economic spectrum. It is anticipated that identification of any discernible commonalities amongst expatriates will illustrate how their presence and lifestyle preferences propel social, economic, and spatial transformations. In applying the interviews as a platform for addressing expatriate intentions abroad and whether these intentions have been modified in post migration life, variance in tendencies based on locale of settlement contributes to an understanding of community preference and participation.

Though the lineage of inquiry assigned to interviews in this study shares in notions explored within existing literature, the arrival of interests pertaining to expatriate commitment to area of residency can define the pace and amenities typical of variously assimilated communities abroad. As the search for a “better way of life” often serves to be the decisive characteristic of residential tourism, the interview process in this study grants the opportunity to evaluate and quantify the otherwise qualitative details they choose to share (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009: 608). It allows for an understanding of whether expatriates in Belize indeed, arrive purely to be absorbed into a slower (peaceful, quiet) way of life or whether they address (eagerly or with reluctance) the agency they carry as members of the developed world, therefore remaining active within host communities via participation in volunteer projects and improvements.

It is anticipated that results from this study will contribute to the existing yet narrow body of literature on residential tourism as a contribution to the current pool of
empirical collections. Complementing the framework with its angle of focus on the perceptions of the residential tourists themselves (expatriates, lifestyle migrants), this study supports the evolution of tourism, migration, and mobility, as the decided sites are reflective of the variance in human desirability for geographically diverse locales.
Study Area

Corozal  I  San Ignacio  I  Ambergris Caye
Background & Literature

Overview of Tourism – (1600-1800)

For this study to fulfill the aim of capturing the avenue of residential tourism in the way it is practiced, represented, and perceived by expatriates living in Belize, a review of the milestones that have shaped tourism studies must first be applied. In considering the cumulative changes that shaped tourism throughout history and into recent decades, the transformative elements of the past ease visibility of the path that led to the rise and popularity of contemporary tourism trends and more specifically, the momentum with which residential tourism expanded.

In backpedaling through the Origins of Sightseeing (Adler, 1989), Judith Adler’s (1989) study is applied as an outline of sorts, to highlight the aforementioned milestones of tourism, travel, and sightseeing over the course of some two hundred years for the purpose of identifying the processes that occur while people organize their travels (Adler, 1989: 7). Some of the normalized practices that must be completed include a ritual preparation, as people organize the components that will be necessary if not critical to successfully setting out on a lengthy trip (Adler, 1989: 7). In comparison to the modern ease in travel and accommodations, organizing a trip between the 1600-1800’s was far more involved. Adler identifies the importance of deciding on the duration of one’s travels, as time spent away from home meant that extensive organization and fine-tuning of an itinerary were essential.

Apart from the planning end of a trip, Adler identifies the evolution of patterns that were prevalent during the 200 year period that focused on an array of senses one must use during a trip in order to fulfill preferred styles. As Lassells, a Catholic tutor
stated, “Conversation with eminent men, assiduously sought out abroad, becomes a prime technique for ‘reading’ the world, and in old age the traveler can hope to ‘travel over again’ – not, it is worth noting, through a store of pretty scenes which have been squirreled away in memory, but through thoughts and discourse” (Adler, 1989: 10-11).

Adler uses this statement as a resource through which the patterns of travel techniques are exemplified as shifting from speaking with more emphasis on observation in order to not affect existing understandings of the world, especially if the desire to reflect on experiences from one’s youth is a desire in old age. Moreover, the article contributes to details of the Grand Tour, a widely practiced educational outlet for the schooled men of yesteryear (Brodsky-Porges, 1981). Recognized as a ritual in the culmination of a man’s formal education, the Grand Tour signified maturation into adulthood and further symbolized that its participants had acquired a fluency in alternate methods for analyzing the world. It allowed for the educated classes to cultivate the *eye*, an approach that emphasized the importance of observing the global state of affairs as opposed to engaging in other forms of interactions that might inhibit an *objectively accurate vision* (Adler, 1989: 18).

These shared ideas overlap through descriptions of the historical importance of hands-on enrichment for the promotion of worldliness. They support a structure that stresses the importance of travel and explain that the milestones of the past are the foundations and underlying reasons for the abundance of tourism modes and respective motivations for tourists traveling within these categories in a contemporary setting. These ideas of conversation and observation that Adler (1989) discusses, extend beyond the
defined persona of a traveler to serve as critical elements in communicating with and
collecting data from expatriates in this study.

**Acceptance of Tourism Studies Across Interdisciplinary Social Sciences**

Turning to the exclusive tendency of social scientists of the past to disregard and
often omit observations and data focusing on tourists themselves, Leite and Graburn’s
(2009) article offers a refreshing perception of tourism by peering through an internal
lens of observation in a way that confirms the necessity for an expansion in tourism
studies. Their acceptance of tourism as a topic of study within anthropology lends
legitimacy to the realization that research communities have forcefully excluded tourist-
oriented observations in years past. The authors state,

> “while the association with cultural brokerage has not proved as disturbing to
> anthropologists as being mistaken for tourists, it reflects an additional way in
> which they are embedded in the very system they are studying and raises
> important ethical and epistemological issues” (Leite and Graburn, 2009: 38).

This idea is insightful in that it helps in our recognition of the ideas that tourists
were in fact never intruding on the established research areas of social scientists instead,
reluctance to incorporate tourists into observations and data collection processes was
fueled by the resistance of understanding that there is a *qualitative* absence in the
difference of goals between cultural tourists and anthropologists (Leite and Graburn,
2009: 38).
The authors suggest that while tourism studies have grown in popularity and acceptance over the years, the internal and external drivers of the act on an individual basis but also within wider social patterns of travel remain inadequately understood. The aim from this point on is to establish a foundation for future tourism research that unifies the aims of multiple disciplines including sociology, geography, history, political science, cultural theory, and anthropology (Leite and Graburn, 2009: 35). Expansions within the realm of tourism studies suggest that research communities are actively acknowledging the trends driving contemporary global travel as well as the secondary markets they affect. Rouding out pools of existing literature pertaining to tourism and travel therefore enables the expansion of research within some of the more permanent travel arrangements including residential tourism and mobility.
Rise of Alternative Tourism – Residential Tourism / Lifestyle Migration

Applying Bohn Gmelch’s (2010) discussion on “Why Tourism Matters,” supports the purpose of analyzing the perceived effects of residential tourism by extending a general overview of topics often explored via modern tourism studies with particular emphasis on the humanistic lens of research approaches. As the author’s interests in the extensive spectrum of tourism trends was triggered during a trip to Barbados alongside her students, Bohn Gmelch came to the realization that tourism and its subsequent impacts were displayed everywhere.

Her observations of the seasonal shifts Barbados endured in order to accommodate droves of tourists in addition to understanding her students’ mindful attempts in distancing themselves from being associated with tourism led her to dig into the motivations for tourism through questions of traveler origin, goals for local engagement, and impacts of presence on local communities and their landscapes. As Bohn Gmelch later came to find, the impacts of tourism range largely on the bases of recipient nations’ overall size, scale of tourism, economic complexity, and values of those who control and profit from the industry (Bohn Gmelch, 2010: 9). Consideration of these factors is critical for gaining insights into the degree of interplay necessary for tourism to drive a local economy but equally interesting are the environments they are able to create if and when equilibrium is established.

In placing Bohn Gmelch’s notions into the alternative subcategory of residential tourism, her introductory perspective allows for a greater roundedness to understanding tourism, but more so, it enables a deeper grasp of the motivations that drive the factor of permanence in lifestyle migrations and mobility of expatriates. To support a discussion of
the scale of variety existing in the world of tourism, Bohn Gmelch contributes the variable of authenticity as a determining factor in a touristic pursuit (Bohn Gmelch, 2010). As MacCannell (1999) has pointed out,

“authenticity exists whenever people have significant control over their lives and play an active role in determining what changes occur in their society”


This suggests that expatriates participating in residential tourism are holding the lead in activating and bringing to fruition the most valued desires in their lives. Yet, transplanting this idea as a potential explanation to a form of tourism that remains to be so largely undefined would inhibit the ability to objectively absorb whether participants in this study are moving abroad in pursuit of an authentic lifestyle or arrive to a place that best accommodates their perceived version of an authentic self.

Their combined contributions work to explain that the authenticity imagined by tourists cannot be met in reality. Instead, the practices of a culture must be continuously reshaped and redefined in order for it to continue to evolve in a way that is suitable for current and forthcoming generations. If this is indeed the dominant mindset amongst researchers, the motivations propelling the rapidity with which residential tourism continues to expand, must be examined on an individual basis. Touring a foreign destination for a temporary experience is justifiable however, migration to similarly foreign destinations with alternate and long term intentions of starting anew requires
further insight as it would compromise the individual experience but more so, the health and authority of developing nations.

Graburn’s (2010) chapter contribution to *Tourists and Tourism*, theorizes tourism in explaining that the practice of tourism is a type of ritualistic experience during which people seek to participate in activities that are an inverse of their daily lives at home and at work. Tourism experiences, characterized as special occasions rounded by moments of leisure and travel are meaningful because of their ability to bring separation to peoples’ lives from the things that might be regarded as ordinary. The types of experiences a tourist pursues however, are reflections stemming from daily life and lifestyle preferences back home.

The idea that people as tourists function in the places to where they travel in a way that is similar to their daily lives is an insightful way to consider or even forecast the types of relationships or physical activities a tourist might pursue while on holiday. As Graburn stated,

“Other than obtaining some straightforward goals whether they be warmth for northerners, weight loss for the overweight, history for the culturally hungry, or immersion in nature for bored urbanites, tourists generally remain unchanged and demand a lifestyle not too different from that at home” (Graburn, 2010: 34).

This idea that we fundamentally do not adjust ourselves confirms the necessity of separating tourism into modes as Cohen (1979) has done in breaking down tourism practices. Consisting of five primary types of experiences one might seek, the modes are
determined by focusing on the phenomenology of tourist experiences to therefore identify the triggers that influence people to fulfill their underlying inclinations to travel. Consisting of the *recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential* modes, these categories bring attention to those distinct interests that inspire the differences in motivation for travel amongst populations (Cohen, 1979). In coverage of the *recreational mode* for instance, his article states,

> “When he cannot take the pressures of daily living any more, he goes on vacation. If he overdoes it, or fails to return to serious living, his behavior becomes ‘dysfunctional’, in its extreme anomic escapism” (Cohen, 1979: 185).

Their overlapping ideas contribute to a universal understanding that it is critical to identify the internal motivations of a tourist as this knowledge transfers onto a broader stage that outlines how the places and sites themselves draw the appeal of a particular tourist. If the motivations for tourism travel as a general practice are identified, they may shed light onto the narrow yet rapidly expanding path of expatriate driven residential tourism.

To understand the ongoing influx in outward migration where American expatriates among others traveling with relative affluence increasingly venture abroad to satisfy their quests for a better way of life, the factor of perceived authenticity of a destination or through an experience may illustrate the general tendencies that ultimately motivate migration. Using Boorstin’s (1964) analysis of the tourist against MacCannell’s (1973) attempt to validate a tourist’s search for an authentic experience beyond the
parameters of familiarity, Cohen’s position falls in the middle of the spectrum with a lean toward greater support of MacCannell due to his more in depth attempts in explaining the motivations of tourists. In Cohen’s (1979) examination of sightseeing and its impacts on the broader social structures within society, he argues that MacCannell failed to generate overall objectivity in regards to the tourist community. As a whole, MacCannell’s portrayal presented the community in a way that makes it appear poorly informed about the types of authentic opportunities that can be found in the quest for authenticity tucked beyond the shielding layers that modify the preserved culture beneath.

This perspective complements the topic of residential tourism in this study as it aims to uncover the less visible aspects of intentions driving migration. In considering the way Cohen’s modes of tourism, as they are defined in his article on tourist experiences, the open-ended interviews used in this study became more easily decipherable as emergent themes were pronounced in participant explanations for their individual motives driving residential tourism.

Through MacCannell’s (2010) perspective of sightseeing and its effects on shaping and subsequently reshaping the broader social structure, it becomes visible that a select array of tourist tendencies are responsible for ultimately escalating certain places to mainstream popularity. In support of Erving Goffman’s (1963) ideas about human behavior in public places, MacCannell finds that behavior itself is but one of the externally visible examples of social structure seen in public places. Therefore human behavior lies within a greater array of contributing representations and it is in the way categorized associations to a place are externalized that serve to steer tourism to a place. Though trends of partiality for certain destinations over others are visible, they endure
fluid transitions over time so it is difficult to accurately detail the features of places that emerge as host communities to rapidly altering populations such as those embodying residential tourism. The idea that any single and seemingly random variable has the capacity to substantially impact the degree of visitation to a place sheds light on the abundance of existing sites that are consistent recipients of tourism yet might otherwise be considered as offbeat attractions.

Overview of The Tourist

In order to understand the prevalence of contemporary flows within the world of tourism and more narrowly, residential tourism, the notion of what it means to be a
tourist must be defined. If a prototypical set of tourist characteristics are developed, they would allow researchers to more concretely understand quintessential tendencies within the expanding market. Therefore, Barthel Bouchier and Graburn’s (2001) study is applied as a platform for the development of comparisons among various interdisciplinary tourism scholars and their often-contrasting conclusions about the role and ultimately, the place of the tourist.

In the past, the type of traveler who embodied the mold of the tourist was perceived as a primary contributor to increases in mass tourism (Barthel Bouchier and Graburn, 2001:147-48). Following the establishment of the tourist as an individual who fuels relations among developed and peripheral nations, social scientists sought to analyze the impacts of the tourist on local infrastructure, economies, internal migration to tourism oriented job markets, and efforts in sustaining landscapes of escalated foot traffic. In Cohen’s (1973) analysis of the ‘tourist as (willing) victim,’ he explained that travelers who are willing to compromise their safety fall within a category of society that is financially unbound and therefore seek meaning through escapism in peripheral nations as they are unable to satisfy this quests in otherwise typical destinations.

Similarly, MacCannell’s (1973) conclusions validate the overarching themes that prevail in the presence of tourism expansion. There is agreement among the referenced authors that tourism is not only visible everywhere, but as MacCannell states in his discussion of ‘staged authenticity’,

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“wherever the tourists locate their gaze, he asserts, the modern forces of commercialization have erected lucrative mirrors which reflect but of course are not the tourists’ desired authentic sights” (MacCannell, 1973: 150).

Therefore, regardless of its prevalent visibility, tourism will continue on its path of rapid expansion as visitors relentlessly pursue the authentic, also referred to as the ‘elusive backstage’. Graburn’s (1989) thoughts on tourists are formed through descriptions of tourists who participate in mainstream activities and his study finds that ongoing reluctance to accept them as ‘our’ tourists from origins in the West are unnecessary, particularly as their intentions show limited contrast to those of observational researchers (Graburn, 1989: 150). This diffusion of difference is furthered in the work of Urry (1990) and can be seen as he distinguishes between the romantic gaze typical of the educated middle classes and the collective gaze, more embodied but less visual. Though the latter has been associated with characteristics of the English working class, Urry joins the dichotomous gazes citing their underlying theoretical connection. The notion of unifying the gazes of the tourist continued to receive both support (i.e. MacCannell) and criticism over time therefore giving Urry the momentum to expand on his former thought that tourists’ sensory capacity was limited to the gaze. Instead, as Adler (1989) has pointed out, tourists are located by their performance, so the activities they seek and the internal sensations experienced during those activities are responsible for molding the majority of an experience (Barthel Bouchier and Graburn, 2001: 151).

Ultimately, “the tourist is a sight-seer, but not only a sight-seer” (Barthel Bouchier and Graburn, 2001:153). Inclusive of all characteristics and definitions that
have reshaped what it means to be a tourist, this section concludes that the tourist is of the ‘western middle class’ but can exist in any place where education and leisure come together to propel travel (Barthel Bouchier and Graburn, 2001:153). For residential tourists, this fusion is highlighted by affluence and transformed into a category of its own because of the factor of overall permanence in a leisured lifestyle. Regardless however, of the milestones, theories, and evolving trends highlighted by reference of the notable researchers, we ultimately cannot frame the tendencies of tourists because there is an absence of patterns in the range of variability between people and the places they seek for the fulfillment of their goals in exploration.

**Emergence of Lifestyle Tourism and Migration**

As travelers fulfill their desires of wanderlust by setting out to various destinations across the globe, their widely contrasting motivations set them apart as individuals but they are nonetheless united by the decision to pursue an imagined way of life through migration and more so, mobility. (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009: 1). Based on socio-economic dispositions prior to departure, the trends of mobility within residential tourism and migration create an imagery of distinct patterns that fall into several categories, the most prominent of which result in permanent residency abroad and annually recurring visitation. These patterns of movement are unbound to specific stages of realization that residential tourism complements and instead, support any paths leading to the improvement of life. Instead, in reviewing the storied intricacies that migrants share during interviews in Benson and O’Reilly’s (2009) study, it was found that people
decided to “migrate at various points in the life course and in different familial situations” (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009: 1).

Residential tourism may be viewed as a bold path but certainly not one of least resistance. The decision to resettle in a destination abroad is well informed and requires planning and a level of confidence that confirms the potential for dreams and aspirations to be met. The push for individuals of the developed world to pursue migration to destinations abroad is:

“often an antimodern, escapist, self-realization project, a search for the intangible ‘good life’”

– Benson and O’Reilly (forthcoming).

Triggered by a desire for some sort of self realization, the decision to do so spells out some of the impacts of social transformations from across the globe and serves to display the physical manifestations of peoples’ responses to modified conditions (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009: 1).

Upon closer examination of the overall style of event that influences and promotes the outward migration of expatriates, it becomes apparent that contemporary flow is being increasingly used as a way to search for a desired way of life. It is important to understand however, that the most powerful point of mobility driven realization is achieved long after the period of commencement (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009: 2). These social transformations that fuel the expansion of mobility and migration including “globalization, individualization, increased mobility and ease of movement, flexibility in working lives, and increases in global relative wealth”, contribute to a bilateral desire
stemming from escapism (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009: 3). It allows for a separation from people or places in the past that perhaps inhibited our ability to therefore escape toward a place that fulfills our passions and discovery of a meaningful life (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009: 3-5).

**Residential Tourism in Latin America**

Considering the goals of the study rely on an examination of the perceived effects of residential tourism within Belize, the lens of the expatriate as opposed to that of local Belizeans is amplified in importance because of its potential to feed into the development of a better understanding of the prevalence in residency abroad. To aid in determining whether elements that are tied to comfort and familiarity in living amongst other expatriates within Belize serve as influential determinants for a destination versus whether an embrace of local culture is a similarly widespread occurrence, Benson’s (2013) study is applied as a placeholder.

Benson’s (2013) account of expatriate assimilation in Panama examines how postcoloniality and privilege influence various perspectives on migration. Though newcomers do not always arrive with a set of predetermined social boundaries that might limit or expand their growth and integration in the Panamanian communities, their overall motivations for migration are nonetheless often triggered by intangible imaginings of a new life (Benson, 2013). The continued influx of migrants to otherwise underprivileged destinations presses for a deconstruction of their conditional experiences where regardless of their socioeconomic positions back home, their presence in developing areas inadvertently serves as a determinant of their privileged disposition within the
global North’s power hierarchy (Benson, 2013: 317). The ideas that compose and expand on notions of postcoloniality and privilege therefore penetrate existing surface perceptions of expatriates allowing the space for a deeper understanding of their shared efforts to resist the inescapable privilege that shaped their lives prior to migration (Benson, 2013: 313).

Through an account of personal observation, Benson recalls,

“Government representatives from the local immigration services in David [in Panama] come to the meeting to explain changes in VISA regulations to U.S. citizens, a courtesy that I cannot imagine was extended to other less affluent migrant populations in Panama” (2013: 318).

The divergent perspectives that populations within these communities have upon one another inhibit melting pot integration because regardless of seemingly objective open mindedness, Western migrants arrive into the top of the social structure (Benson, 2013: 317). Considering the bold leap that is migration, new arrivals do not instinctively fit into local settings, as they are more readily able to act on their motivations by leaving home-base in the first place. The reasonably unbound ability for expatriates to resettle is evidence enough to exhibit that they are fundamentally better equipped than local populations to actively carry out their goals (Benson, 2013).

As the extension of privilege is carried into restructured post-migration life, visibility of social and economic inequalities becomes more apparent, particularly as expatriates cite their discomfort in being identified among the privileged within their new
communities (Benson, 2013). Though they may acknowledge that their attempts to expunge the extent of their perceived relationship with the privileged world will not be possible, general awareness of the impacts of their presence has led many expatriates to consistently pursue opportunities in philanthropy and charitable work. Certainly these types of contributions are beneficial to local communities however, it is important to recognize that they rarely brush the surface of matters that speak to inequalities but instead, “ordinarily deal with the symptoms [of structural and systemic inequalities] rather than the cause” (Benson, 2013: 326).

The transference of perceived privilege identified by Benson parallels the variety of information this study hopes to attain through interviews with expatriates living in three of Belize’s most desirable destinations for residential tourism. Based on the perspectives transcribed from interviews, the case of Belize is similarly defined in a way that concludes that members of its community of residential tourists hold an overall limited awareness of how their actions perpetuate social inequalities yet hold similarly minimal perception that vocal involvement and participation are minimal.

Perceived Impacts on Local Populations

To understand whether expatriates in Belize arrive purely to be absorbed into a slower (peaceful, quiet) way of life or whether they address (eagerly or with reluctance) the agency they carry as members of the developed world, Benson’s (2014) study is analyzed for comparisons and commonalities. The content of her study supports the overarching role that residential tourism and mobility abroad plays, as members of the movement develop a deeper understanding of the social impacts their presence often
causes to the local communities in which they settle. In comparing the circumstances of migration in the cases of the British to rural parts of France and North Americans in Panama, Benson identified the different forces that initially drove these groups to mobilize and resettle as a set of convincing elements that reassured the fulfillment of a better way of life (Benson, 2014: 47). Aside from the factors that motivated migration, the study examined the migrants’ perceptions of their relative privilege and discussed the ways in which this transference of power was impacting on the development of receiving communities.

Benson’s study explained that interestingly, regardless of migrants’ commitments to assimilating with local culture or attempts to function within them in ways they consider to be helpful and considerate, their lack or unawareness of local trends ultimately leads them to improperly address situations according to local expectations. This view proved pertinent to inquiries of expatriate commitment cited in this study, as a portion in the participant interviews sought to answer whether newcomers remained active within host communities via participation in volunteer projects and improvements. Additionally, the prevalence of unintentional culturally insensitivities occurs so regularly, that Benson’s (2014) study highlights an account via an interview with an expatriate couple residing in Boquete, Panama. In search for labor assistance with their coffee finca and garden, the couple hired a native worker who received a reasonable salary, living accommodations that exceeded the norms of the arrangement, and support for his family to ensure that they had the proper resources for growth within their community (Benson, 2014: 63). Over time however, the couple came to realize that others did not fondly perceive their relationship with the worker but instead, viewed it as an insensitive
approach to hiring local help. In their attempts to cultivate a meaningful relationship, the couple inadvertently reaffirmed their escalated position as migrants who arrived to the top of the “local social hierarchy” (Benson, 2014: 63).
The idea of arriving to the top of a social structure based on a degree of privilege that is carried over from the nation of origin fundamentally discredits the values that an expatriate might otherwise attempt to express. The legitimacy in the intention to support assimilation among other interactions with a host community is called into question because of the relationship between habitus, field, and practice (Benson, 2014: 51). Though Benson (2014) applies Friedmann’s (2005) “presentation of migration as social transformation” to suggest, “habitus is mutable (under certain conditions)”, the post-migration lifestyles exemplified in the study present a uniform pattern of resettlement of British and North American migrants to places that support the habitus and community structure of their former lives (Benson, 2014: 52).

Ultimately, the aesthetic qualities sought by expatriates often outweigh factors that might influence a type of person who seeks a reasonable destination based on its ability or potential to be economically accommodating. These upwardly mobile migrants prefer the aesthetic traits of a locale such as the scale for improvement of quality of life to be key drivers in their decisions to move, offsetting consideration of otherwise reassuring factors like income potential and job security or advancement. Though the extent of an expatriate’s position of privilege is gauged in relation to the circumstances of the receiving community, the ability for them to make decisions for a destination based on compatibility with its socio-cultural dimensions explains the socioeconomic inequalities that surface in post-migration life (Benson and Osbaldiston, 2014: 1).

As potential expatriates select destinations for resettlement, a significant proportion of the factors that influence their move toward a certain destination amongst its competing neighbors is based on its ability to accommodate expectations of an
ephemeral composition from the imagination. Supported in previously reviewed literature, Salazar (2014) states that,

“for lifestyle migrants, resettlement is ‘a way of overcoming the trauma [of watershed events], or taking control of their lives, or as releasing them from ties and enabling them to live lives more true to themselves’” (Salazar, 2014: 120).

Motivated by a variety of now classified aims, expatriates typically move along the avenues that fulfill their roles as residential tourists, those on a quest for an improved way of life (Benson and O’Reilly, 2009: 611). These visceral ideas of an attractive lifestyle abroad are the drivers of this study as it supports the evolution of tourism, migration, and mobility while reflecting the fluid variance in human desirability for geographically diverse locales.
Data & Methodology

To better understand the influx in outward migration visible in contemporary flows of residential tourism from the United States and similarly developed nations to destinations within Latin America, an in situ approach applying qualitative methods is used in this study of Belize. Open-ended interviews are used for the first leg of the process to seek out members of the Belizean expatriate community living either part-time or permanently in three of the nation’s commonly sought after destinations by residential tourists. These destinations, including the mainland towns of Corozal and San Ignacio, as well as the offshore island of Ambergris Caye are the selected focal areas for this study based on the likelihood that diversity of lifestyles within them would produce a most representative sample of expatriate residency in Belize.
The objective for the interviews was to collect a total of at least thirty storied perspectives from those residents who individually identify as members within the expatriate community. To find these individuals, hotel tourism brochures were used as they often provided the surnames of business owners, names of non-Latin origin suggesting expatriate entrepreneurship. Additionally, reviews from rating sites including Yelp and TripAdvisor were used to identify businesses either owned or frequented by expatriates as patrons using these types of platforms as resources for their recommendations were quick to cite details partial to their interests, details as obscure or otherwise irrelevant to the review of a business as citing that they shared a hometown with the owner of their favorite bed & breakfast. The detailed reviews not only provided

“It’s absolutely amazing that in such a small country each one of the districts is so very unique in itself and its characteristics and culture.”

–Canadian Business Owner
users with glimpses into the lives and origins of reviewed businesses and their respective owners, but also relayed information critical to obtaining interviews for this study. By identifying the customer base of a destination or explaining that a game of darts, for instance, drew its largest crowd of competitive retirees on a Tuesday afternoon, the reviews and the contemporary platforms through which they were extended, provided timely recommendations for an interview-seeking itinerary.

San Pedro – South Island, Ambergris Caye
June, 2015

The most effective sites for interviews proved to be bars owned by expatriates that supported a communal atmosphere, particularly since owners often worked as the inviting operators or bartenders of these businesses. The communal atmosphere of a bar setting in general, is convenient for the start of conversation while patrons at local watering holes catering mostly to *regulars*, are quick to initiate conversation with
newcomers such as myself, about the purpose of my travels. Therefore, the combination of friendly staff and patrons in bars is incredibly effective for gathering interviews as the role of liaison gets passed along through a wonderfully meaningful snowball effect of unique interviews.

The collective results from details gathered during interviews aid the purpose of this study by defining the overarching perspective as it is seen, generally speaking, through the lens of expatriates living in Belize. They enable this study to identify individual ideas of place while stories shared during the interviews contribute a quantifiable set of foreshadowing themes that trigger an interest in moving abroad. It is for the hopeful gain of being on the receiving end of someone’s backstory that makes the open-ended interview approach more thorough, meaningful, and relatable than other surveying methods because the open yet intimate correspondence encourages both parties to share beyond the limitations of a yes or no answer (Taylor and Trujillo, 2001). As opposed to traditional surveying methods, this approach proved effective and consistently drew a positive response from those expatriates who were profiled for an interview session. While the method for advancing into the topic of obtaining an interview was intentionally casual (i.e. mingling with residents in public places, private businesses), it invited participants to speak openly and complemented the objectives for the interview questionnaire by allowing them to shape their own discretionary boundaries on the details they were willing to disclose. The outcome brought richer data identifying not only how expatriates living in Belize perceive their presence but also to explain why diverging perceptions exist, particularly as variability in opinions is often reflective of place of origin, decisions driving migration, and locale of settlement.
To ensure the accuracy of statements, stories, and supporting opinions or information shared by the interviewees, a voice recorder was used when permissible, as an accompanying data collection source during sessions typically ranging from 15 minutes to 1 hour. The voice recordings were later transcribed to draw themes on repeating trends and to extract supplementary background information including quotes and stories shared by participants.

Data collection spanned the course of a weeklong trip to Belize during June 2015 where interviews with a total of thirty-two expatriate participants were disproportionately collected from Corozal Town, San Ignacio, and Ambergris Caye. Working to shield both the privacy and identity of each participant, the interviews were monitored using the following format:
Perceived Effects: Residential Tourism in Belize

Interview Questions

Corozal  |  Ambergris Caye  |  San Ignacio

Olga Govdyak

Dr. Ed Jackiewicz – Department of Geography  |  California State University, Northridge

1. May I ask your age range or alternately, if you are actively employed, newly retired, or made your move to Belize after retirement?

2. Where did you live prior to migration?

3. What was your occupation prior to migration?

4. Do you view yourself as an expatriate or a migrant? How do you differentiate?

5. What events or circumstances accounted for your departure?
   a. What was your mindset upon migration?
   b. Did social/political/religious environments or affiliations stimulate your decision?
   c. Was the desire for a slower (peaceful, quiet) way of life a factor in your decision?

6. How long have you been living in Belize? Is your residency part-time or permanent?

7. Did certain (economic) incentives motivate your selecting Belize over other popular destinations for expatriates?
   a. i.e. Panama, Ecuador.

8. What factors led you to settle [here] as opposed to other cities throughout Belize?

9. What are the means of your livelihood here in Belize?
   a. Retiree vs. Entrepreneur, etc.

10. In daily life, do you have greater interaction with Belizians, expatriates, or tourists?
    a. In terms of specific settings like your work environment, or your residential neighborhood and local hangout spots?
    b. Do you foresee that these relationships will stay the same or change in years to come?

11. Do you own or lease your home? Did specific variables motivate this decision?
    a. i.e. Community, Familiarity, Economic Advantages

12. How do you perceive and categorize your presence on [this] receiving community?
    a. How have you been received? Do you feel anonymous or do you find that your experience has met the expectations you anticipated?

13. How has your place of origin shaped your position in Belize?
    a. In terms of getting settled – [moving, finances, loans, local regulations, business]
    b. How would you describe your transition after moving to Belize?
    c. Social, Economic, Political Adaptations?

14. How would you describe the ways you feel your [individual] presence is perceived by members of your local community? Is this in line with how you would like to be portrayed? How do you feel it differs from the way the expatriate community is perceived as a group?
    a. How would you describe your relationship with Belizians?

15. Do you consider yourself a vocal resident within your community?
    a. Do you ever apply skills from your life prior to migration to activities within the community via participating in volunteer projects or other improvements?

16. How would you define your commitment to Belize as well as your neighborhood?
    a. i.e Degree of assimilation, commitment to current neighborhood, longevity of stay in Belize?
    b. Do you feel as though you have shifted away from a Western leaning lifestyle in regards to the types purchases you choose to stock your home?

17. If you were to plan your move to Belize with the knowledge you now have as a resident, would you change any decisions or elements that shaped your experience?

18. How do you perceive the grander picture of the movement?

19. Do you have any questions, comments, or stories you would like to share?
Findings & Analysis

Participant Demographics

In sum, 11 female and 21 male participants contributed their perceptions to this study but while all participants cited familiarity with the term *expatriate*, definitions were highly varied. A theme that surfaced during the early phases of the interview process was the absence of a generally held commitment to time spent abroad as a determinant of residency status and permanence. Considering this consistently inconsistent response, it appears that residency in Belize is intentionally casual regardless of whether investment opportunities or other financial ventures are at stake. This observation calls for discussion because it often conflicts with the primary motivations that drove particularly those expatriates who came from the United States to settle into a new life abroad.
According to participant demographics, a mere 10% of the group identified as actively employed or otherwise far from retirement age. This suggests that there is a greater likelihood for them to be inclined or willing to mobilize in years to come. However, the remaining majority of the group were at or near retirement age, many of whom spent a portion of their time in Belize, were managing entrepreneurial endeavors as a means of preparing a retirement base, or were retirees who were disinterested by the thought of returning to the places they so purposely departed. The sizable representation of existing or upcoming plans committing to a permanent life in Belize is certainly credible yet only 1 of 32 participants renounced his passport to pursue Belizean citizenship.
Interviews Per Site

Interviews Per Site
Corozal | Ambergris Caye | San Ignacio

“I am Belizean now. I have no thought of going back and living in the United States. This is home.”

-American Entrepreneur

Overarching Themes

Interviews with residents from a diverse range of environments and backgrounds confirmed general motivations for settlement in Belize over other suitable destinations in Latin America to be based on climate, language, cost of living, investment opportunity, and social stability. While arrivals from the United States comprised 75% of the group, the collective trends that surfaced through their responses were not effective in skewing the grander lure of residential tourism. The remaining 25% from Canada, Turkey, South Africa, and Australia cited that their motivations bloomed in response to a craving for
external comforts of warmth and cost of living but also perhaps more optimistically, an internal desire to live in a place that promoted sincerity, a place that supported and encouraged them to embrace the gentler strides of nature as she initiates the gradual transformation of a nation.

The element of *patience* arose during 22% of interviews and developed into what felt to be a bonding awareness that existed amongst those expatriates whom, apart from their perceptions of permanence in Belize, were dedicated residents with 7+ years spent abroad. Their expressions of this necessary quality were shared in response to understanding that regardless of whether their origins contributed to the ways in which the local members of the Belizean population perceived them, they remained to be guests who were received by a less affluent nation and welcomed by its respective communities. As one Canadian woman explained her methods for community interaction and involvement, she emphasized that regardless of whether place of origin influences how its arriving residents are perceived,

“...There's a right way to do it and there’s a wrong way to do it. Case and point, they wanted to start a tilapia fish farming project and I was invited along on the research tours and from all the research that I did of course we discovered that it is a species of fish that completely and utterly destroys the environment that it's in and if it were to ever get lose in the waterways here, it would destroy all the natural gaming fish here. To make a long story short because that made me opposed to the project… but, rather than me say that I was opposed to the project I took the information that I had found and I presented it to some of the Belizean
people that I knew who were very influential and I said this is what my findings were and I’m giving you the information and its up to you what you do with it.”

Though her motivations for Belize were driven by the desire to own a holiday home and invest in property in a place that allowed her to escape the cold winters of Northern Alberta, she maintained a consciousness to her approach in community participation to ensure that her sentiments remained absent of any uninvited impositions. Similarly, as one American retiree came to Belize in search of freedom from a claustrophobic life in the United States, he explained that upon arrival 29 years ago, he was very well received. He attributed his positive experience of life in Corozal Town to this recurring element of patience and stated,

"I found that patience and good manners do a lot towards helping you resettle here. Understand where you are and know that this is their country and not your country."

“I lost my youngest son, and so he was the last one in the nest and that prompted me to go for what I wanted to do instead of what life told me I had to do.

I had a brand new boat and nowhere to go and Belize was raw for charter boats… and so I came here and established myself and am doing really well.”

–American Entrepreneur
Ambergris Caye
The perceptions described by participants as they reflected on their earlier years in addition to their more present accounts of an assimilated lifestyle enable this study to identify individual visions of place. They illustrate how common themes from life prior to moving abroad, primarily including dissatisfaction with political agendas or the pursuit of a slower-paced lifestyle, surface to serve as influential determinants both in the selection of a locale as well as to the degree of commitment to respectable community participation. One Canadian business owner living part-time in Corozal stated,

“All the baby boomers are reaching retirement age and Canadians in particular are looking for someplace to retire where it’s:
a) warm
b) where the pension check stretches just a little bit further
c) some place that’s English speaking, because that’s a big plus in Central America
d) some place with a stable government, a stable economy.”

This set of pros was outlined time and again during interviews and while some felt that availability and access to resources was secondary to what they were accustomed to, American expatriates in particular expressed that lacking resources to satisfy old habits was not a deterrent in their decisions to settle in Belize, nor did it come close to washing away unsavory remnants of past life in the United States. One American retiree who moved to Corozal after losing his property due to tax evasion stated,

“No intention of ever going back up to the States unless there’s some divine intervention that changes the status quo. I just realized, I couldn’t live in the States anymore. I couldn’t put up with that system. I’m too independent, I’m too headstrong, I know what’s proper and what’s not and I’m not willing to compromise my moral values to comply with federal regulations…”

The decision to move abroad is certainly one that is individually distinctive, yet the undertone in stories shared by the participants in this study carried a collective similarity for the desire to remove external influences that once posed limitations or
restrictions on their values. This commonality arose frequently in conversations during and apart from the study drawing significance to the fact that while all participants expressed that modifications had to be made in post migration life to suit the pace and resources available in Belize, only 8% viewed their presence to be impacting on their receiving communities.

A noteworthy dichotomy exists in this finding as the perceived effects amongst participants in this study are mutually recognized while remaining on opposite ends of a bilateral distribution. Though 88% of participants cited that they felt their overall presence as a permanent resident in a developing country did not impinge on the local character and development of their communities, their ranging responses to supporting questions about anonymity, vocal involvement, and participation conclude that they at least remain minimally attentive to pertinent alterations occurring within their communities.

94% of participants expressed an interest in absorbing Belizean culture, explaining that their anticipation to assimilate and adopt components of a Belizean lifestyle existed long before departure from a former life. Yet, it was disheartening to find that although this majority of participants were eager to begin anew, those who composed the remaining 6% were active contributors to the mass real estate investments existing particularly in Ambergris Caye. The tone of interviews with contributors to this subset was far less kind than that of other stakeholders who viewed their property investments as places to call home as opposed to means for a rapid return. The primary difference amongst these investment interests is the absence of compassion paired with a perception
of temporariness for those eager to cash in whereas the inverse has been deliberately
cultivated by those who aim to live in or later retire to their properties.

**Study Sites**

As the recipients of this mobile subset of arrivals from the developed world, it
appears that Corozal, San Ignacio, and Ambergris Caye are on the front lines of a nation
where converging yet often-conflicting cultural interests are the steering forces impacting
the organic pace of growth and subsequently, change.
The case of Belize proved to be fully disproving of hypothesized conditions existing in developing nations serving as home to increasing numbers of residential tourists. This conclusion was reached during analysis of transcribed interviews from the three sites where there was an absence of difference in perceptions amongst participants’ views aside from the anomaly in which only 8% considered their presence to be impacting on receiving communities. Yet, while 88% of participants cited that they felt their overall presence as residential tourists did not impinge on the local character and development of their respective communities, it was unforeseen to discover that the demographic composition accounting for their ranging responses to questions of anonymity, vocal involvement, and participation would be so varied.

For those who have chosen to pursue an alternate lifestyle in Belize, the motivations are found to be unaffected by place of origin, occupation prior to migration, or goals towards participation or integration with receiving communities. Nor did this study find the perceived effects of residential tourism, as they are seen through the lens of expatriate participants, to be influenced by age range or shaped by geographic locale of settlement. Instead, a single theme transformed the outcome of this study to conclude that those participants, who have spent 7+ years living part-time or permanently in Belize, shared in similar perceptions of the effects that their actions and presence may weigh on a community abroad.
Conclusions

The findings in this study suggest that a new frame of mind and perception are adopted after an arbitrarily fixed span of time has elapsed. Other incentives or motivations that may have been appealing lures at the time of migration may continue to exist in the individual affairs of residential tourists but time and patience are elements that all expatriates appear to resonate with as they attribute satisfaction in their new lives to an embrace of a mindset that becomes visibly instilled over time.

Although this study aimed to identify differences in demographics and trends in spatial distributions, traveling to Corozal, San Ignacio, and Ambergris Caye granted this study the opportunity to absorb irreplaceable experiences and conversations while proving that aesthetic partnered with spatial distance do not affect the individual motives of a relatively affluent traveler. As the search for a “better way of life” often serves to be the decisive characteristic of residential tourism, this growing pattern of resettlement appears to be an extension of Graburn’s (2010) contribution that theorizes tourism as a form of ritualistic experience.

At present, the evolution of tourism has arrived at a crossroads where home and away have become one, creating a permanent experience out of activities that were previously considered to be the temporary inverse of daily life. These tourism experiences were once solely characterized as special occasions of leisure and travel. They were meaningful for their ability to remove people mentally and physically from the redundancy of daily life and recently reconstructed into a lifestyle option as the world transferred into a contemporary setting.


