MAINTAINING THE GULLAH HISTORY, HERITAGE, AND CULTURE:
IS ECOTOURISM A VIABLE SOLUTION?

by

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(Under the Direction of Hilda Kurtz)

ABSTRACT

This thesis evaluates the potential of ecotourism as an alternative form of development for a population significantly impacted by more traditional forms of mass tourism. The focus is on a community on St. Helena Island in South Carolina, of which a large portion is the Gullah. The Gullah are descendents of slaves from Western Africa who have been able to maintain their language, religious beliefs, rituals, foods, music, and crafts that distinctly connect them to their African roots. Ecotourism has often been utilized in the developing world to improve the ecological, economic, and cultural situation of indigenous communities, yet it can also be appropriate within the developed world. Theoretical considerations include the exploration of when ecotourism may or may not be viable depending on local contextual factors. Pertinent ethical considerations include whether it is moral to market a culture, and if tourism is simply artificial maintenance of a dying culture.

INDEX WORDS: Ecotourism, Gullah, Sea Islands, St. Helena Island
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Susan and Denny, as any of the strengths that I have developed are due to their never-ending patience, love, and constancy. They have always impressed upon me that I can do anything I set my mind to, if only I am willing to work diligently to make it happen. Mom and Dad, thank you so very much for your steadiness and love. This small accomplishment is also yours.

This thesis is also dedicated to the Gullah community on St. Helena. The strength and pride that you have cultivated in the face of the hardships experienced by your families is inspiring. Your ability to adapt and still find hope amidst such grave misfortunes is deeply humbling. The passion of your culture will forever leave its impression upon me. Thank you.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This research examines the potential of ecotourism as an alternative form of
development for a community that is significantly impacted by more traditional forms of
mass tourism. It contributes to a larger literature on ecotourism as a form of sustainable
development by applying ecotourism precepts within the United States, rather than the
traditional application within developing countries. It also explores theoretical
components of ecotourism by exploring a situation in which it may or may not be viable,
depending on contextual and cultural factors. In keeping with the themes of ecotourism,
the research highlights the necessity of local people managing their own resources in
order to secure an empowered, sustainable future.

The focus of this study is on a community on St. Helena Island, South Carolina
that is significantly impacted by tourism. St. Helena Island was chosen as the study site
as the influence of tourism on the island is ever accelerating and leading to numerous
conflicts and tensions. While this experience is not uncommon, St. Helena is particularly
special since a significant component of the local population is a group of native islanders
known as the Gullah. This thesis explores how the local community, particularly the
Gullah, is coping with these tensions. The Gullah are descendents of slaves from
Western Africa who have been able to maintain the language, religious beliefs, rituals,
foods, music, and crafts that distinctly connect them to their African roots. As more and
more ethnic minority cultures are vanishing around the world, it is vital that surviving
groups consider all available options to maintain their cultural integrity. For these
reasons, it is necessary to explore ecotourism as an alternative development option to maintain their history, heritage, and culture.

The remainder of this introductory chapter contextualizes the history and development of Gullah, discusses their unique culture, and lays out in more detail the challenges facing the continuation of their lifestyle. Many of these challenges are related to increased development resulting from the primary industry of South Carolina—tourism. Tourism in South Carolina is significantly changing the physical and cultural landscape, necessitating an examination of alternative models of tourism. Chapter Two reviews the debates over the effects of tourism, and examines the paradigm of sustainable development as a solution to many of the problems and negative effects associated with traditional tourism in the literature. Sustainable tourism, and the more specific subset known as ecotourism are discussed in detail. Figure 1 below depicts the relationship between these topics, showing how tourism as a growth strategy often branches off quite distinctly from tourism that is developed under a sustainable development model.

![Figure 1: Thematic Exploration Process](source: Developed by Author)

Chapter Three discusses the research design and methodology used to address three specific research questions. Chapter Four, which presents the research findings, is divided into three primary sections, each of which individually addresses one of the
research questions. Chapter Five, the conclusion, reflects on the theoretical and empirical contributions of the research, provides recommendations for ecotourism development on St. Helena Island, and discusses the limitations and significance of the study.

**Gullah: Historical Context**

Gullah culture developed out of the slave trade, as Africans were brought to the United States coastal regions. Coastal slaveholders showed a preference for people from the rice-growing regions of Africa—the Windward Coast, including Sierra Leone, Angola, and Senegal. The blending of these various cultures on the barrier islands of Georgia and South Carolina resulted in the birth of Gullah culture, and over time, it has closely evolved with the coastal landscape. Figure 2 shows the location of Beaufort County, located in Southern South Carolina. The line points to St. Helena Island—the study site for this thesis—that is located just north of the well-known vacation destination of Hilton Head.

![Figure 2: Beaufort County Locator Map](image)

Source: Developed by Author
The Gullah have been able to maintain their cultural integrity partially due to the geographic isolation afforded by living on the barrier islands, thus resulting in minimal contact with mainstream America. Historically, the ratio of blacks to whites was as high as eleven to one, leading the Lowcountry to be termed the ‘Black Coast’ (Tibbetts, 2000). In addition, the incessant influx of slaves brought continual fresh African influence to the coastal islands. The combination of these factors minimized the influence of American white culture on the evolving Gullah community. The Gullah people have preserved more of their African cultural influence in their self-expression, behavior, and beliefs than any other large group of blacks in the United States, notes William Pollitzer, professor emeritus at the University of Chapel Hill, North Carolina (Pollitzer, 1999).

The term Gullah refers not only to the culture itself, but also to their language. As slaves were forced together on plantations from various tribes and regions of Africa, it was necessary for them to develop a pidgin language in order to understand each other, and since slaveholders had to be able to communicate with them, they made sure slaves used European words (Morgan, 1998; Goodwine, 1998; Pollitzer, 1999). Words were shortened, the passive voice, tenses, and gender removed, words omitted, abrupt short sentences strung together, and the speech was otherwise altered. As children were born who learned this as their primary language, it evolved into a Creole language and is now the only lasting English-based Creole in North American (Tibbetts, 2000). Virginia Geraty lived for over fifty years near Charleston, South Carolina learning the language and culture of the Gullah, and describes the Gullah language in these terms:

Contrary to the belief held by some, Gullah is not poor or broken English. It is not a dialect of any other language, nor is it Black English. Gullah possesses every element necessary for it to qualify as a language in its own right. It has its own grammar, phonomological systems, idiomatic expressions, and an extensive
vocabulary. Since this language was never intended to be written, there are no hard and fast rules governing its orthography. One of the most interesting features of Gullah is the frequent use of idiomatic expressions that are both meaningful and colorful, also making the language difficult to understand. Since this language is an English-derived Creole, it sounds like English, but there is a certain flavor of the West African coast in its intonation and stress. To describe the language, Gullah is spoken softly, with a rolling rhythm. As the Gullah speak, you can almost hear the wind ruffling the marsh grasses. Their words sway like the long banners of moss that hang from oak tress that grace their homeland.

(Geraty, online source).

There are many African traditions and customs that continue to take place on the Sea Islands, common threads that serve to elucidate the Gullah’s link to Africa. (Pollitzer, 1999; Jarrett & Lucas, 2002; Jones-Jackson, 1987; Twining & Baird, 1990; Goodwine, 1998; and many more) The most notable craft practiced among the Gullah is sweetgrass basketry, originally used for agricultural and everyday household purposes. Basket weaving continues to be an important part of their heritage and a source of self-expression. African naming practices are still in use today, where people are given a ‘basket name’, a nickname given according to circumstances at the time of their birth or physical characteristics. For example, I was told of a woman who was born during a hurricane, and thus her basket name was Stormy Weather. Strong social and environmental values are present as

\[ \text{the values born in Africa and honed through slavery and oppression were based on harmony with nature and their fellow man, contrasting with the frantic pace of the consumerism of today} \]

(Pollitzer, 1999: 4).

The extended family is an all important, primary social and economic unit where kinship and lineage play a distinctive role. This was apparent when driving through a Gullah community on a bus tour with Rolin, a local islander; we stopped to chat with a woman raking her yard. That she paid close attention to family lineages was evident.
when before talking with him, she asked “who your people” in a questioning tone. To describe people on the island, the terms Bin Yeah and Come Yeah are commonplace, although their actual meaning varies between users. In general, Bin Yeah’s are the native islanders, while Come Yeah’s originated elsewhere and are, curiously, often still branded a Come Yeah even if they have been on the island for thirty years and married into a Gullah family. It is also common to find cluster households, where extended families share a larger plot of land, and build their homes in a group, similar to many African communities. It is not unusual for a child to grow up a block away from their natural parents, residing instead with a childless or more financially secure relative (Jones-Jackson, 1987).

Religious beliefs remain a powerful central force in daily life, and it is believed that ancestors maintain a daily presence. This is due to a dual belief in soul and spirit, where the soul leaves the body after death, while the spirit stays on earth. For this reason, great preparations for burial are common, and it is common for islanders to pay on burial policies their entire lives to ensure a satisfactory ceremony. Cemeteries are significant and often placed near the waters edge—facing east toward Africa in order for the spirit to easily return to the homeland. Graves are commonly covered with glass, dishes, and other items belonging to the deceased in order to serve them in the afterlife. Even today, babies are passed over a new grave before it is covered with dirt to keep the spirit from haunting the baby. The practice of voodoo, or hoodoo, is dying out today, but involves rituals where good and evil spirits are conjured up to give predictions, perform cures, or avenge sins (Jones-Jackson, 1987). Religious beliefs are expressed and articulated through physically active and emotional gatherings. For example, call-and-response
preaching involves the preacher calling out a statement, which leads the congregation either to repeat or answer the call. It is accompanied by rhythmic music, and singing is a regular part of daily life as it is seen to be good for the body, spirit, and soul.

Historically, spirituals often carried veiled cries for freedom, and the ring shout developed along with intricate clapping patterns as both dancing and drumming were discouraged by slaveholders. Praise houses, which are simple one-room white clapboard structures, played a central role as the place to pray, settle disputes, and hold meetings. While many of these cultural traditions have lessened with the times, remnants of these are still prevalent throughout the Gullah community.

The Face of Tourism in South Carolina, the Lowcountry, and Beaufort County:

The travel and tourism industry is South Carolina’s largest employer, bringing over 136,000 jobs, and more money into the state than any other industry—over 14.4 billion dollars in 2002 (Flowers, 2003). Tourism is also the primary industry of the Lowcountry of South Carolina, and is mainly centered on resort vacations, shopping, beaches, golf, tennis, fishing, and historical attractions. The town of Beaufort, just across the bridge from St. Helena, receives regular mention in national travel, retirement, arts, and nature publications, and include such praise as “best place to live”, “best small arts town”, and “best historical destination” (Cox, no date). The change from a strong agricultural to a service-based economy has resulted in substantial economic, social, environmental, and cultural changes—not unlike other rural communities experiencing similar industrial transformations.

These changes are noticeable in terms of tangible benefits, such as infrastructure improvements, increased community awareness, new job opportunities, and financial
benefits particularly for those who establish businesses in order to take advantage of tourism; yet there are also distinct drawbacks. Communities are often unprepared to make the transition to the service industry in terms of employment skills and social-environmental impact. Increased tourism accelerates the erosion of traditional lifestyles and means of subsistence as local people gravitate toward new service jobs, the control of land changes as developers tempt or force locals to sell their land, and rifts in the community develop as decisions are made in an often *ad hoc* fashion in order to take advantage of new economic opportunities. These alterations in the distribution of wealth and power wrought by tourism also result in social structure changes, leading to status delineation and resentment by displaced residents toward tourists and new businesses. Both the positive and negative effects of this increased development affect residents differently, particularly in terms of race. Clearly, it is primarily the African-Americans of Beaufort County, who are living a “culture of servitude” in many ways parallel to slavery as they fill the low-paying service sector jobs and are subservient to wealthy tourists (Faulkenberry *et al.*, 2000; Reid *et al.*, 2000; Jarrett & Lucas, 2002; SRDI, 2003). While tourism is an increasingly important form of development on the South Carolina coast, African-Americans, (the majority of who are Gullah) in Beaufort County, South Carolina, make one-third the per capita income that whites do, and have unemployment rates seven times that of whites (South Carolina Division of Research and Statistical Services, 1998). Effects of tourism on this Gullah community are detailed in the following section, which further situates the Gullah within a contemporary context.
Gullah: Contemporary Context

The Gullah culture is under threat from rapid rates of increased development and the mass tourism industry along the South Carolina coast. The inevitable increase of daily contact resulting from increased development in coastal regions of the Southeast has led the Gullah population to diminish in size and the culture to be transformed. St. Helena Island, South Carolina is one place where this significant transformation of culture has not yet occurred to the degree it has elsewhere. Still, the Gullah community on St. Helena is clearly impacted by the alteration of the surrounding social and physical landscape. The coastal areas of South Carolina are facing unprecedented growth rates for the state as white, middle-aged, upper class and retirees relocate there to take advantage of the surroundings at minimal cost (Lee, 2002). Between 1950 and 2000, the population of the Lowcountry increased by more than one hundred and fifty percent, which was nearly twice that of the nationwide growth rate, at eighty-six percent. Furthermore, Beaufort County, within which lies St. Helena Island, has had a forty percent increase in the last ten years alone. The population growth of whites has driven the rate of growth, while African Americans have demonstrated a stagnant rate (Lee, 2002).

The current available literature details the many issues resulting in the decline of the Gullah lifestyle throughout the Sea Islands. There are obvious political, economic, environmental, social, and cultural effects wrought by increased development, which when combined, create a substantial challenge to the persistence of the Gullah culture. Native residents describe a gradual and subtle loss of political power as a plethora of new residents arrive in the area—primarily wealthier caucasians whose interests vary widely from those of the native islanders (Faulkenberry et al., 2000).
Economic disadvantages are evident in terms of leakage, where although tourists visit and leave behind vast amounts of currency, minimal amounts stay within the community to recirculate, and instead get ‘leaked’ to outside interests. This occurs due to a lack of service related businesses and accommodations that are owned by locals, as many of the motels and restaurants are owned by larger chains. Also, the Gullah, once able to depend on traditional forms of subsistence, are now dependent on an economically driven service-based economy. Primarily for older and uneducated folk, this has devastating effects, as many have not gained the skills required to survive in this type of economic system (SRDI, 2003).

The most recent figures indicate that in Beaufort County, the mean per capita income of African Americans at $6,741 was one-third that of the mean per capita income for whites at $18,878. Further, African Americans make up a quarter of the population of Beaufort County, yet account for over half of the unemployed in the county. This leads to one in three African Americans living below poverty level, compared to one in twenty for other residents of the county ¹ (South Carolina Division of Research and Statistical Services, 1998).

Environmental changes are noticeable. As the landscape has become further developed, increased pollution is leading to a decline in sea life, affecting fishing and sweetgrass basket making. These are both traditional crafts that the Gullah are increasingly reliant upon, as they have become economically dependent on the changing economy (Faulkenberry et al., 2000; Goodwine, 1998; Mufwene, 1998; Porcher & Allen, 2000).

¹ As the distinction between African American and Gullah is often fluid and blurred, available census data sources do not separate the two ethnicities. However, it is assumed that the data referring to African Americans in Beaufort County are indicative of the Gullah situation as many of the African Americans in the area are Gullah.
2001). Ecological impacts are exacerbated by the sensitivity of the landscape, which consists primarily of marshland and barrier islands.

Three primary negative social effects are highlighted within the literature on St. Helena, in terms of resource struggles, perceived and real class separation resulting in increased divides within the community, and decreased family stability. First, struggles have developed over the control of land and other resources. On St. Helena specifically, the loss or forfeiture of land has been a primary concern and particularly well documented in the literature as residents see surrounding islands permanently altered. Land loss results from four primary factors—land disputes leading to partition action, land speculation, increasing property taxes, and a lack of understanding causes of and possible solutions to this land loss.

Second, perceived and real class separations are caused by changing land use patterns, and there is now a clear divide between the very wealthy and the very poor on contiguous lands (SRDI, 2003). The increased worth of land is causing steep increases in property taxes on the islands, resulting in the further forfeiture of property, as landowners are unable to pay the escalating taxes and must sell portions of their land. In recent years on nearby Hilton Head Island, some families’ taxes have gone up 300% in a single year because of a resort being built on adjacent land (Goodwine, 1998). Due primarily to a strong community base on St. Helena Island, a local zoning district was created to protect the unique resources of the island from nontraditional patterns of development, such as golf clubs and gated communities (Lee, 2002). Zoning has blocked resort development on St. Helena from occurring at the rapid pace it is on other sea islands. Yet, as undeveloped lands outside the zoned district come under ever-increasing pressure, it may
become a significant economic temptation to allow more development. This leads to increased community division due to dissent on development issues, as traditionalists and entrepreneurs battle over the proper rate and degree of change (Faulkenberry et al., 2000; Reid et al., 2000; Mowforth & Munt, 1998).

Third, family stability is decreased as many Gullah travel before dawn to surrounding islands, returning only after dark. Often, the only economic opportunities supplied for locals by the new development on the islands are low paying service jobs without much potential. Therefore, class distinctions also play out, as African-Americans are further led into a ‘culture of servitude’. (Faulkenberry et al., 2000). This ‘culture of servitude’ is evident when considering the vast income and unemployment rate differences between blacks and whites in Beaufort County. In addition, the proliferation of gated communities is compared to “going back into slavery, where it’s like they are saying you can’t come to the big house tonight” (quote taken from Faulkenberry et al., 2000).

Cultural changes are evident as land bridges connect the once secluded islands to mainland America; this increased interaction between locals and mainlanders results in local traditions being forfeited. Culture is both complex and dynamic, and although the Gullah have been able to keep much of the integrity of their African heritage, assimilation has still played a significant role. For generations, the Gullah speech patterns were seen as barbaric and backward by whites, while traditions such as crafts, the use of healing herbs, religious rituals, communal identity, and other attributes were seen as ignorant and worthless. As a result of this, many elders in both the past and present were/are not passing down these traditions to the younger generations to the
previous extent. Instead, elders taught that if the children wanted to “get somewhere” they must correct the way they spoke and speak English\(^2\). Even a gap of one generation can significantly alter what is known of a culture. This type of suppression has resulted in a further loss of awareness regarding Gullah heritage and history within the community (Goodwine, 1998; Mufwene, 1998). This has resulted in flagging interest of Gullah and changing values as many of the younger generation are more interested in the city life, television, and money. There is much knowledge that has already been lost, particularly as it is an oral culture and was not intended to be written. A high level of outward migration involves a significant proportion of community members, primarily the young, leaving the islands in search of job opportunities and further resulting in a loss of cultural identity and lifestyle (Goodwine, 1998; Mufwene, 1998; Twining & Baird, 1990). Also leading to a reduced expression of their cultural heritage is the proliferation of gated communities on the coastal islands that significantly limit Gullah access to areas crucial for the maintenance of their livelihood and craft traditions.

It important to note that the development of Gullah stemmed from the blending of various cultures and so the Gullah culture is not disappearing, rather it is being further transformed from its African roots as it continues to blend with American culture. While there has been a continual progression of the Gullah identity, this does not mean Gullah is not still present. Connections are rich and powerful and this is something that many of the Gullah never intend to let go of, as culture is much more than the visible traditions of

\(^2\) Interviews with participants suggest that elders have de-emphasized teaching that they must speak ‘correctly’ as interest in their culture has increased.
cooking and dress, but is also about beliefs and values. For them, it is real and very much alive. Alexandria best stated this,

The development of Gullah didn’t stop at the end of the civil war, it continues to evolve. You don’t go to France and expect to see the same things from Louis XII whatever, you know, you don’t look for that, so why would people come here and expect to see Gullah as they did back in 1865? As long as people are still here, who have a root that goes back to here, then Gullah is still here. It’s not gonna die. Even if everyone’s not speaking what we think the Gullah dialect is, that does not mean the Gullah is not here, if you’re talking to a French man, because he is not speaking with his accent, doesn’t mean he is not French. It is our food, religious practices, our child rearing practices; you know a whole lot of different things make up the Gullah culture.

The Gullah community on St. Helena requires an industry in order to become more economically stable, yet most industries are extractive and consumptive, which is unsuitable for the fragile coastal environment. Future development should strive to meet the holistic economic, social, cultural, and natural environment goals of sustainable development. Sustainable tourism has the potential to offset some of the negative outcomes of traditional forms of tourism in Beaufort County. Ecotourism can be an appropriate strategy of sustainable development depending upon the specific environmental and cultural context.

This thesis explores how Gullah community members on St. Helena Island perceive current effects from development and tourism in relation to their expectations and desires for the future. This research determines stakeholder reactions to the possibility of ecotourism to alleviate these identified concerns and desires. In addition, this thesis delineates community perceptions of constraints and incentives in the development of ecotourism on St. Helena. This is explored particularly in terms of the level of community involvement, effectiveness of decision-making structures and

Throughout this document, interview participants are given first name pseudonyms in order to protect their confidentiality
regional networking and support. As Marquetta Goodwine, founder of the
Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition stated, “If the culture fails, it won’t be due to a
desire to give up traditions, but due to the failure of empowerment of socio-economic and
political institutions” (Goodwine, 1998: 5).

Research results are explained in detail in Chapter 4, but are briefly described
here. It was found that the potential benefits of ecotourism do correspond to what is
needed to ease interview participant’s identified concerns for the future and to contribute
toward the attainment of future visions. Interview participants were unaware of
opportunities for ecotourism, but generally highly interested once we began to discuss its
potential contributions. In terms of constraints and incentives in the development of
ecotourism, it was found that the current levels of leadership, involvement, and
networking are encouraging but could be further developed to increase the viability of
ecotourism on St. Helena.

This chapter served to elucidate the purpose of the research and the structure of
the thesis. It described in detail the Gullah culture and development, and the face of
tourism in South Carolina, the Lowcountry, and Beaufort County, as well as specific
issues facing the contemporary Gullah culture. Primary objectives were noted, along
with a summary of results.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Tourism:

Tourism is a tool of social and economic development that is clearly a significant sector of the global economy. Few other forms of industry involve so many sectors, levels, and interests as tourism. Therefore, there exists a wide range of stakeholders involved in the global tourism industry. The tourism literature examines how these various scales of the tourism industry impact the development of tourism and subsequently, its implementation within the economic system.

Besides its role as a development tool, tourism is also an activity that helps people understand the world and the ways in which humans interact with the planet and with each other. Much of our worldviews are shaped through tourism, and so from the onset tourism deals with the nature of how we represent activities and the places in which we vacation. These ‘geographical imaginations’ highlight how representations of the world are socially constructed (Mowforth & Munt, 1998). The many scales of study and the human-environmental interface make tourism a significant topic for geography as it presents an opportunity for scholars to draw deeply on geographical strengths concerned with the study of time and space. Butler’s Tourism Product Life Cycle Model is a useful analytic framework for examining how a tourist destination space is created and changes over time. At the end of this section, I will utilize Butler’s Model to locate St. Helena Island within this conceptual model.
Tourism is often touted as a panacea for development, yet, as it grows so do people’s concern about and critique of its social, environmental, and economic impacts (McCool & Moisey, 2001). In the early to mid 1970s, the realization began to surface that tourism is not a panacea for economies in need of development. Countless numbers of studies on mass tourism began to highlight that without proper planning and management, the unequal economic and social impacts associated with tourism can result in severe environmental and cultural degradation (Bryden, 1973; Perez, 1975 & 1975; Turner & Ash, 1975; Turner, 1996; as cited by Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Fritz, 1982; MacCannell, 1992; Pearce et al., 1996; Honey, 1999; Faulkenberry et al., 2000). Mass tourism has traditionally brought extensive and uneven development, environmental pollution, economic disruption, invasion by culturally insensitive foreigners, and minimal retention of economic benefits; while the only local benefit is often obtained in the form of low-paying service jobs, such as maids, waiters, and drivers (Honey, 1999).

Critiques of mass tourism note that tourism is derived from colonialism and imperialism, as is made evident in a statement by a former executive of the world’s largest tourism Non-Government Organization (NGO), Ecumenical Coalition on 3rd World Tourism (ECTWT), in his statement that,

[t]ourism…as currently practiced, does not benefit the majority of local people—instead it exploits them, pollutes the environment, destroys ecosystems, bastardizes the culture, robs people of their traditional values and ways of life, and subjugates women and children in the object of slavery and prostitution. In other words, tourism epitomizes the present world economic order, where the few that control the wealth and power dictate terms affecting the majority. As such, it is little different from colonialism and imperialism (Srisang, cited in Mowforth & Munt, 1998, pp.47).

Bruner (1989: 439), as cited by Mowforth & Munt (1998) also insists, “[c]olonialism…and tourism…were born together and are relatives”, and that “they are
driven by the same social processes that involve the occupation of space”. The use of the terms colonialism and imperialism are often appropriate since they emphasize the control of tourism by outside or dominant interests. This is evident when considering leakage, which refers to the bulk of the money leaving the local region due to outside ownership and control of the tourism industry and infrastructure. Furthermore, strategies for development tend to be driven externally and even the push for local participation often comes from a position of outside power. Thus, strategies are sometimes not implemented because they were not locally developed and owned (Mowforth & Munt, 1998; WTO, 2002).

Tourism is often critiqued in terms of unequal, power-ridden visitor-local relationships. Mowforth and Munt (1998) detail how power inequalities can in turn lead to commodification, resource struggles, and cultural change. Since tourism is a “conduit for relationships of power” (p. 49), effective analysis of tourism must acknowledge the importance of relations of power. Tourism often has the attributes of a master-servant relationship, and can commoditize cultures while providing hedonistic practices for wealthy tourists (Faulkenberry et al., 2000; Mowforth & Munt, 1998). The rapid expansion of capitalistic relationships of production can transform a culture into a commodity. An example of this commodification of culture is evident in how the timing of cultural traditions and rituals are sometimes altered to fit the tourist schedule, or only traditional crafts with an easily recognizable market value are continued (MacCannell, 1992). These commodities hide the social conditions of those who perform or supply the services, so that tourists are generally unaware of the daily life conditions of their cooks, waiters, tour guides, and other service personnel.
As tourism develops in a region, the economic and social fabric must stretch and adjust. Alterations in the distribution of wealth and power often change the local social structure, and hosts find themselves separated socially and economically from tourists due to the nature of these activities, often leading to further increased resentment and status differentiation (Nash, 1989). Often, the struggle for control of land and other resources has an impact on the development of local economies, and the landscape becomes more valued as it is increasingly threatened. Landowners are often tempted or forced to sell land to developers, and if they do not sell, they must suffer increased property taxes. As the control of land changes, so do job opportunities. Local people are often left with low-wage seasonal jobs (i.e. busboys, wait staff, maids, grounds maintenance) and economic dependency ensues (Fritz, 1982). Unequal power relations result in a local community structure that is subservient to tourists and local elites. The economic benefits that host communities enjoy correlate closely with the degree of control and ownership that local residents have over the industry (Faulkenberry et al., 2000).

Cultural changes occur when visitors bring different ideals, values, and problems, yet also often lead to increased community self-awareness as locals reevaluate their identity and discuss cultural presentation. This can lead to disputes, as members of the community must choose which traditions to present, to alter for public consumption, and which to keep private. Many are torn between the potential for economic benefits (which are often much needed at this point) from marketing crafts and traditions, and the desire to keep their privacy and cultural authenticity. These choices often further separate a community already divided by traditionalists and entrepreneurs (Pearce et al, 1996).
While some scholars highlight the creation of power rifts between visitors and locals, others highlight the development of internal tensions between community institutional structures and processes. This frequently occurs due to a lack of identifying the community’s overarching goals, and the lack of comprehensive planning. Instead, *ad hoc* decision-making and development generally occurs through incrementally driven entrepreneurship (Reid *et al.*, 2000). The often emotionally charged debates that arise frequently become more concerned with issues of control rather than determining what tourism could and should look like in the community and leads to the development of long-term tensions (Reid, *et al.*, 2000). In addition, often those directly involved in tourism reap its economic benefits, subsequently viewing tourism favorably, while those less involved are generally ambivalent or antagonistic toward it (Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Brongham & Butler, 1981; Sheldon & Var, 1984; Akis *et al.*, 1996, as cited by Sharpley, 2000).

There is a tendency in the tourism literature for scholars to focus on the tourism industry primarily in regard to developing countries. This occurs particularly when examining the relationship between globalization, economics, and cultural change. As a result, a significant portion of the tourism literature is focused on the obvious economic, social, and cultural differences between locals and visitors in developing countries. Yet, because developed countries are not homogenously developed, there are portions of the country that share many social and economic similarities with developing countries. Ecotourism can also be fit to various degrees to developed countries due to its holistic triple approach on the environment, culture, and economics. Thus, it is important to
examine the potential of ecotourism ventures within countries that are more developed as well as its traditional application to developing countries.

This thesis illustrates how these stark economic and social differences are still apparent within the United States, and more specifically, on St. Helena Island. This allows the same concepts concerning development and tourism in regard to developing countries to be applied at a smaller scale within a developed country. This corresponds to the sustainable development literature, which shows that sustainable development is applicable both within developed and developing countries. It is important to draw on lessons from both developing and developed country policies and practices for addressing the global challenge of implementing sustainability. Ecotourism is one option that has merit and should be explored in more detail to assess its viability within specific contexts.

The tourism paradox becomes clear, as it is often the case that as a destination becomes popular, the quality of the destination begins to decline as it is “loved to death”. Butler’s Tourism Product Life Cycle Model (1980), addresses the idea of development in regard to carrying capacity\(^4\). As tourism development is dynamic, his model identifies predictable stages of tourism development that occur in any tourist destination over time, which are depicted in Figure 3. There can be a variety of outcomes depending on how tourism development is handled after consolidation. While he does not specifically address the concept of sustainability, based on his model it could be construed that if managed correctly, tourism can be sustainable during the stabilization stage.

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\(^4\) It is important to note that the concept of a carrying capacity has not found wide application as a planning tool for tourism. It generally involves determining the ability of the destination to absorb tourism impacts, and how tourism perceptions relate to the quality of the destination, yet attempts to quantify carrying capacity are difficult. This is primarily due to diverse opinions concerning acceptable levels of crowding, changes in area management altering the carrying capacity throughout time, and a frequent lack of background environmental data necessary to determine thresholds (Hunter, 1995). Yet, I feel that the concept still has merit within his model, as Butler depicts it as a critical range rather than a defined number.
Exploration is the beginning stage of a tourist destination where a small number of tourists independently explore a new location, either for personal adventure or to experience new cultures. At this stage, economic, social, and environmental impacts are generally non-existent. Involvement occurs as acceptance by locals increases and they begin to promote the destination and improve facilities, leading to an increase in the popularity of the site. During development, increased participation by locals leads to the area becoming established as a tourist destination and control of the tourism industry generally passes out of local hands into those of larger corporations, while packaged vacations begin to develop. During consolidation, tourism is important to the community in both economic and social terms, and traditional economies and lifestyles are often adversely affected. Because of this, resentment frequently occurs and the number of tourists continues to rise, but the rate of increase slows. At this point, a decline, reduced growth, stagnation, stabilization, or rejuvenation occurs. The decrease in tourist visits
suggests that original cultural and physical attractions have been lost. Stagnation is often a result of increased local opposition to tourism, plus a growing awareness of environmental, social, and economic problems that prevent further growth and support by stakeholders. Rejuvenation occurs when a secondary growth spurt is brought about by new momentum, and the losses of original attractions are compensated for by new facilities. These new tourists may be of different socio-economic classes or age groups than the original tourists.

Butler’s model may show the general trend of a tourist destination’s life cycle, allowing the identification of common features between locales in terms of processes and impacts. While Butler’s model has found wide application, it is not without criticism. Some scholars argue that the tourism destination pattern does not have to typify a life cycle of birth, growth, decline, and death. Instead, it can be viewed as a continual evolutionary process that changes due to crucial differences in contextual factors, such as supply and demand (Tooman, 1997; Pearce and Butler, 1999).

Currently, the Gullah are at the latter stages of development, as tourism, along with employment at the military bases, is one of the two primary economic foundations for their community. Packaged tours have begun, yet control is still held by locals in many ways through Gullah controlled tours, restaurants, and festivals. Yet, the lack of accommodation and Gullah owned local businesses result in a minimal retention of tourist dollars. This Gullah community is also partly into the consolidation stage, as tourism is a significant economic contributor to the community and has led to social changes as well. Resentment is evident by some community members, primarily with regard to increased development. Therefore, it is at this crucial moment when it is
essential to explore alternative models of tourism in order to retain the physical and
cultural attractions of the island and to minimize local opposition. This would minimize
the likelihood of the tourism-based economy reaching the stagnation or decline stages of
Butler’s model.

**Sustainable development:**

Sustainable development is a “powerful term that stems from an intuitive sense of
threat to human survival if we continue to live as we do”, and it obtains a sense of
urgency based on the perception that we are facing an environmental crisis that requires
changed concepts of development (Wilbanks, 1994: 541). This concept was made
popular by the 1987 publication *Our Common Future*, also known as the *Brundtland
Report*, that was published by the World Commission on Economic Development
(WCED) (McCool and Moisey, 2001). *Our Common Future* argued that the survival of
humans is dependent on the adoption of new paradigms of economic development, such as
sustainable development (WCED, 1987). This document was significantly different from
previous calls for development because it incorporated what were previously, and still to
some degree considered contradictory goals, those of environmental protection and
economic progress.

While sustainable development is a powerful concept, it is also disputed with regard
to a number of important dimensions; namely regarding how it is defined, managed, and
implemented. These concerns are a reflection of long debate over the best uses of
resources, and are bound up within the wider framework of environmental attitudes.
Beyond sustainable development’s political scope, it is also an economic, environmental,
and social concept that requires new ways of thinking about the nature and purpose of
development, growth, and the role of the individual, government, and private sector in developing sustainable futures (Hall & Lew, 1998).

First, and perhaps most significantly, there is no universally accepted definition of sustainable development. Sharpley (2000, p. 4) argues that, in three decades, the concept of sustainable development has changed from a process or condition defined according to strict economic criteria to a continual, global process of human development guided by principles of self-reliance.

Thus, sustainable development is a long-term global endeavor whose key aim is to provide for the needs of the present while ensuring that options for future generations remain (McCool and Moisey, 2001). The primary principles and components that resonate throughout the more commonly used definitions of sustainable development are delineated in Table 1.

Table 1: Sustainable Development Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fundamental Principles</th>
<th>Holistic approach: development and environmental issues integrated within a global social context</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Futurity: focus on long-term capacity for continuance of the global ecosystem</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equity: development that is fair and equitable and which provides opportunities for access to and use of resources for all members of all societies, both in the present and in the future</td>
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<tr>
<td>Development Objectives</td>
<td>Improvement of the quality of life for all people: education, life expectancy, opportunities to fulfill potential</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Satisfaction of basic needs; concentration on the nature of what is provided rather than income</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Self-reliance: political freedom and local decision-making for local needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Endogenous development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability Objectives</td>
<td>Sustainable population levels with recognition that population level not solely responsible for level of resource use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimal depletion of non-renewable natural resources</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainable use of renewable resources</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pollution emissions within the assimilative capacity of the environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirements For Sustainable Development</td>
<td>Adoption of a new social paradigm relevant to sustainable living</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International and national political and economic systems dedicated to equitable development and resource use</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technological systems that can search continuously for new solutions to environmental problems, with recognition that it is imperative not to rely on technology’s ability to find appropriate solutions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Global alliance facilitating integrated development policies at local, national, and international level</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Copied from Sharpley (2000)
A second set of debates concerns how best to operationalize this already contested concept—because it is socially constructed, it reflects the interests of those involved in decision-making, resulting in a wide spectrum of attitudes and levels of commitment. Even for those who rally behind the overreaching theories, advocates call for different approaches to meet sustainable development goals. There are several operational debates that illustrate the range and lack of focus that tend to characterize much of the debate on how to accomplish sustainable development objectives. One debate considers whether further conservation is necessary or if it is possible to set appropriate scales and levels of continued growth. Another controversy is concerned with the degree of trust in market-oriented democratic processes to make acceptable decisions, or if these processes should be further controlled. A third dichotomy considers the appropriate level for decision-making—whether it should be centralized or decentralized. Lastly, it is debated whether incremental or larger changes are necessary, in other words, if reformism is sufficient, or more distinct calls for a revolution are required (Wilbanks, 1994).

The difficulties involved with how to meet sustainable objectives are evident when considering that in the 1980s, developing countries were seen as the primary obstacle to sustainable development, but more recently there has been a growing recognition in developed countries that the emphasis on materialism and consumer society was taking too heavy a toll on the world’s resources (Swarbrooke, 1999). The WCED puts particular emphasis on the world’s poor, who should get first priority in terms of sufficient food, clean water, shelter, and clothing. The sustainable development framework is less clear in areas where basic needs are already being met (Hunter, 1995). The role of economic growth in promoting human well-being can vary depending on the
stage of development of a country. Traditional forms of development have generally prioritized one over the other depending upon the stage of development. Industrialized countries tend to first focus on environmental management, while the emphasis on limiting negative economic impacts gets secondary consideration. Conversely, developing countries focus primarily on economic development, with environmental concerns being secondary (Wilbanks, 1994). Sustainable development is different from other concepts of development as it is a holistic view that puts equal emphasis on the environment and economics. One primary difficulty may be that the achievement of sustainable development will most likely require dramatic lifestyle changes in western countries in order to place less pressure on non-renewable resources (WCED, 1987).

The third debate that threads throughout the sustainable development literature concerns the implementation of sustainable development, which is dependent upon how it is perceived and utilized between entities.

Sustainability therefore is not reducible to a set of absolute principles; rather it is relative to other values, to the varying perceptions of those who use them, and to the relationship between the ideological and moral values of those who apply and interpret them


The widespread acceptance of the term is both satisfying and disturbing since the concepts have been successful, yet this has not translated to its implementations (Hall and Lew, 1998). It is clear that in many ways sustainability has become a buzz word. It is now an essential item in the vocabulary of modern discourse. This is problematic when it is manipulated for decision-making purposes whether or not the term is understood (Mowforth & Munt, 1998). If sustainable development continues to remain a buzz word,
it will persistently be distorted by politicians due to its wide interpretation by people of
dissimilar outlooks on a given issue (Mowforth and Munt, 1998).

As will be shown further when discussing ecotourism as a form of sustainable
development, there is often a disparity between the theoretical discussion of sustainability
and how it actually plays out in daily life. Its complexity enables it to be utilized in very
different decision-making and management approaches.

**Sustainable Tourism and Ecotourism:**

Sustainable tourism is a branch of its parent tree—sustainable development. Particularly in its requirement for a holistic approach, it is viewed as an integrated system
and changes in one element will reverberate throughout the entire system. As
development can lie at various points along the sustainability continuum, so too can
tourism. As a result of the often negative effects of traditional tourism, there has been an
explosion of new forms of sustainable tourism—agro-tourism, cultural tourism,
adventure tourism, nature-based tourism, ecotourism, and more5 (Mowforth & Munt,
1998). The sustainable tourism literature discusses alternate pathways to the future by
suggesting types of difficulties and ways to bridge them, inextricably linking culture and
the environment in tourism development, and recognizing the complexity of tourism
development. Because of this complexity, decisions are very much political and ethical
(McCool & Moisey, 2001). For sustainable development and sustainable tourism to be of
use, it is imperative that the multiple dimensions of sustainability are further explored,
that the internal inconsistencies and inadequacies in traditional development theory are
recognized, and the existence of political causes of both environmental and cultural
degradation are accepted (Swarbrooke, 1999).

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5 The actual inherent sustainability of these forms can be debated.
In general, sustainable tourism is a kinder, gentler form of tourism with a longer perspective that is often small in scale, sensitive to cultural and environmental impacts, and recognizes the importance of host communities and their involvement in policy decisions. Sustainable tourism is preferred as terminology rather than the oft-heard ‘alternative tourism’, which is problematic since it cannot be defined except in relation to mass or traditional tourism (Mader, 2002). The crucial concern is in protecting the resources upon which tourism is built by reducing negative social, cultural, economic, and environmental impacts (McCool & Moisey, 2001; Swarbrooke, 1999).

Social sustainability refers to the ability of communities to absorb inputs and to continue functioning without the result of social disharmony, or adapting social functions and relationships to alleviate or mitigate that disharmony. Cultural sustainability refers to the ability of a people to retain or adapt elements from their own culture that distinguish them from others. Economic sustainability refers to the level of economic gain sufficient to cover costs and mitigate tourist’s presence that results in inconveniences incurred on the community (Mowforth & Munt, 1998). Environmental sustainability involves living within the ecological capacity of the biosphere and maintaining natural capital.

Originally, sustainable tourism and mass tourism were considered polar opposites, and it was imperative to get rid of mass tourism in order to reach sustainable development goals. As time progressed, they became less polarized as it became evident, to scholars and those involved in the tourism industry, that positive action could make mass tourism more sustainable, and that perhaps all tourism can strive to be sustainable (Swarbrooke, 1999). Swarbrooke (1999) concludes that no type of tourism is inherently more sustainable or better than another. If managed well, any type of tourism can be
highly sustainable, but if badly managed, all tourism is unsustainable. Therefore, it is important to concentrate on approaches to management of tourism rather than becoming tied up in semantics.

It is crucial to have a degree of healthy skepticism and realize that sustainable tourism is not a panacea for developmental concerns. Even if it is implemented successfully in one region, this does not necessarily mean that those approaches and lessons will work elsewhere (Hunter, 1995). The literature points to four challenges to sustainable tourism development.

First, the issue of scale is fundamental to the successful application of sustainable tourism, particularly in terms of operation size and location. It is argued by some that to apply sustainable development principles to any single sector is unrealistic and unachievable, because it is only at the global scale that there is no leakage or impact outside the focus area. While the undesirable effects at a destination can be decreased and mitigated, impacts caused by travel to the destination may not be. “Unless the scale of analysis and action can be turned to the bigger picture in both space and time, it is unlikely that tourism will ever become truly sustainable beyond the most local of cases” (Hall & Lew, 1998: 24). In other words, it is imperative to space tourists—both geographically and temporally—although this is very complicated for decision-making because of the complexity of effects. For example, small-scale locally owned businesses are more likely sustainable in terms of the host population but these many ventures may affect social and environmental relations more deeply and have more lasting effects than a larger scale operation that is confined to a clearly defined area (Cater, 1997).
Therefore, Sharpley (2000) argues that there is a consistent failure by academics to relate sustainable tourism to its parental paradigm of sustainable development. Instead, there is the assumption by scholars that the objectives of sustainable development are transposed onto tourism development concepts. Sustainable development is holistic, but sustainable tourism development is often inward or localized. He argues that the focus is generally on the sustainability of tourism itself, rather than on its potential contributions to long-term sustainable development. While I agree that it is crucial to keep the overall goal of sustainable development in mind, it is clearly more achievable to operationalize the concept by focusing on smaller spatial scales and working up to the larger implications from there.

Second, it is in the context of time that sustainable development offers the greatest difficulty when considering tourism, because it can be argued that nothing can be judged sustainable or unsustainable except after an extended period of operation—so claims to the level of sustainability are often premature at best. In addition, we have very little idea of the needs and true preferences of the current generation regarding tourism and resources, much less the needs of the future (Hall & Lew, 1998). Temporal difficulties are evident when discussing the higher rate of time preference in developing areas, when the short-term benefits to one interest can result in long-term losses for themselves or others (Arrow et al., 1995; Moseley, 2001; Reardon & Vosti, 1995). The concept of intergenerational equity is crucial to sustainable development, but conflicts are inherent particularly where survival needs are not currently being met (Cater, no date).

Third, sustainable tourism can be seen as a sort of hegemony in regard to how cultural preservation is promoted as an end in itself. Hegemony is the ability of dominant
classes to convince the majority of subordinate classes to adopt certain political, cultural, or moral values (Mowforth & Munt, 1998). Local communities have the most at stake, and globalization makes local economic control difficult, but sustainable tourism seeks to reverse this trend by stressing that local business owners and communities must be closely involved throughout the planning, implementation, and maintenance phases of development (Wood, 2001). Yet, as (Davis, 2003) found, since the goal is still to please the tourists in order to get them to the destination, any sort of tourism, however well managed and deeply indigenously owned, by its very nature is still colonial.

Fourth, the new “sustainable tourists” are generally driven to seek out ever more remote, obscure destinations with ecosystems and cultures different from his/her own—this very sense of discovery makes them dangerous. This relates to the decline or stagnation component of Butler’s Tourism Product Lifecycle Model, where once a popular destination begins to lose its appeal for these tourists, they move on to start the process again, only to leave the previous location for the lower spending, less sensitive package tourist (Swarbrooke, 1999).

As evidenced by the many negative effects of mass tourism occurring on St. Helena Island, it is necessary to examine other forms of tourism. Alternative models of tourism development may enable the local community to receive more benefits of tourism while decreasing the negative effects. Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism that goes beyond sustainable tourism principles by placing activities within a nature-based setting and emphasizing an educational component.

The rest of this section outlines the evolutionary development of the concept and identifies key players and organizations in ecotourism’s development. It also discusses
some of the primary arguments prevalent throughout the ecotourism literature in terms of its use primarily in developing countries, its polarity with mass tourism, and the difficulty both in accomplishing and assessing true ecotourism.

Hetzer (1965) was one of the first to use the term, when he identified the four primary principles of responsible tourism: minimizing environmental impacts, respecting host cultures, maximizing benefits to locals, and maximizing tourist satisfaction. Over time, the term ecotourism has evolved, whereby early definitions stressed a nature-based experience (Boo, 1990; Ceballos-Lascurain, 1987) and recent definitions highlight sustainable development principles and concepts (The International Ecotourism Society; 1991; Ecotourism Association of Australia, 1992; Allcock et al., 1994; Tickell, 1994; Wight, 1993). A variety of current ecotourism definitions abound, although commonalities among definitions include:

- The promotion of natural and cultural conservation measures,
- Community planning and management,
- An interpretive component,
- A nature-based setting,
- And the goals of economic and environmental sustainability


The promotion of natural and cultural conservation measures can be either direct, in terms of contributing funds, or indirect, in terms of obtaining knowledge that can lead to attitude and behavior changes. Community planning and management are vital for sustainability principles concerned with inter- and intra-generational equity. A community is more likely to protect and maintain a resource base in a form suitable for tourism if it will benefit from it (Blamey, 2002). The interpretive component necessary
for true ecotourism is concerned with the interpretation of local nature and culture. This meets both the purpose of satisfying tourist demands for information, as well as adding pro-environmental knowledge that can lead further to changed attitudes and behaviors. Consumer education campaigns are crucial since travelers are becoming more concerned about the environment and welfare of locals—this component will strengthen the legitimacy of ecotourism (Wood, 2001). A nature-based setting refers to the direct enjoyment of relatively undisturbed nature. This is a fuzzy concept since where one draws the line of proximity of whether or not an activity is nature-based can depend on innumerable personal factors (Blamey, 2002). Ecotourism can result in a dynamic economic situation that can spur healthy economic growth in underdeveloped areas, yet it is also susceptible to boom and bust cycles that are very destructive to the environment and local economy. Therefore, economic gain must mitigate the impact of tourism on the community (Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Wood, 2001). Environmental sustainability concerns the appropriate, different uses of renewable and non-renewable resources and functions.

Ecotourism has been formulated as a sustainable development tool by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), developmental experts, and academics since 1990 (Wood, 2001) and has often been touted as a panacea for equivalent socio-economic issues facing native communities around the world (Weaver et al., 2001; Mowforth & Munt, 1998). Many organizations are key players in the development and continuation of ecotourism, and international developmental agencies have a vital role to play in financing projects related to tourism development and conservation (Wood, 2001). Conservancy organizations such as the World Wildlife Foundation once shunned
ecotourism due to its perceived unreliability as a conservation tool, yet now establish ecotourism projects to conserve natural and cultural features (Lindberg et al., 1993). These international organizations play a prominent role in the sustainable development of local communities by conducting research and programs on best practices, guide training, regional planning, stakeholder meetings, community development, and implementation of grassroots ecotourism initiatives (Wood, 2001).

The World Wildlife Foundation (WWF) and The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) are both prominent leaders in the study and implementation of ecotourism worldwide. Their widely accepted guidelines concern necessary pre-conditions for successful ecotourism. These basic pre-conditions outlined by the WWF include:

- A local community aware of potential opportunities, risks, and changes involved with ecotourism,
- A local community with a high level of interest in ecotourism,
- Existing or potential structures for effective community decision-making,
- Landscape or flora/fauna with inherent attractiveness and appeal,
- An initial market assessment suggesting a potential demand and an effective means of accessing it
- And an ecosystem at least able to absorb a managed level of visitation without damage

(WWF, 2001).

Although it is not often explicitly stated, ecotourism has traditionally been regarded as a tool suitable only for developing countries. This is made evident when considering that it is generally only developing countries, with the exception of Australia, that scholars illustrate as requiring ecotourism development (Boo, 1990; Honey, 1999; Richards & Hall, 2000; Pearce & Butler, 1999; Mowforth & Munt, 1998). It is often argued that the growth of ecotourism offers a means for developing countries to ‘escape the confines of underdevelopment’ in a sustainable and equitable manner (Mowforth & Munt, 1998). The applicability of ecotourism is much clearer in the literature regarding
under-developed regions, although ecotourism is also appropriate for developed regions and countries, within which many of the same power struggles and inequalities are evident.

Although the common assumption is that ecotourism cannot exist with mass tourism, Kontogeorgopoulos (2003) found that even when applying the most stringent definition of ecotourism to a situation, it can still be mass tourism. This issue is debated within the literature as ecotourism is more often seen to be polarized against mass tourism. It can still be mass tourism because the clientele are often traveling on package tours obtained through mass marketing and primarily staying in star rated hotels—components usually seen as contrary to ecotourism principles. Yet, as shown in Kontogeorgopoulos’ local, contextualized case study, in some cases ecotourism can, in fact, be *dependent* upon the mass tourism infrastructure for the marketing and clientele. It is important to realize that while this is the situation for his case study, mass tourism and ecotourism cannot always be combined in a locale, as it is dependent upon the local context and key entities.

Due to ecotourism’s small, highly dispersed, regional character, it is difficult to accomplish, as well as to assess and quantify the success or failure of an ecotourism venture in any given place. Since there is no international regulatory body that exists for certifying ecotourism operations, ecotourism is dependent upon business owners and tour guides to apply recent sets of standards and definitions to their business (Wood, 2001). This results in marked differences between the theoretical depiction of ecotourism and the operationalized approaches between and within continents, regions, countries, states, counties, and individual businesses (Cater, 1997). Since ecotourism is a newly emerging
industry, a lack of familiarity and credibility creates a significant challenge for entrepreneurs. Therefore, individual stakeholders will play an extremely important role in the definition of expectations and perceptions of performance in order to increase legitimacy (Lawrence et al., 1997).

While there are numerous forms of sustainable development that could be viable on St. Helena Island, this thesis explores ecotourism for three reasons. First, the Gullah have evolved with the coastal environment, and as the coastal regions of the United States are being rapidly developed, both the Gullah and the coastal environment are endangered. Since the pressures facing the Gullah are both cultural and economic in nature, it is imperative that any options must also address the economic viability on the coastal islands where they live. The strength of ecotourism lies in its threefold focus on the often conflicting needs of the environmental, cultural, and economic systems. A more pragmatic reason for exploring ecotourism lies with marketing issues. Studies have shown that ecotourists are different from mass tourists. Specifically, they are generally older, wealthier, better educated, and have a higher interest in culture and nature—all of which lead to a higher probability of making proactive contributions to the local environment and people in terms of monetary assistance or environmental restoration (Higgins, 1996; Wight, 1996a; Wight, 1996b; WTO, 2002). Third, since tourism is the current industry trend on St. Helena, it seems that the mindset is already present to discuss additional models of tourism. This puts ecotourism exploration in tune with their approach, rather than imposing one entirely different. Pertinent ethical considerations for the community include deciding to what degree it is moral to market their culture, and if
tourism is simply an artificial maintenance of a dying culture. Only the Gullah community can answer these questions within their specific context.

This chapter served to elucidate the framework of tourism as a development tool that branches off quite distinctly from ecotourism as a tool of sustainable development. The following chapter will introduce the research design, questions, and methodology in order to address how research questions fit within the frameworks outlined within this chapter.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Questions:

Clearly, the Gullah have historically been adversely affected by colonialism, and many would argue that they are still today being impacted by the colonial experience. Mass tourism threatens the continued survival of the Gullah culture and they are currently at a stage where it is worthwhile to explore possibilities for ecotourism. Basic pre-conditions to successful ecotourism, as noted in Chapter Two, include:

1) A local community aware of potential opportunities, risks, and changes involved with ecotourism,

2) A local community with a high level of interest in ecotourism,

3) Existing or potential structures for effective community decision-making,

4) Landscape or flora/fauna with inherent attractiveness and appeal,

5) An initial market assessment suggesting a potential demand and an effective means of accessing it,

6) And an ecosystem at least able to absorb a managed level of visitation without damage.

Pre-conditions four and five are clearly met as evidenced by current levels of tourism in the Lowcountry. Pre-condition six has not yet been evaluated, but there are numerous ways to manage an area so that it can handle a level of change acceptable to stakeholders. Therefore, the focus of this research is on the first three pre-conditions and poses the following primary questions:
• With respect to development and tourism, what is the relationship between community member’s expectations and/or desires for the future and their current lifestyle?
• What are reactions of community members to the possibility for ecotourism to alleviate concerns about and enable desires for the future of the community?
• What are factors that facilitate or constrain the development of ecotourism on St. Helena?

By addressing these questions, this research contributes to the ecotourism literature by applying ecotourism precepts for sustainable, community-based tourism within the United States, rather than the traditional application within developing countries. This thesis will also provide interested stakeholders with the initial means to evaluate a portion of the community’s ideals and concerns regarding ecotourism as a strategy for maintaining their history, heritage, and culture.

As evidenced by the exploratory nature of the research questions, this research clearly necessitates and demands qualitative answers. A social constructionist view was taken regarding the creation of knowledge, which argues that realities are made of multiple mental constructions produced through social interactions and experiences. As Denzin and Lincoln (1998) note, realities are not more or less true in an absolute sense, but simply more or less informed, so that a person’s constructed reality changes as they become more informed or sophisticated. Every truth is multi-faceted and a product of social construction—therefore the interview data was construed as partial representations of reality.

What we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspectives. Knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by the mind (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 236).
This research elicited a set of perspectives from community members through the active production and meaning developed through our interaction—meanwhile bearing in mind that the data are representations made within a context that I am unable to check or verify (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). The purpose of the research was to understand the complex reality of an experience by bringing various constructions into juxtaposition (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

Since the success of ecotourism is primarily dependent upon the degree of control by the local community, it is clear that this research must focus on active discussions with community members to obtain their views on ecotourism. As these are complex issues, perspectives are best discovered through the use of open-ended interview questions, as in the Active Interview model described by Holstein and Gubrium (1995). Traditional approaches treat the subject as a “vessel of answers” or “repository of facts”, while the active approach to the interview instead treats the interaction as,

A conversation with a plan, which involves encouraging subjective relevancies, prompting interpretive possibilities, facilitating linkages, suggesting alternative perspectives, and appreciating diverse horizons of meaning

Holstein and Gubrium (1995: 3).

Data Collection:

I began this research by contacting various other researchers who have conducted research on or with the Gullah. This was done in order to discuss some of the practicalities of working with a population that has been studied numerous times and that is represented in the literature as being somewhat suspicious of outside researchers and their intentions. The advice offered by these researchers centered on making sure to meet with a variety of community entities to obtain a diverse array of views, as some leaders
would attempt to drive the direction of the research. In addition, these scholars noted that it was important to maintain an academic perspective and not let the interview participant’s demeanors affect me personally, as many community members had little patience with researchers. These conversations led to much consideration of how to achieve access into the community.

It seemed as though by being a younger woman of smaller stature and dressing primarily in jeans and t-shirts while at community places, I was seen as a small threat to community members. This less formal researcher presence presumably is what led people to approach me to chat, rather than me initiating contact. When meeting with community leaders, I was conscious of dressing more professionally and having a more formal approach. As they are accustomed to giving their time to researchers, I felt that I should be overtly respectful of them for offering me their time. In the end it merely required a sense of respect and being relaxed in order to gain contact with most individuals, as the Gullah as a whole are a very approachable, friendly, and polite group of people.

Direct observations and semi-structured interviews with community members were the prime sources of data for this research. Interview transcripts were analyzed in order to understand how various community members construct and articulate their individual realities. In addition to these primary sources of data, I collected a range of secondary data sources to situate the Gullah both within a historical and contemporary context.

Initial research began with direct observation in order to examine the proliferation of Gullah tours along coastal Georgia and South Carolina. Participation in various tours
was necessary for me to gain an understanding of the extent of tourism involvement by
the Gullah and to compare and contrast various tours. It was also my intention to
determine which Sea Island community seemed most approachable and open to meeting
with me and exploring ecotourism prospects, as well as having a fairly high potential for
ecotourism. High potential referred to an outwardly tight-knit community interested in
alternative means for preservation and enhancement of their lifestyle. St. Helena Island,
South Carolina, was chosen in part due to its seemingly large and cohesive Gullah
community. Also, the presence of the Penn Center, which was the first school for black
students after emancipation, offered a historical and current nucleus to the community.
In addition, I observed community events, such as community forums and the Gullah
Heritage Days, a celebration that brings over ten thousand people each Fall, in order to
evaluate potential research sites. These types of events were important since they
supplied information within the real daily context of events. Initial direct observations
were made during two primary fieldwork periods in September and October of 2002.

As questions necessitated a discourse concerned with drawing out perspectives
from interview participants, semi-structured interviews were a central method of data
collection. Interviews have much strength in that they are targeted to the subject matter
and can, if successful, lead to further interviews and contacts.

The signed consent form required through the Institution of Research Participants
was waived as it can often pose a greater intimidation to interview participants than the
actual interview questions. As the purpose of qualitative research is to create a dialogue
between the researcher and the participants where the researcher does not hold an
authoritative hierarchical position, this equal relationship is greatly undermined by
requiring the signed consent form. This is particularly true in an already suspicious and reluctant community, which requires significant explanation and assurance by the researcher—greatly detracting from the interview conversation. While I fully support the intentions and requirements of obtaining signed consent, I believe that the legalistic nature of it may have undermined the mutual exchange and rapport that was crucial to the research project. I began the interviews by describing the research project to the participant, obtaining verbal consent, and giving the participant a business card with the necessary Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight paragraph and information on how to contact me. I clarified my intent to audiotape, and all interview participants consented to this.

First, appropriate interview questions were developed prior to conducting fieldwork. These were constructed from what was learned during the literature review, and addressed the three research questions. Yet, as is common with qualitative research, questions evolved as the interview process shaped them to accurately reflect and further explore issues. The same primary series of questions were asked of each interview participant, with adjustments made as needed, while I listened for emergent themes and concerns that expressed the social reality of the interview participants. The interviews ranged in length from 30 minutes to three hours. Interviews were obtained over two primary week-long research periods in January and February of 2003. Interview questions are attached as Appendix A.

Interview participants were chosen with the goal of obtaining a stratified though not formally representative sample of community members. Initial participants were selected from websites and recent studies on the Gullah community on St. Helena, where
it became evident who some of the active members of the community were, and their affiliation, if any, with community organizations. Community leaders are central since they often are the ones who spark further interest in the community for possible endeavors and play a vital role in the exploration and subsequent necessary planning, development, and monitoring of those endeavors. I also utilized the "snowball method", which takes advantage of the social contacts of the initially identified research participant, in order to identify additional participants who may be interested in being interview participants. As these one-on-one semi structured interviews began, I strove to obtain a wide diversity of interview participants by positioning myself in different areas of the community such as restaurants, parks, and gas stations in order to meet a variety of people from across the spectrum of the Gullah community.

In addition, it was important to talk with people outside of the community who play a role in development on St. Helena. These interviews included city planners, Chambers of Commerce representatives, and rural development or conservation organizations that have had extensive contact with the St. Helena Island community. It was necessary to contact these stakeholders, as it is not possible to escape the hierarchy of city, county, state, and federal organizations, which regulate the development in an area. In addition, as tourism spans multiple scales, it is impracticable to focus the lens on only one community, as it is clearly nested within a larger socio-economic system. This is particularly true in terms of sustainability as it is not possible to have an island of sustainability within an ocean of unsustainability. Table 2 details the demographic and other characteristics of interview participants within the Gullah community, while Table 3 details the characteristics of interview participants outside of the Gullah community.
The makeup of interview participants was representative of the stratified sample that I strove to obtain. The sample is strong in that there was a fairly even distribution of age groups, sex, level of involvement in tourism and community development, and institutional affiliation. The length of residency is skewed toward Bin Yeah’s, as I was more interested in responses from native community members. The sample could have been slightly improved had I obtained an interview or two with adults in their twenties, yet they proved difficult to find, most likely as they were away at school.

Table 2: Interview Participants: St. Helena Island Community Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Length of residency</th>
<th>Institutional affiliation</th>
<th>Tourism involvement (direct, indirect, non-existent)</th>
<th>Community development role (low, med, very high)</th>
<th>Completeness of interview (full, partial, questionable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ernie</td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>Penn</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>Sea Island Coalition</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lola</td>
<td>50s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>Sea Island Coalition</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>Sea Island Coalition</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandria</td>
<td>40s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boris</td>
<td>30s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Indirect</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butch</td>
<td>Late 50s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Come Yeah</td>
<td>Penn</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rolin</td>
<td>Late 50s</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Come Yeah</td>
<td>None, lean toward Coalition</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katrina</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Come Yeah</td>
<td>None, lean toward Sea Island Coalition</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keegan</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline</td>
<td>Late 40s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>Med</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lola</td>
<td>Early 30s</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horace</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Full</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deana</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>Penn</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Med</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcia</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bin Yeah</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Developed by Author</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>Why important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laquanda</td>
<td>Beaufort chamber of commerce</td>
<td>Affect local tourism, has a demand side, outsider with contact perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyle</td>
<td>Black chamber of commerce</td>
<td>Affect local tourism, has a demand side, outsider with contact perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juan</td>
<td>Involved in sustainable tourism in S.C.</td>
<td>Affect local tourism, has a demand side, outsider with contact perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herbert</td>
<td>Law office in area</td>
<td>Been active in community issues, in particular land related ones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audrey</td>
<td>Cultural component at Penn</td>
<td>Partial Penn perspective, being a come Yeah, how matches community desires</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daryl</td>
<td>Done past research with Gullah</td>
<td>Interesting outsider view</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myrtle</td>
<td>Works at S.C. Coastal Conservation League, who does some work with Gullah for Penn Center for Preservation</td>
<td>Interesting involved rural development outsider perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neddie</td>
<td>Involved in Penn Center for Preservation</td>
<td>Interesting involved rural development outsider perspective</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Developed by Author

There were no incentives offered for participation in the interview process, although I explained to most interview participants my intent to contribute to the community in the form of a written document reporting the study's findings. A copy of this thesis will be made public at the UGA library, the Penn Center, and the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition. However, the interview transcripts will not be made public, only summarized results without identifiers will be included.

Data Analysis:

Seidel describes qualitative data analysis as a “symphony based on three notes: noticing, collecting, and thinking about connections” (Seidel, 1998). This is not a linear process, but rather iterative and progressive since it is a repeating cycle that builds on previous cycles. Thus, data analysis included coding, sorting, determining dominant themes, and phenomenological interpretation. Codes are used to facilitate discussion and further investigation of the data (Seidel, 1998). Since initial codes were somewhat
ambiguous and may have included two or three key concepts, later reorganization further
delineated appropriate codes into manageable and accurate concepts.

Analysis began by looking for patterns and relationships between and within
sections of the interview transcripts in order to develop a typology of emerging themes
and categories that developed out of the interviews. Since many of these issues are
extremely complex and may take a host of forms, most of the questions were left open-
ended, and then grouped into various levels of responses during analysis. The transcribed
interviews were input into *N Vivo Qualitative Data Analysis* software in order to assist
with coding and the subsequent delineation of codes into finer topics. Tree nodes are
primary code topics, and were created after transcription by highlighting certain passages
that related to my research questions in order to first pull together seemingly discrete
statements and observations into categories (Charmaz, 1983). These passages were then
coded to correspond to the appropriate research question, meanwhile leading to a slight
adjustment of the research questions themselves as they were shaped by the interview
process. Then, parent and child codes were delineated as lower level codes to further
subdivide and rearrange categories. Figure 4 depicts the dendritic analogy of a tree with
its main branches and finer twigs representing these various levels of coding.

![Figure 4: Coding Nodes](source: Developed by Author)
Coding utilized both emic and etic codes, which are two perspectives that can be employed in the study of a social phenomenon. It is possible to take the view of either an insider or an outsider, so that the emic view focuses on the intrinsic distinction that is meaningful to the interview participant, and the etic view relies upon external concepts that have meaning for the researcher and are imposed upon the data (Headland, 1999).

These passages were continually refined and resorted until they represented the concerns, ideals, and interests of the interview participants. *N Vivo* was useful in managing the data, although the actual analysis of the sorted data was a manual process that seemed to be of more use in terms of time and effectiveness. Had I been more familiar with the software through previous use, it may have been more beneficial for actually analyzing the data.

This chapter has served to outline the research design, questions, and methods used to answer the research questions. The following chapter outlines what was found through the process of discussion and analysis.
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Question One Discussion:

With respect to development and tourism, what is the relationship between community member’s expectations and/or desires for the future and their current lifestyle?

The first research question explores the space between the current, probable, and ideal community experience, particularly in terms of development and tourism. It is necessary to gain an understanding of what community members determine to be causes for concern and what they would like to see happen. This is particularly important in the face of rapid landscape changes as increased development and tourism bring different people, environmental effects, and changing ways of life to St. Helena Island. Also explored were potential actions that could work to minimize tension between interview participants’ concerns and desires.

Reactions to Increased Development

Interview participants described three primary issues related to the increased development occurring on St. Helena Island and adjacent areas; these included land loss, a changing landscape resulting in a displacement from their way of life, and struggles over power and resource use. These results are discussed according to the order of their importance, which was determined by the frequency and passion of responses.
Land Loss

Land loss is the principal concern, as it underlies nearly all other concerns. The four primary reasons for land loss include: land disputes, coercive land speculation and partition action, increased taxes, and a lack of understanding of the causes of and possible solutions to this land loss.

First, land disputes are an issue for the Gullah due to a complicated land ownership pattern referred to as “Heirs Property”. After emancipation, blacks purchased or were deeded land, usually without access to the legal system. Under South Carolina law, land that passes by succession is legally owned by all the descendents in common, meaning that hundreds of people can be listed on one land deed. This leads to loss because holding a title to property in the name of “the heirs of” an ancestor is an unstable form of land ownership. This makes it susceptible to forced partitions in order to clear the title because an heir or anyone who purchases an interest in the property, regardless of the size of his/her interest, can request that the land be partitioned—thereby forcing a division or sale of the land. Clearing the title is necessary when the property has been passed down by succession without a will, which makes it vulnerable to potential conflict between multiple heirs. When this happens, land is often sold at below-market prices that are set by the courts, with the proceeds divided among the living heirs (David & Scruggs, 2002). In addition, heirs move away or are unaware of their role in the legalities of land ownership, resulting in delinquent taxes. Land disputes also often arise due to inaccurate

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6 This discussion on land loss comes from both primary and secondary research. As was to be expected, the majority of the primary research resonated quite strongly with the literature review. The purpose of expanding on land loss within this thesis is to apply interview participant’s perceptions of current and desirable situations to the consideration of ecotourism and the role it could play on St. Helena Island.
surveys at the time of deed purchase after emancipation, as many were not able to obtain legal assistance (Davis & Scruggs, 2002).

Second, wealthy developers are often responsible for pursuing the sale of land, while their primary interests are frequently in building high-end residential and resort areas. Although many families may not wish to sell, limited economic choices and exorbitant price offers often lead them to do so anyway (Goodwine, 1998; Faulkenberry et al., 2000). Due to a lack of awareness concerning the willingness for deceit from land speculators, it was common for illegal land transactions to take place as land speculators coerced landowners to relinquish their land rights (Jarrett & Lucas, 2003). Land partitions were also commonly pushed by land agents during the great migrations north, as speculators would track down landowners in order to obtain a ‘quit claim deed’ to auction off the land—this was often easily accomplished as with time, the absentee Gullahs lost the attachment to their land (Jarrett & Lucas, 2003). As the value of undeveloped coastal properties substantially increases, land agents go to great lengths in order to obtain land. Miranda, an interview participant active in community development, commented that speculators send people into the community to disrupt meetings and distribute nebulous ‘fact sheets’ in order to confuse people. For example, as conservation easements are a substantial adversary to developers, ‘fact sheets’ have detailed how conservation easements are merely another way for the government to take land—which is entirely untrue.

Third, there is now a clear divide between the very wealthy and the extremely poor on contiguous lands in the Lowcountry (SRDI, 2003). Rising land values are

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7 This still occurs, although to a lesser degree than it was previously due to increased awareness on the part of islanders.
causing steep increases in property taxes on the islands, resulting in the forfeiture of property as landowners are unable to pay the escalating taxes and must sell portions of their land. In recent years on nearby Hilton Head Island, some families’ taxes have increased 300% in a single year because of a resort being built on adjacent land (Goodwine, 1998). Laquanda, a representative of the Beaufort Chamber of Commerce, argued that tourism is beneficial since it leads to increased property values for the native landowners. Yet, what was not understood by Laquanda was how the Gullah’s deeper attachment to the land and reluctance to sell results in them being land rich but income poor. Herbert, a local lawyer dealing primarily with land issues with the natives, noted that most Gullah have no capital and cannot get a loan on their property since the title is tied up in Heirs property. This, combined with their inability to pay increased taxes, actually results in the loss of property. Families must define a balance in order to decide at what point money to improve quality of life is worth more than the land that has absorbed generations of a family’s blood and sweat.

Fourth, there is an overall lack of education among the general native population concerning both the implications of Heirs Property and options that could enable the Gullah to keep their land. Organizations are forming to fill this need, but as yet, the majority of landholders are unaware of both issues and options. Historically, Heirs Property has provided a mechanism through which many Gullah have been able to hold onto their land. This has changed however, as speculators have more resources available to use to clear the land title, as it is generally a time-consuming and expensive process.
Displacement

Displacement was the second primary concern caused by increased development, as people are displaced in numerous ways from their traditional lifestyle. Displacement occurs due to the increased infiltration and development of the road system, from Come Yeah’s having different and often opposing values and attachments to the landscape—thus resulting in different ideas of acceptable change, and assimilation pressures.

Among the most mentioned threats of displacement from their traditional lifestyle was the widening of Highway 21, which runs from Beaufort, located to the northwest of St. Helena, along the length of St. Helena, and to Hunting Island at the far end of St. Helena (See Figure 5). Proponents say that road widening is necessary to decrease traffic congestion and improve safety, while critics argue that the proposed plan would destroy rural community character and bring in further intrusion and pressure to develop. As the pace and character of the island and surrounding landscape change due to the widened road, many people mentioned concerns about increased crime.

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8 Although the map seemingly portrays a solid land mass, there are marshes that separate St. Helena from Lady’s Island, Hunting Island, and Fripp Island.
As Come Yeah’s migrate to the area, it is common for them to make quite different decisions from what Bin Yeah’s would—they do not have the deep attachment to the landscape that the natives do. This is evident when looking at the high level of development over graveyards; traditionally, they were built right on the water—and that is now the most desired real estate. Pollution caused by increased development on the marsh edge also affects the means of subsistence and livelihood for many, particularly with regard to fishing and sweetgrass, which is a marsh grass used for the Gullah’s well-known basketry. Clearly, levels and types of acceptable change vary drastically between natives and newcomers, thus leading to increased tensions on both sides.

Lola mentioned how as the number of whites on the island increase, the Gullah lifestyle changes, and it is increasingly difficult for the Gullah to live in two worlds with
different playing rules and standards—a ‘white’ world and a ‘black’ world. This leads to assimilation pressures as many Gullah were taught to not value their culture as they were growing up, and they in turn are not passing down values and traditions to their children. The lack of job opportunities on the island leads locals to gravitate toward service-industry jobs in Beaufort, Hilton Head, and surrounding islands, resulting in a tendency to lose touch with the landscape. This is particularly noticeable as many grow up on the island learning nothing of the river or marsh, and commercialism pervades as many are instead interested in having gold teeth and booming stereo systems.

**Struggles over Power and Resources**

Increased development has resulted in both power and resource struggles. These result from an array of diverse interests and views on how development should occur, the increased pressure placed on available resources, and their appropriate levels of use.

Power struggles have developed both internally within the community and externally with other entities outside of the community. Divisions have developed between organizations in the community, particularly between the traditionalists and entrepreneurs as they have varying ideas of acceptable and appropriate levels of change. This concept is discussed in further detail when exploring Research Question Three, which is in part concerned with community leadership.

While community leaders are often an exception, there is an overall lack of awareness, education, and understanding on the circumstantial effects of increased development among interview participants. This has begun to change as many Gullah see the rapid development of places like Myrtle Beach and Hilton Head. Interview participants often said that they do not want St. Helena to become similar to these locales,
yet conversely many of them desire to have the road widened and more stores located on
the island. These changes could eventually lead to similar development results if they are
not careful to continue to detail precisely what they do not want on St. Helena. This lack
of awareness and understanding leads to differences in opinion concerning the approach
the community should adopt to increasing economic development.

As population increases in the area, many more limits are placed on resource use.
This is to be expected, although several interview participants felt that new laws and
restrictions primarily affect those who are most dependent upon local natural resources.
For example, new fishing restrictions were continually mentioned as they dramatically
restrict the type and number of fish that can be caught. As many of the Gullah have
always depended upon fishing as a source of subsistence and income, they have never
learned other skills and ways with which to make a living in a strictly monetary economy.

Reactions to Tourism

Interview participants described many issues relating to increased tourism in the
area. These are categorized into three primary factions: levels of involvement, desires
and concerns, and solutions to lessen the disparity between desires and concerns for the
future. The level of involvement is further divided into positive and negative socio-
economic implications, which vary considerably based on the interview participant’s
level of involvement in the tourism industry. Desires and concerns for the future hinged
on how well the community would be able to continue to adapt and take advantage of the
changing social and economic systems. The success or failure of their ability to adapt
and prosper in these changing conditions is dependent primarily upon increased
organization in terms of education, involvement, collaboration, and the development of
business venues, as well as the control of the local tourism industry through regulations and planning.

Perceptions of Tourism and Subsequent Involvement

When asked about the level of Gullah involvement in the tourism industry, many participants noted that it is the primary industry of the area, with military bases following as the secondary employer. When the construction of buildings for tourism accommodations, hotel and restaurant workers, and other service industry jobs are considered, nearly all of the Gullah are in some way involved with the tourism industry (Faulkenberry et al., 2000). This was seen as a “win-win” situation for some interview participants in part because it increases the number of black-owned businesses in the area. Even those whose primary job is not directly related to the tourism industry can earn extra income during festivals and/or by selling their foods, art, or crafts along the roadside.

Many who are not currently directly involved in tourism seemed open to exploring additional options available to them, which do not require having an initial resource base, such as taking tourists trawling, shrimping, crabbing, or otherwise. Yet, they were unconvinced that they could earn money by sharing such daily activities as this. This is because many of the Gullah, particularly the elders, do not understand the increased interest in their culture and think the term Gullah is slang. This is evident when they say, “I ain’t no Gullah, don’t know bout that kinda thing, heard of it, but…” Some do not associate themselves as Gullah even though they are speaking Gullah and living the culture all of the time.
The number of Gullah directly involved in terms of entrepreneurship is currently fairly small, although many are anxious to become involved and are looking for an entry to the tourist economy. This interest is evident since the three Gullah-owned restaurants located at the primary intersection on St. Helena are all recent additions to the community. Other than restaurants, the additional primary tourism related Gullah businesses are Gullah tours—primarily oral history tours that can be customized to include additional cultural activities.

Further, the substantial impact of the tourism economy is evident by the discourse concerning the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) confederate flag boycott. The NAACP has called for economic sanctions by way of tourism boycotts in South Carolina until the Confederate flag is removed from the Statehouse. The civil rights group sees the flag as a symbol of white supremacy, while defenders of the flag see it as representing Southern heritage. This debate was commented on primarily by interview participants external to the community at the Chambers of Commerce, although it also affects the Gullah indirectly as most of them work in the service industry that is dependent upon tourism.

Interview participants had various perceptions of tourism, and responses tended to correlate to their level of involvement in the tourism industry, although not as one would assume—that the more one reaped economic benefits from tourism, the more favorable they would construe it to be. Instead, many community members who were not involved in any direct way with tourism had fairly neutral perceptions of the effects of tourism and felt primarily unaffected by the tourist presence. A colorful illustration of this indifference to tourists was evident when Lolita said “Yeah, we at war right now,
terrorists of the United States, son of a bitches, them son of a bitches trying to mess us up, but tourists? Nah…” As discussed below, many positives and negatives were related to social and economic effects. Interestingly enough, many of the negative implications were mentioned primarily by those who are directly involved in tourism; this is most likely due to increased awareness and self-education on their part.

Positive effects of tourism mentioned by interview participants are grouped into two primary categories. First, there have been social effects caused by a turnaround in the appreciation of Gullah. As interest increases, people become advocates for Gullah, leading to a further interest and concern for the perseverance of their culture. Many interview participants mentioned how this increase in interest also leads to augmented self-esteem and a sense of pride, thus resulting in further educational and self-improvement gains. Many times, participants elaborated on the opportunity to share what is real for them, and to present an opportunity for outsiders to learn their history and develop an understanding of Gullah. This promotes pride and satisfaction from teaching as well as a mutual understanding and respect as similarities between cultures are noted.

Tourists visit a ninety-seven year old woman named Marcia on a regular basis, since Rodrigo, one of the tour guides, likes to bring tourists to her house to sit and chat for a few minutes. Marcia very much appreciates this and feels proud that people come from all over the world to visit her.

Second, economic benefits are evident for those directly involved in tourism, as people are willing to pay top dollar for cultural tourism. There are many opportunities for entrance into the tourist economy, even without a formal venue or product. Many locals sell products out of their vehicles along the roadside, welcoming the money as well
as the chance for interaction and conversation. The sale of sweetgrass baskets and other crafts, food, and tours is the primary mode of direct tourism involvement by the Gullah. The monetary effects for those indirectly involved are also evident as the majority of the Gullah work either in the tourism industry (restaurants, motels, or golf courses) or on one of the area’s military bases.

A variety of negative impacts from tourism were delineated throughout the interview process, which were also primarily concerned with the social and economic dimensions of the community. While negative effects were varied in scope and degree, they are categorized into two primary themes—displacement and exploitation.

Natives are experiencing displacement from their land and way of life as they find that a Come Yeah has bought land nearby and tells them they can no longer fish their preferred fishing hole, or they find that their favorite hiking trails are identified and taken over by visitors to the island. In addition, long commutes to workplaces on surrounding islands necessitates leaving the island before dawn and returning after dark, resulting in reduced family time during which to transfer values and traditions.

Rising interest levels in the Gullah result in a sense of exploitation and commodification. This is evident as many ‘fake’ tour companies move to the area and set up shop, or restaurants advertise “Gullah specialty: Frogmore Stew” when it is not their normal fare, thereby misrepresenting and/or making money off the culture. People are angry at being exploited as they find themselves on TV or in a documentary without ever receiving word, being asked permission, or receiving any compensation. These rising interest levels are particularly perplexing as many were taught not to value their culture. Rodrigo, a local tour guide, says that people are always asking him,
Why you bring all these gang a tourists round our place, what they wanna know bout we language anyway? How come they want to hear us speak? Ain’t nobody make no monkey out of me, I be speakin’ no Gullah.

In addition, tourists’ behavior is less constrained by etiquette because of their temporary status, where they are ‘let free’ on vacation. Tourists are often disrespectful in many ways, as they ask people to speak Gullah, not realizing that it is similar to someone asking them to speak “southern English” or “Yankee” and take pictures without asking. As other authors have expressed, the Gullah do not benefit to the degree possible from increased development and tourism. This is evident as many of the Gullah are living a ‘culture of servitude’ (Faulkenberry et al., 2000) as they are working at the bottom of the service industry, without much potential for advancement. This is also evident in terms of economic leakage, where because there is not enough local ownership of tourism on St. Helena, tourists come in but their dollars go back out.

Desires and Concerns for the Future

Interview participants mentioned a variety of concerns and desires for the future. These hinged on the ability of the Gullah community to adapt further with the fast-paced socio-economic changes and to position themselves to take advantage of the changing industrial structures. The difficulty lies in navigating between the variety of mentioned visions and fears, although there are similar and complementary visions held in common by several of the interview participants.

The desire of the majority of the participants was to keep St. Helena’s rural, neighborhood atmosphere and not destroy the family lifestyle. It could ideally become a place where farming, gardening, and a rural economy lends itself to sustaining the
environment and the culture. One interview participant’s hope was to make the community a ‘living museum’, where tourists can come and experience the Gullah way of life. Residents of St. Helena envisioned more cottage industry businesses that bring back traditional services and crafts and employ local people, such as the Corners Area property, run as a business market center. Several participants commented that it was imperative that native people benefit from any new groups, such as these, that form in the community.

Yet as a sense of commercialism pervades, there are also those who want to see Burger Kings and time-shares. Many participants would like to see department and grocery stores on the island so that they would not have to travel so far to obtain what they need. As increased development requires more attention to evacuation means, many participants mentioned a second evacuation route off the island as a necessity.

People described concerns that within the next decade, they would not be able to recognize the island due to unrelentless pressure from developers. They portrayed the island merged with the city of Beaufort, with a Piggly Wiggly, Wal-Mart, and the usual assortment of corporate businesses. Many participants foresee it overrun by tourists and Hispanic immigrants, making it very difficult to locate natives of the island.

Miranda, a local community leader, said that she could not separate the ideal and expected future—rather; she could only describe what she sees. This faith and resolve points to the ability and strength of some leaders to realize their visions, as it was clear that she was willing to do everything possible to see her vision come to fruition.
Potential Actions to Minimize Tension Between Desires and Concerns

Many solutions were mentioned in the interviews regarding what actions could work to minimize the disparity between concerns and desires for the future. The majority of the solutions mentioned were tangible, although several of the interview participants also mentioned their faith in “the man upstairs, as he is the only one who can bring us through”. These solutions are grouped into the thematic categories of improved organization and the control of tourism through regulations and planning.

Improved organization is necessary in order to compliment the coexistence of entities rather than increase competition between them. This should take the form of increased education in order to decrease levels of mistrust both within the community and with groups external to the community. Also necessary is involvement in community affairs and partnerships to increase financial cooperation between entities and further empowerment. In addition, improved organization is necessary to develop more revenue-generating venues that result in added jobs and less leakage.

First, as people will be skeptical of any sort of development if they are not aware of alternative forms of development to what they see elsewhere on Hilton Head or Myrtle Beach, education is a necessary component to decrease levels of mistrust. Many of the interview participants who were involved to some degree in community development organizations or actively involved in tourism mentioned that it is imperative to decrease the level of mistrust between Bin Yeah’s and Come Yeah’s to encourage cooperation in order to reach common goals and compromise on opposing goals. Miranda, one key participant illustrated this when she said,
I’m not talking about the root now, talking about what’s above the ground, which is the tree, and which branch are you on? You see. And so now I don’t need to hate your branch, your branch has a certain angle to it that has its own beauty, so does mine over here, my thing is we have this connection here at the trunk and we need to respect that. That’s what gives us the strength.

Another key reason for education is to increase awareness of the responsibilities that come along with land ownership—as their land is highly desired they particularly need to be *au fait*. It was previously common for Gullah children to be taught not to value their culture because their way of speaking ‘broken English’ and many of their traditions and values were considered backward and ignorant. As a result of this, there seems to be a generation that does not have any interest in the continuation of the Gullah culture, who does not see anything special about their lifestyle worth preserving. While it is important to focus on education at various age levels, many participants spoke of the need for the community to concentrate on the children, in order to encourage them to become keepers of their culture. Many participants mentioned that it was important for parents and elders to reestablish traditional values, beliefs, and crafts while making the children aware of the risks facing the continuation of their culture. Due to active advocates, this educational component is beginning to occur through the implementation of a Gullah curriculum in the classroom, where elders visit so the children can learn oral history, crafts, and other components of Gullah culture.

Second, it is necessary for community entities to compliment each other rather than compete with each other. Improved involvement in community affairs and collaboration between community entities was commonly mentioned in order to obtain greater financial cooperation and empowerment for these entities. It is important for committees and mechanisms such as the Landowners Association and the Community Development
Corporation to make a sustained, organized effort and educate community members through legal clinics and educational venues. Currently, as Come Yeah’s tend to be more active in developmental issues, it is crucial for Gullah community members to become further involved in community affairs in order to understand and be conscious of laws that affect their land and lifestyle.

The importance of partnering and obtaining support from developmental entities was a theme consistently mentioned throughout the interviews, as people need to work together and take advantage of each other’s businesses and marketing. Collaboration is crucial at county, state, federal, and international levels as the tourism market extends across every level of government. Therefore, Gullah promoters will be more successful if their marketing dollars and marketing plans utilize all of those levels. Collaboration should be a network rather than a hierarchy, and if people can fit themselves to multiple dimensions of tourism, this would lead to the masses profiting rather than just a few. Taking advantage of the tourist development at various levels would decrease anger toward the rapid pace of change, and the danger of over dependence on tourism, thus making it less susceptible to vicissitudes common with tourism. Initially, this collaboration is evident as one advocate is applying for United Nations recognition that would further protect the culture and lifestyle, and the National Park Service is conducting a Special Resource Study to determine what role they should play in preserving Gullah culture.

Third, improved organization within the community could lead to increased development of revenue-generating venues on the island that would create jobs and amplify economic multiplier effects. A few participants argued that the community
should take advantage of the tourist presence as it makes monies available from the influx of tourists and Come Yeah’s; this was best said by Alexandria in her rich statement that,

"People are discovering Beaufort, so progress is coming. The pie is already baked, you can’t go back and take the flour out, might be able to take the apples out, but you can’t take the shortening out of the crust, you can’t do any of that. So instead, what you need to do is think, ok, how am I gonna get a slice of this pie?"

Another respondent argued to take advantage of the tourist demands by creating more local tourism businesses, services, and accommodations, reasoning by analogy that, “Don’t keep your kid in a size three shoe if their foot is growing do you? You change the shoes size so it will accommodate his growing foot.” Redeveloping an economic relationship with the land is one way to keep the land and the profit that ensues from it. Two main examples were mentioned by interview participants that are in line with the preservation and protection of the culture and the landscape. The Corners Area, which is located at the island’s prime intersection and is owned by the Penn Center, is currently a somewhat neglected park that could be converted into a market venue for crafts and local goods. Rather than selling wares along the roadside as is currently done, there would be a known place where tourists could stop, yet retaining the rural character. Another way for the Gullah to situate themselves to take advantage of the changing demographics involves growing and marketing organic products. While this does not necessitate everyone becoming farmers again, several interview participants felt that local landowners should make their land available for use so that the landowner can still profit from it. As many of the Come Yeah’s are wealthier folk who often demand higher quality food, they are generally willing to pay substantially more for a local, organic product. This could be particularly advantageous as organic products are generally
produced in a manner that is less resource intensive than more mass food production methods. This is occurring to some extent as a couple of local farmers have set up produce stands on the island. It would also be beneficial to develop an agenda of products that can be sustainably produced so that the Gullah can reap economic benefits from their land.

Also key is the control of tourism through preventative management, regulations, and planning. Several participants echoed this sentiment and argued that every community has the opportunity to control tourism through accommodation, thereby controlling the locations, time, and degree to which it occurs. Specifically regarding tourism, pre-trip educational orientations to the culture would go a long way toward keeping tourism respectful and mutually beneficial by setting up a standard for behavior. The Gullah community has the opportunity to play a large role in determining their future, but it necessitates that locals attend zoning and planning meetings to exert their influence.

The Gullah community has made substantial steps in determining what precisely it is they want to see and how they plan to implement their visions. One step that has been taken to ensure the alliance of people in terms of similar envisioning was the creation of a comprehensive plan in 1997 that details the desires of the county. Legal governing principles and ordinances will affect the future character of the island, and so more conservation areas, purchasing of development rights, and reduction of land sales are key. More projects like the ‘Penn Center for Preservation’ project are necessary at all levels, from the kids, to the youth, and to the adults. The Penn Center for Preservation was a project that arose to teach community members about planning and zoning. It was out of this combined effort that the planning advisory committee and cultural protection
advisory committee arose, and has been the most holistic alliance of various groups within the community thus far.

**Question Two Discussion:**

**What are reactions of community members to the possibility for ecotourism to alleviate concerns about and enable desires for the future of the community?**

This question ascertains the level of familiarity with and reactions to the principles of ecotourism. It also explores the implementation of ecotourism venues and their viability within the space between the current, probable, and ideal community experience on St. Helena which were drawn out by Research Question One. As is to be expected with any sort of commercialism of culture or the environment, there are bound to be tradeoffs between the level of economic activity and the level of preservation of the commodity. Thus, this question explores what people perceive to be fair trade-offs concerning economic development and commodification, and if there can ever be a mutually beneficial relationship between culture, the environment, and tourism.

**Familiarity With and Reactions to Ecotourism**

It was found that many of the community members not involved in the tourism industry had never heard the term ecotourism and so were unfamiliar with the concept. This is not surprising as even those actively involved in what is promoted as ecotourism are often unsure of exactly what its principles entail. Those who had heard of the term equated it with nature-based tourism—namely kayaking, as that is the form that it has taken in the area due to the abundance of marshes. Interestingly, all kayaking ecotours in the area are run by whites and none by local islanders. It was described in general as “nature stuff”, or in some cases, more specifically as a non-destructive pleasure of the environment—a use of the land in one form or another by outsiders. Ecotourism was also
discussed in terms of being non-consumptive as it is based on the environment but does not necessitate developing the landscape. Yet, they acknowledged that it could easily exceed that and become consumptive. Advantages of ecotourism noted by research participants were that it could bring economic opportunities without destroying the special resources of the area. Miranda made a clear distinction and preference for cultural tourism over ecotourism. This was because ecotourism amounted, to her, to people going into the water and marshes, walking and hiking the land, kayaking, picnicking, and just looking at the environment, with no real interaction with the native populations. She prefers the term ‘cultural tourism’, as that means that the tourists interact with the community and learn their story directly. In this way, the tourist contributes to the economic well-being of the community.

During the interview process, I described a case study of the Hill Tribes in the Chiang Mai Province of Thailand. I chose this example because I wanted to illustrate a concrete case of how community based ecotourism can be used as a viable development option9. Further, it was an appropriate example because of the large number of people involved, and one of the concerns that many of the interview participants mentioned was concerned with difficulties involved getting so many people to work together. In the Hill Tribes, income obtained from ecotourism is spread equitably throughout the tribe of about 4000 villagers, who reside in 600 villages. Tourists arrange homestays with families to experience their lifestyle in terms of cooking, storytelling, religion, fishing, and numerous other facets. An ecotourism organization was created to arrange the homestays, which take place on a rotation system, and families that are interested have

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9 Note: I am not arguing that ecotourism has been successful for all of the Hill Tribes, there have been extremely detrimental effects for some of the villages where it was not properly implemented and managed.
visitors no more than twice a month. Eighty percent of the money stays with the family that hosts the guests, fifteen percent goes to the ecotourism organization that arranges the details, and five percent goes back into the community so that even those who are not involved directly receive some of the benefits through community improvements and events (REST, 2002).

Not wanting to portray ecotourism as a panacea and acknowledging that negative affects could be quite substantial, I asked interview participants how they thought local residents would react if there was a rape or a theft during one of the homestays. Most were forward thinking and commented, “You can’t judge the whole congregation cuz of one bad representative of the church” and “that through a screening process or other means, it is possible to work on the preventative end”. Ben remarked that as black folks have “been through hell with all of the atrocities”, they have a good sense of whether something is an average situation or not, and would not throw out the project, instead dealing with such issues as they arose.

Responses to the Hill Tribe example ranged from mild interest to expressing that it was a brilliant idea, while others thought it interesting but difficult to extrapolate to St. Helena. Difficulties in the extraction of this example to St. Helena included being skeptical as to who enters their house. The island is not as rural as it once was, which is evident due to increased crime levels. The fact that there may be children in the home was also a deterrent. One participant thought that people would not be interested in that sort of thing right now. This was particularly because the Gullah’s experience has been that as they identify access to their favorite walking trails or paths, white folk come in and take them over, evicting them from the paths their ancestors have walked to the
marsh or to the graveyard for generations. Some participants thought that something similar could work on St. Helena if only people knew what the possibilities were. It was thought that particularly those already involved in tourism would have a higher level of interest, while others would be more skeptical. Most interview participants noted and responded positively to the sharing aspect, and thought that ecotourism implemented similarly to the Hill Tribes would have a high potential for St. Helena. Rodrigo thought it a great idea to investigate, and was going to discuss it further with some other members of the community as a way to enhance the current types of tourism on the island.

Implementation of Ecotourism on St. Helena

Some interview participants detailed similar examples that they thought could work on the island such as: taking people fishing on their boat, bundling and selling herbs such as one known locally as “life-everlasting,” taking people out into the marshes to share their knowledge of the transitory zone, going crabbing, walking on nature trails, learning to quilt or to cast a shrimp net, or sweetgrass basketry. One participant mentioned that there are many things that one does each day that are easy to take for granted, and that they would never have considered being able to earn an income in that manner. A couple of participants mentioned that the Penn Center has done similar things on a smaller scale with Peace Corps volunteers or student interns who have stayed with families. In those cases, they were screened, supervised, and came through a system at the Penn Center before they were sent to stay with a family. When asked about training community members as guides, an emphatic ‘no’ was received by Miranda, who said that guiding is a matter of spirit, and when things are scripted, they become hollow and the tourist does not receive the full experience of the culture.
For ecotourism similar to the Hill Tribe example to be successful on St. Helena, many people mentioned the need for a greater level of organization than is currently present, and that the Hill Tribes seem very centrally organized, with an emphasis on a collective identity rather than on individualism. To make it work on St. Helena, the level of mistrust between primary organizations on St. Helena would need to be further lowered. Many thought that it was possible, but these conditions would have to be remedied for it to succeed to the extent that it has in Thailand. A leader would be required to advocate it continually and to let people know of their options and encourage them. A few participants who are active in the community mentioned that ecotourism has been something tangentially considered but never fully addressed. Yet, they thought the concept would keep being revisited.

Tradeoffs between Cultural Preservation and Economic Gain

As any development will result in social and environmental changes, we must be prepared to deal with trade-offs. The primary trade-off discussed in interviews regarded acceptable levels of commodification. In discussion of the trade-off between preserving the community lifestyle and increasing the economic base by bringing in more tourist activity, participants described the process as a tug of war, where if the door opens wide for tourism, it is also opened to the opportunity for destruction. There is a fine line to be navigated when earning a profit off cherishing and sharing cultural and environmental attributes without the production of a commercialized atmosphere. On the one hand, a culture can receive protection by receiving recognition that what it has is unique and valuable. The big challenge lies in balancing recognition with economic opportunity to the community in a way that does not destroy its value. As cultural-based tourism
involves economic profits obtained from sharing a way of life and traditions, there is a sometimes blurry distinction between exploitation and earning a profit based on what is authentic. Figure 6 places various activities and products that are currently being sold as commodities on St. Helena along a continuum, thereby depicting how interview respondents defined their various levels of acceptability.

Figure 6: Continuum of Various Levels of Acceptable Commodification
Source: Developed by Author

Perhaps there are some things that should be kept out of the tourism realm, or at a minimum controlled by accommodation. Others thought that things of a sensitive nature, such as worship services, could be opened up to a good-will offering rather than a set charge, and that in that way it is possible to find a balance. Some drew the line of acceptability to be between times of festivals and day-to-day life. The majority of the respondents saw tourism as being about teaching and sharing rather than selling. Even though many craft traditions are considered sacred, sharing them can be permissible depending upon the intentions of the sharer. Using them in an educational sense was found by many interview participants to be of a greater value than what could be obtained by putting a price tag on it. Commodification can easily become dangerous, as Miranda
stressed by saying “Look, my people were the commodity, I am not about to let you make me that all over again, that is out.” Miranda commented that,

A monkey could write a book and say ‘this is a Gullah book’, and all the sudden it’s gonna be in that window. Lies or truth, you know. Cuz of that commodification aspect. Because this here tourism is driving a lot of the world right now. So it’s a matter of where your spirit is, and what you’re gonna do with it, and who you answer to in the end, that’s the bottom line.

When asked if it was possible to have a mutually beneficial relationship between tourism and the environment or tourism and a local culture, many thought it was possible to find a balance in everything, and that one would never know for sure unless it was attempted. Others were a bit more pragmatic and discussed how it would have to be controlled by land use, infrastructure, and an understanding of what is important to preserve, what’s best for the community, and what’s important to maintain in terms of the lifestyle.

**Question Three Discussion:**

**What are factors that facilitate or constrain the development of ecotourism on St. Helena?**

In summary, this question explores factors that could work to facilitate or constrain the development of ecotourism on St. Helena. I have identified the following factors as having a significant effect on the development of ecotourism on St. Helena. Interview participants’ understanding of how these factors play out on St. Helena were used to evaluate the ecotourism development potential for the Gullah within their particular context.

- Why, and to what degree, it is important to maintain the Gullah culture
• Identification of community leaders and decision-making structures, along with perceptions of their effectiveness and representativeness

• Identification of community identity boundaries and factors that facilitate or constrain networking

• Consideration of rationales for community involvement and examples of how community is working to define its future

Importance of Maintaining Gullah Culture

Interview participants named two primary reasons that it is important to maintain the Gullah culture. First, the Gullah are endemic, an African based culture that is unique to the Lowcountry—one whose role in the development of America cannot be overstated. Second, the Gullah are seen by several interview participants to be a healing mechanism for race reconciliation. This is possible because Gullah serves as a connection between numerous people from various geographic, ethnic, and social stations because it is a blend of several African and European races and cultures. One Gullah community member stated that,

A culture like this you cannot find all over America, do you understand what I'm saying, this is one of the last, this island. This is one of the last ones where you have Africans, thousands of African Americans living in America, and it’s real. It’s real.

The current situation on St. Helena provides many tangible examples to demonstrate that numerous people feel the Gullah culture is vital to preserve. This is evident from the many advisory groups and activists that work to ensure Gullah’s survival by legal means and through education programs for all age levels in order to revive the level of awareness in traditional customs and heritage. There are three Gullah festivals a year, organized to share cultures, foods, crafts, and outlooks—the largest one
drawing tens of thousands of people to St. Helena Island. In addition, the recent creation of a comprehensive land use plan will go a long way to preserve traditional land use patterns and to retain established customs and the rural way of life. These factors suggest that there is a multitude of interest in exploring additional methods of preservation—such as ecotourism.

**Identification of Community Leaders**

The key players involved in the community can be broken down into three different categories: entrepreneurs, traditionalists, and official entities. There are both Come Yeah’s and Bin Yeah’s that can be grouped as *Entrepreneurs*, such as the Community Development Corporation, The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition, and several tour operators. The manner of some entrepreneur leaders in the community tends to cause further division as community members take sides in disputes concerning the legitimacy of leadership. On the one hand, it is felt that some of the entrepreneurs have a personal agenda and desire to lead and control any issues that arise, and that the narrow line between exploitation and representation is crossed too often. Yet, the entrepreneurs are in large part responsible for extending awareness about the Gullah as they put a lot of focus on external communications, and have a propensity to draw on resources outside of the community to assist in maintaining the Gullah culture. The entrepreneurs tend to be very concerned with the preservation of the culture and serve as a forum for the community to increase their skills and coalesce on issues. They are often the ones who develop plans and plant seeds to bring the community along.

*Traditionalists* are Bin Yeah’s such as Elders, the Churches, and the Penn Center. Opinions were expressed that the traditionalists still have a voice, but as they age and fail
to recruit new people, their role is diminishing. Further, some interview participants see the Penn Center as more of a historical institution than a leader because they have never been officially charged with representing the community. A large segment of the community did not attend when it was operating as a school because they could not afford an education there. As a result, those whose family did not attend often feel disconnected to Penn today and thus do not become involved in community affairs developed by the Penn Center. Because they never developed a relationship, this disconnect tends to occur even though they may be many generations away from the relatives who were unable to attend. Yet, the traditionalists have had a long and distinctive presence in the community and still hold a key position of leadership today. The involvement of the elders enables the maintenance of strong values. The Penn Center serves to provide a focus for the community due to its historical and contemporary role, which gives St. Helena a definite community structure that is generally not found elsewhere. Figure 7 summarizes this categorization scheme by depicting the makeup of each group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Traditionalists</th>
<th>Bin Yeah’s</th>
<th>Come Yeah’s</th>
<th>Officials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneurs</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: Community Identity Delineation
Source: Developed by Author

Many interview participants felt that the two most visible groups on St. Helena, the entrepreneurs and the traditionalists, have primarily the same goals regarding community development, but that they have distinctly different approaches. This leads to tensions, particularly because they are an island community and many people are territorial and hold grudges for a long time. These grudges are often passed down through generations,
much as a story or a basket design would be—this has led to a battling for position within the community. Often, when an outside entity comes in to work with the Gullah community, they choose one of these visible organizations. Unfortunately, they frequently get a distorted representation of the community as a result, because those polar to the chosen organization will often choose not to be involved. For ecotourism to equitably benefit the community, these individuals and organizations that make up the core leadership positions and represent a variety of interests on St. Helena must work together so that no one is alienated.

*Official entities* include local Chambers of Commerce, City and County Governments, and Advisory Committees. To a lesser extent, there are also volunteer organizations, farmer groups, public hearings, and the involvement of such organizations as the NAACP. Some natives of St. Helena feel that many of these organizations are oblivious in terms of being representative of the desires of the community, yet they are the ones who are making decisions that affect the community. This sentiment was evident in tangible terms, as both a Gullah/Geechee Welcome Center and a Black Chamber of Commerce recently opened because the Gullah did not feel their interests were being fully represented. On the other hand, the St. Helena planning representative lives on the island, and plays a very large role in determining community interests, concerns, and desires. There are also other community members on the boards who are very involved in answering people’s questions and informing them of current happenings. This core attends meetings, seeks out information, and takes their role very seriously to inform others. The community charges their leaders to notify them if something requires their presence, while the leaders hold them responsible to come when needed.
Identification of Community Identity Boundaries

As the community is not homogenous and instead, consists of a plethora of classes and personalities, it was necessary to determine whom interview participants were referring to when they spoke of ‘the community’. Often, the separation of who was or was not included was defined either by the length of residency or geographic location.

In terms of time scale, there was often a separation of the Come Yeah’s and the Bin Yeah’s. There is still a very large proportion of people that are native to the island (Bin Yeah’s), but the number of newcomers is rapidly and substantially increasing (Come Yeah’s). The line drawn between the two groups becomes fuzzy since many natives left the area during the great migration to industrial areas, yet often returned once they retired, or else sent their children back for summer vacations in order to minimize the disconnect between these often opposing lifestyles. It seems that people are considered a full part of the community as long as their legacy is there. Miranda confirmed this in her statement that, “There ain’t no such thing as you completely in the north, never; they are part of the community because they are acculturated throughout their upbringing”. This was also evident in another statement, “I can look in their face and see their heirs, I can’t remember their name, but I know their roots.”

Geographic delineations came into play as they divide residents of the island into two separate communities. Most often the Bin Yeah’s are primarily the black folk—the descendents of the slaves—who are largely settled around several roads on the island, and nested within the larger community of Come Yeah’s. The Come Yeah’s include many of the people of Beaufort, Lady’s Island, St. Helena, Fripp Island, and Dataw Island (See Figure 5 on page 55 for a depiction of these locales). There are still very tight
communities nested within the larger population on the island due to the historical plantation layout—where each family has its own geographic territory. This is evident in the cluster style housing, reminiscent to many African villages, where the extended family all lives on the same plot of land or on adjacent land, often with the elder female located toward the center (Twining & Baird, 1990). Particularly, being an island community, and traditionally arranged in separate plantations, these result in the creation of many cliques and distinct groups that vie for control and power in decision-making. The community identity seems to be evolving, initially it included the entire island because it tended to be a secluded, separate entity due to its geographic isolation. Now, it seems the indigenous community is attempting to draw a shell around itself, as people in the gated communities on Fripp and Dataw generally have quite different views than the native residents of St. Helena.

*Internal and External Networking Across Community Boundaries*

There are various levels of decision-making, and it is when those are synchronized that communities persuade the government to get what they want. Most of the time this works, except when organizations become weak and fail to stay active on key issues. Therefore, networking is crucial, both within the community on St. Helena and externally between St. Helena and other organizations at the city, county, state, or federal level. It is important to assess the degree to which community members collaborate to build a strong community capable of demarcating overarching goals and desires, and are involved enough to produce those desired results.

During the interview process, three primary reasons arose regarding the importance of networking for benefiting the community. First, networking and
collaborating on issues results in stronger ordinances—if a plan is locally developed through the diligent work of locals, it will more likely be successful because it is specific to their particular context. Second, the city level is affected by county level decisions that are affected by the state, which is then affected by the federal. This hierarchy is inescapable and so it is necessary to work between those levels. Third, both internal and external networking are important in specific reference to tourism, as it is not possible to draw county or city lines in tourism marketing. This collaboration also results in less leakage of the tourist dollars, as they are more likely to recirculate within the area. Table 4 outlines the primary facilitating and constraining factors that impact the networking success specifically on St. Helena.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Networking: Facilitating and Constraining Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Networking</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Facilitate</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Biocentric Identity</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Historical Interdependence</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Frequency of Community Events</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Previous Successes</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Acknowledgement of Community Leaders Leading to Active Rather Than Passive Relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Reverse ‘Brain Drain’ as Educated Community Members Return</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Constrain</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Insufficient Knowledge of Goals and Agendas of Other Organizations and Individuals</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Lingering Distrust of Larger Socio-Political System</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Feel Misrepresented</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Developed by Author

As shown in Table 4, four principal factors were discussed throughout the interview process that facilitate the success of *internal networking* on St. Helena Island. First, organizations have primarily the same goals and although they may choose different paths to attain their goals, they still work together on many levels to make sure they meet their objectives. Second, both Miranda and Lola mentioned how one of the things about the Gullah that sets them apart from others is that they are close enough to the earth to understand their vital connection to the earth, and to understand that beyond the physical
world there is a separate spiritual world. This has enabled the community to be concerned with harmony and balance with whatever else exists. Further, everyone has something in common as far as the environment—it serves as a common thread, so that they all have an appreciation for it and try to protect it. What varies is what people consider protection, and acceptable levels of change. Third, due to historical circumstances they depended on each other for survival and self-sufficiency, which created an inclination for cooperation. Fourth, community events are common, allowing people to network and collaborate to break down barriers. Many factors illustrate how islanders perceive the community to be an active, willful force, even in the face of resourceful adversaries—such as large-scale developers.

Yet, there are also two chief factors present that have constrained the level of internal networking. First, the division that has occurred due to entities disagreeing with each other’s approach and a high level of distrust has led to a wide rift, which leaves them reluctant to work together. Second, as there does not seem to be a full understanding between groups of what various branches of the community are doing in terms of their missions and agendas, it is difficult to complement each other. Instead, many agendas are overlapped with other groups—leading to competition rather than collaboration.

Three facilitating factors were discussed that lead to efficient external networking with outside entities. First, they have thus far been very successful in collaborating with outside entities who have many of the same ideas and who have been respectful of the community’s wishes. These initial successes seem to be leading to a greater desire for collaborating opportunities. Second, the acknowledgement by outside organizations that
St. Helena has prominent leaders results in more active relations than the previously passive relations of the past. Miranda commented that now that St. Helena is seen by external entities as having more effective leaders, external organizations make more of an effort to treat the Gullah as active players. Third, many Gullah that move away choose to return home, thus resulting in a reverse ‘brain drain’ effect. As they move elsewhere to obtain an education and then opt to return, they bring back a different awareness and set of skills, often leading to an increased activist role for the Gullah community.

Yet, there are also factors that work to constrain networking with external entities. Many of these are due to historical circumstances and relationships. First, there is a lingering distrust and lack of respect for the larger structural system that was historically run by whites, who either controlled or treated communities such as theirs passively. Second, some interview participants do not feel properly represented as outside organizations tend to go directly to more traditional entities within the community because they have historically been the most visible community organizations. Others feel as though they are not properly represented because they are not being suitably informed of meetings.

Levels of Involvement and Subsequent Influence

It was important to discern the level of involvement in the planning, delivery, management, and evaluation of services and programs, as this in turn speaks to the ability of community members to affect the future of the community. Further, rationales for the degree of participation were drawn out during the interview processes. Three factors were discussed that result in a low level of participation in community affairs. First, as many see the onslaught of all the growth on nearby Hilton Head and Myrtle Beach, they
are thus resigned and have a tendency to feel hopeless, as if they have already lost. This was evident in comments about how they say ‘No!’ to development but the developers just keep on developing, and that there is nothing that can slow down progress.

Second, a lack of interest by many of the community also pervades, as people do not do anything to influence their surroundings. As the Gullah have been taught for so long not to value their culture, frequently people will not pay attention due to a subsequent lack of interest. Community organizations have educational seminars, but if people do not take advantage of them, and do not bother to participate, then their considerations are not heard. Often, the Come Yeah’s appear to have much more interest in the larger community’s affairs than the Bin Yeah’s. This was alarmingly clear as I attended a forum on The Reconstruction Period concerning how best to present that period of history to tourists. Out of a crowd of approximately two hundred people, only three were African-Americans—even though reconstruction chiefly affected African-Americans.

Third, as many community members work two jobs, it is difficult to attend meetings during the day, so often the timing is bad even though they would like to be involved. This is related somewhat to levels of interest, as the level of priority they assign to the meetings will impact the effort they expend to leave work to attend the meetings. Fourth, many do not understand the implications due to a lack of awareness, understanding, and education. They have not been trained to think for the future due in part to a shorter time preference, as they are used to considering how best to meet current needs. For example, members of the Penn Club—who have historically been very influential within the community—are aging, and are often told that they need to think
structurally to recruit ‘young blood’ to carry their ideas and wishes forward, yet they merely shrug it off and move onto the next item.

Despite these difficulties, when Ernie, an active community member, was asked to place the community on a continuum in terms of their current strength, he placed them very highly as they have been able to coalesce around several issues of importance. The community can make their voices heard when needed, even if it is not on a regular basis. This was evident when in 1991; the Department of Transportation (DOT) had the money and a plan to widen Highway 21, which runs the length of St. Helena, from Beaufort all the way to the gated community of Fripp Island. It is currently a two-lane road with unpaved shoulders that many island residents without cars walk along on a daily basis. The DOT plan involved widening the highway to five lanes. St. Helena residents got up in opposition and temporarily killed the project, forcing the DOT to hold public meetings, which many community members attended, in order to come up with a reasonable plan. This is still community division on just how the road should be upgraded, but a compromise is being developed. A firm in Atlanta has come up with a plan that the community is happy with, that many people feel will be accepted by the DOT. Community members involved deeply in the road widening plan feel as though they have control over what will happen, as was evident when one interview participant said,

On the highway 21 issue, I don't think it'll happen. What’s gonna happen is what we told them we want to happen, and that is selected improvements, and we will not see any of that other stuff happening.

Also, Beaufort County was the first in the state to pass, by public referendum, a land preservation program where a portion of property taxes are set aside each year in order to pay off up to forty million dollars in bonds for the outright purchase of lands and
development rights. Those are targeted primarily toward rural areas like St. Helena—and almost all of the voters in the county supported it. Jacqueline exclaimed, “Thank god we got advocates who advocate for the whole population for the future.”

It was through people working together and sustaining a wide variety and magnitude of support that brought the Cultural Protection Overlay District alive. In 1997, Beaufort County developed a comprehensive land-use plan, which involved various advisory groups meeting two to three times a month to come up with specific information on zoning restrictions. Rolin mentioned how St. Helena has been somewhat unique in how they've been able to coalesce around visionings for concepts. For example, the Corners Committee for St. Helena came up with a vision for a part of the island known as “the corners area”, an intersection that functions as the primary business area, with four restaurants, an art gallery, and a small assortment of shops. The committee’s vision is to make it the only commercial area for St. Helena, employing the people of St. Helena, run by people of St. Helena, and serving the people of St. Helena as well as visitors to the island. In addition, a recently developed landowners association is looking for ways to help islanders develop economic opportunities on their land while still being able to hold onto it, such as forest products and Spanish moss harvesting. This is allowing opportunities for landowners to think and look at possible options. These successes bode well for ecotourism development potential on St. Helena as they show how the community is indeed aggressively organizing to determine the changing face of St. Helena Island.

This chapter has categorized and discussed in detail the discourse that was developed throughout the interview process that served to answer the three primary
research questions. The following chapter summarizes the research results and expands on the contributions of the study as well as outlining recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

Summary of Results:

In summary, this research examined the relationship between concerns and desires for the future on St. Helena Island, and collected various stakeholder perspectives on the applicability and viability of ecotourism as an alternative method of development. Further, a variety of social and political factors were considered that could work to affect the success of ecotourism on St. Helena.

The primary concerns regarding increased development included land loss, displacement, and power and resource struggles. Ecotourism could decrease land loss pressures by increasing revenues and in turn minimizing two of the causes of land loss: by having more available income to be able to keep pace with increased taxes, and enabling a renewed economic relationship with the land while allowing more job opportunities on the island. Other options complementary to ecotourism that should be further explored for protecting and benefiting from the land include conservation easements, where the development rights are sold or donated. This arrangement holds into perpetuity and drastically lessens the taxes on the land, as it is not considered worth as much if it cannot be developed. This is complementary to ecotourism because relatively undeveloped land is one of the necessary pre-requisites for ecotourism.

Ecotourism could ease displacement tensions in three ways. First, ecotourists have generally been shown to be more sensitive and proactive compared to traditional mass tourists (Wight, 1996b). Second, ecotourism on St. Helena would not require any further
development or infrastructure as the mass tourism infrastructure is already present and can be utilized. Third, the perceptions of living within two worlds, a black one and a white one, may be diminished as the Gullah share their story and connections are made across races.

Ecotourism speaks to the reduction of power and resource struggles as it can go a long way toward meeting the needs of both entrepreneurs and traditionalists. For entrepreneurs, ecotourism would enable more Gullah-owned businesses, thereby bringing a multiplier effect to the local economy. For the traditionalists, ecotourism is concerned with a sharing of culture that does not require substantial changes in the infrastructure or character of the island. Ecotourism does not substantially contribute to reducing tensions due to resource struggles. On the other hand, it does not exacerbate them, as ecotourism does not require much additional resource use.

What is expected and what is desired for the future differs quite strongly for those community members who are involved on a regular basis in community meetings and forums from those who are not. Particularly those community members in a leadership role are of the mindset that it takes work and dedication to build a community, and that a strong community is created, not mere happenstance. Those who are involved tend to impact decision-making at various levels, both internally to St. Helena and beyond.

This research spoke to numbers one, two, and three below of the WWF necessary pre-conditions for ecotourism by considering the level of awareness and interest in ecotourism options on St. Helena. Familiarity with and reactions to ecotourism were necessary as ecotourism could not be successful without positive support and awareness of both possible costs and benefits associated with ecotourism. Without adequate and
effective decision making structures in place, or the potential for those structures, the possibility for successful equitable ecotourism is substantially reduced.

1) A local community aware of potential opportunities, risks, and changes involved with ecotourism,

2) A local community with a high level of interest in ecotourism,

3) Existing or potential structures for effective community decision-making,

4) Landscape or flora/fauna with inherent attractiveness and appeal,

5) An initial market assessment suggesting a potential demand and an effective means of accessing it,

6) And an ecosystem at least able to absorb a managed level of visitation without damage.

Based on responses from interview participants to ecotourism possibilities on St. Helena, a lack of awareness of ecotourism opportunities is the primary factor contributing to a current lack of ecotourism venues. Among community leaders, the concept has been tangentially considered but as of yet, not fully addressed. While the seeds are planted in the minds of the community, they must receive close inspection and scrutiny before they can sprout.

The increasing number of restaurants and tour operators on St. Helena shows that there is clearly an increasing interest in direct involvement with tourism. This high level of interest shown by most interview participants bodes well for the implementation of ecotourism, and would most likely be increased as community members became further aware of opportunities for involvement in ecotourism. Ecotourism is suitable in a rural, neighborhood area, thereby meeting the desires of many interview participants in their vision for the future of St. Helena, while also bringing the desired income opportunities. While many interview participants expressed skepticism due to past and current experiences related to tourism and development, after further discussion, they responded
more positively to ecotourism as an potential alternative method of development.

Acceptable levels of commodification depended primarily on the cultural aspect for sale. While all interview participants considered educational tours completely acceptable, as the focus turned to more private affairs, such as worship, there was an undeniable hesitance regarding the acceptability of opening that experience to tourists.

Many factors have a significant effect on the dev of ecotourism on St. Helena. For ecotourism to be viable there must be a substantial interest in maintaining the Gullah culture. Without this interest, it is unlikely that ecotourism could work, as the culture would lose more of its authenticity as it leans solely toward economic benefits rather than focusing also on cultural benefits. The high levels of activism and advocacy for Gullah are evident as they work to ensure the survival of Gullah through legal, educational, and other means. There does seem to be a significant level of interest in exploring alternative methods of preservation—such as ecotourism.

The community identity delineations and high levels of mistrust could work to constrain ecotourism development as many of the Bin Yeah’s resent being represented by someone who could be considered a Come Yeah. Yet, if the Come Yeah’s—who are more likely to have the ability to contribute financially—can work with the Bin Yeah’s—who are the prime ecotourism marketing draw—than the success of ecotourism would be greatly facilitated by this sort of partnership. In some ways, the Bin Yeah’s are not so distrustful now because many of the Come Yeah’s have learned how to earn the Bin Yeah’s trust and be respectful neighbors. In order to harness any benefits from tourism, increased education, involvement, collaboration, and the creation of more revenue-generating venues are necessary adaptations to that changing economy. These would
allow the continuation of positive social and economic effects and the reduction of displacement and commodification that is common with tourism.

While there are sufficient advocates and a core of involved people in the community, further organization and collaboration is necessary to begin an equitable community based ecotourism venture. Many specific factors work to constrain or facilitate collaboration and networking within the community. Yet if one steps back to see the larger context, the community has been very successful in determining their future on St. Helena. Although there are substantial disagreements on approaches to developmental issues between community entities, they seem to have the same overarching goals and have made good progress on external networking.

In conclusion, the potential benefits of ecotourism do correspond to what is needed to ease interview participant’s identified concerns for the future and to contribute toward the attainment of future visions. Interview participants were largely unaware of opportunities for ecotourism, but generally highly interested once we began to discuss its potential contributions. In terms of constraints and incentives in the development of ecotourism, it was found that the current levels of leadership, involvement, and networking are encouraging but could be further developed to increase the viability of ecotourism on St. Helena.

**Contributions of Research**

This research concurs with Jarrett & Lucas (2002) and Goodwine’s (2000) findings that the Gullah are actively strategizing and communicating in order to ensure an empowered future. Examples of strategizing efforts include how the South Carolina Community Development Corporation is working to train entrepreneurs within the
community, the Penn Center aides and supports the vitality of the culture, the Penn Center for Preservation project served to educate local citizens on the principles and practices of local land use planning, the National Park Service is identifying their role in the preservation and interpretation of Gullah culture, and the high number of festivals and educational forums.

Overall, the level of advocacy and collaboration on St. Helena is very encouraging. Although there are still territorial and control issues, there seems to be a large enough number of people that are involved in a variety of ways of to represent community needs. The existing literature concerned with the Gullah community on St. Helena, with the exception of Jarrett & Lucas (2002) and Goodwine (2000), does not speak to the high levels of advocacy and current strategies being explored and implemented on St. Helena. The nature of Gullah has persisted through the formidable challenges of slavery and has perpetuated their resilience, interdependence, and sense of self-sufficiency (SRDI, 2003). Gullah is not disappearing as many say; merely they are further evolving as a dynamic culture.

This research explores the way this rural coastal community of the South Carolina Lowcountry is experiencing a similar situation to that of many communities in developing countries of the world. On the one hand, the Gullah are a pocket of a less developed region within a larger developed context, as evidenced by unemployment and income levels. On the other hand, while they are facing substantial economic and social dilemmas, they are not as poorly situated as the Gullah literature shows. The Gullah are neither positioned completely within a developed or developing context, and as they lie somewhere in the middle, further ecotourism exploration would be beneficial. As this
research has shown, possibilities for ecotourism are not only applicable for communities or regions in developing countries, but also for some locations within a developed country.

As a result of this study, members of the Gullah community have begun to evaluate ecotourism as an alternative development strategy for maintaining their history, heritage, and culture. As this study was exploratory rather than exhaustive, it will be useful for those involved in further exploring or implementing ecotourism ventures on St. Helena, as they will have an idea of community concerns and ideals regarding ecotourism as an alternative form of development.

**Recommendations for Future Research:**

Pre-conditions four, five, and six went beyond the scope of this thesis, although it is important to note that community responses alone are an insufficient component in determining the viability of ecotourism. Therefore, it is important that future research evaluate these additional pre-conditions for the Gullah in particular.

In addition, while this research discusses the viability of ecotourism within both developing and developed countries, further research could specifically explore and map various conditions between developed and developing regions. This would examine more specifically how the development and implementation of ecotourism is impacted based on the specific developmental context within which it is located.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Community:** my primary interest is in finding out how people feel about the future of St. Helena, the level of impact they feel they have on that, how tourism impacts them, and possibilities for alternative types of economic dev. (et)

- Age
- How long lived on the island
- How many generations have lived on the island
- What profession
- For how long
- How many kids
- Their jobs
- Ever worked in the tourism industry

**Community Issues:**

*Community identity*-
- When you think of your community on St. Helena, who fits into that, everyone that lives on the island, or only people who have been there for so long, or have family roots there or something else?
- And do you know most of them by name, sight, or familiarity with their family name?

*Community cohesiveness*-
- To what extent does the community as a whole tend to be involved in decisions affecting the community- a separation of young vs. old?

**Future outlook for community**-
- What do you want to see the community and the island looking like in 10, 20 years *(ideal)*?
- What do you expect to see the community and the island looking like in 10, 20 years *(concerns)*?
- How likely is it that those two visions could be close to matching?
- Any ideas on what would need to happen to make them more closely match?
- How strongly do you feel it is important to maintain Gullah culture? Think others agree? As evidenced by level of passing down of traditions?

**Community leadership and decision making structures**
- Who are the main groups, organizations, or people who represent the community?
- What is the range of support and backing from community? Do you and others feel adequately represented? If no, why not?
- To what extent do current organizations allow adequate opportunity for participation and to hear desires and concerns from the larger community?
- In your opinion, how likely are members of the Gullah community to affect the future of the community/St. Helena as a whole?

**Tourism:**
- To what extent is it acceptable to you to make a living by sharing traditional aspects of your lifestyle i.e. to charge tourists to enliven some traditions that are fading because they have a market value, such as to reinstate services in the praise houses?
• What do you feel are some of the positive and negative effects of current tourism on the community? (on the people or on the land, etc. but I think leave it open to see what they choose to focus on) and to what extent is that a fair tradeoff?
• To what extent can there ever be a mutually beneficial relationship b/w tourism and culture/environment?
• How important to work with outside tourism organizations and businesses?

Ecotourism
• Have you heard of ecotourism?
• If so, what does it mean to you?
• Here’s an example: Thailand example: are there any elements of that that you think could be applied here? Ideas for here: homestays, workshops for basketry, net making, quilting, herbal walks, black water canoeing, shrimping etc.
• Does it seem that this could help be a solution to some of the issues we were discussing earlier?
• What if there was a rape or a theft? How do you think the community would deal with that? Or that people are making more money, but there are also lots of strangers in the area more often?
• To what extent is it important to work with regional tourism organizations and businesses in nearby cities?

Others: my primary interest is in the role that ecotourism could play in the sustainable economic development of St. Helena for the natives who live there—but the zoning, planning, and other sorts of development related decision making structures are very pertinent and crucial to the success of any type of tourism dev on the island

---------------(for Boris*): particular interest in talking with him because if island were to be developed, chances for ecotourism ventures would most likely be greatly minimized
• From Beaufort?
• How did you decide to become involved in the planning of Beaufort county?
• What do you see as main issues to be dealt with on St. Helena Island?
• What do you expect the island to look like in 10-20 years? Or do you feel like you know what it will look like already since you are familiar with the short and long term plans for the island, and what are those?
• Historical preservation position on review board is vacant, why?
• The historical preservation district overlay: spatial boundaries, purpose statement, what can and cannot be done within that, how strong is that protection if it were to be fought against by someone with a lot of money?
• How much of a voice does the community have, for ex. in regard to widening hwy 21, will they have much say in that (I’m talking particularly about the natives of the island)
• What are your perceptions of the level of cohesiveness and involvement of the native community on St. Helena?
• Who do you see as best representing the community on St. Helena, who would you expect to deal with? (if mention two, do you think they are working for same goals)
• What is your response to the ability of tourism to alleviate some of the pressures currently facing the Gullah, such as land use change and development, land loss, outward migration, and pressures of adaptation/assimilation?
• What sort of things need to be taken into account that you deal with that would affect the tourism industry on the island?
• What does ecotourism mean to you?
• Do you see ecotourism as able to address some of those issues (bringing economics gain to relieve press of increasing property taxes and migration, draws on elements of Gullah lifestyle to increase external and internal awareness and interest, and minimizes leakage)
particular interest in talking with Rolin* because play a role in rural development, both in economic and environmental terms, and so able to put the native islanders situation maybe in a larger context or perspective with what is happening at other locales along the coast

- From Beaufort?
- How did you decide to become involved in the sccl? Background?
- What do you see as main issues facing St. Helena Island (whether environmental or cultural)?
- What do you expect the island to look like in 10-20 years?
- What would you ideally envision for the island?
- How close are those two to matching, anything that you envision could bring them closer?
- The historical preservation district overlay: spatial boundaries, purpose statement, what can and cannot be done within that, how strong is that protection if it were to be fought against by someone with a lot of money?
- What are your perceptions of the level of cohesiveness and involvement of the native community on St. Helena?
- Who do you see as best representing the community on St. Helena? (if mention two, do you think they are working for same goals)
- How much of a voice does the community have in determining future for both them & island, for ex. in regard to widening hwy 21, will they have much say in that (I’m talking particularly about the natives of the island)
- What do you expect the island to look like in 10-20 years?
- What would you ideally envision for the island?
- How close are those two to matching, anything that you envision could bring them closer?
- The historical preservation district overlay: spatial boundaries, purpose statement, what can and cannot be done within that, how strong is that protection if it were to be fought against by someone with a lot of money?
- What are your perceptions of the level of cohesiveness and involvement of the native community on St. Helena?
- Who do you see as best representing the community on St. Helena, who would you expect to deal with? (if mention two, do you think they are working for same goals)
- How much of a voice does the community have in determining the future for both them and the island, for ex. in regard to widening hwy 21, will they have much say in that (I’m talking particularly about the natives of the island)
Chambers of Commerce: my primary interest is in the role that ecotourism could play in the sustainable economic development of St. Helena for the natives who live there—but the tourism infrastructure and network in surrounding area is very pertinent and crucial to the success of any type of tourism dev on the island.

- What is your response to the ability of tourism to alleviate some of the pressures currently facing the Gullah, such as land use change and development, land loss, outward migration, and pressures of adaptation/assimilation?
- What do you expect the island to look like in 10-20 years?
- What does ecotourism mean to you?
- How much does it play a role in your overall vision for the area?
- Do you see ecotourism as able to address some of those issues (bringing economics gain to relieve press of increasing property taxes and migration, draws on elements of Gullah lifestyle to increase external and internal awareness and interest, and minimizes leakage)
- How much of a draw for tourism, or particularly ecotourism on St. Helena?
- See any conditions missing on St. Helena that would be necessary for successful ecotourism?
- What are your perceptions of the level of cohesiveness and involvement of the native community on St. Helena?
- How could the chamber contribute to successful ecotourism on St. Helena—particular actions, is there already a relationship developed with them?
- Who do you see as best representing the community on St. Helena, who would you expect to deal with? (if mention two, do you think they are working for same goals)
- Any idea of level of community involvement in the tourism industry overall? What sectors and in terms of numbers?
- In your view, what steps need to be taken to ensure that the relationship b/w tourism and culture or tourism and the environment is mutually beneficial?
- Tourism in state, region, and Beaufort itself, can you give me a summary of trends you are seeing or lead me to any appropriate literature?
- I understand there has been a black chamber of commerce opened, could you give me any details on that?

*These are pseudonyms*
APPENDIX B

PHOTOGRAPHS OF STUDY SITE

Hunting Island Beach—Adjacent to St. Helena

Entrance to Fripp Island—Adjacent to St. Helena
Looking Southwest—Hammocks in the Marsh

Looking West—A Familiar Sight
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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10 To explain the apparent discrepancy in this citation, the abstract itself was for 2001-2002 data, but located within that abstract was the most recent figures concerned with per capita income across races in Beaufort County, which were for 1998.


