

## ‘Opening up to the World’: An Exploration of Residents’ Opinions on and Perceptions of St Helena Island’s Tourism Development

Ronnie Donaldson\*

*Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa, Email, [rdonaldson@sun.ac.za](mailto:rdonaldson@sun.ac.za), ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6710-0220>*

Adrian Forssman

*Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Stellenbosch University, Stellenbosch, South Africa, Email, [aforssm@gmail.com](mailto:aforssm@gmail.com), ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1491-5039>*

*\*Corresponding Author*

**How to cite this article:** Donaldson, R. & Forssman, A. (2020). ‘Opening up to the World’: An Exploration of Residents’ Opinions on and Perceptions of St Helena Island’s Tourism Development. African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 9(6):944-958. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720-61>

### Abstract

St Helena Island, often regarded as one of the most remote places on earth, is an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom and generally considered geographically as ‘part’ of Africa. Economically, the island is wholly dependent on British aid. Once important as a stop for trading ships for some 400 years, the island has suffered the same problems faced by many other small island economies: a lack of natural resources, diseconomies of scale, net outmigration, and a dependence on aid and remittances. Tourism has been earmarked as an important sector which has the potential to contribute significantly to the economy of St Helena, especially after the completion of the St Helena Airport. The purpose of this research reported here was to determine the level of tourism development on St Helena since its ‘opening up’ to the world after the first passenger flight touched down in 2017, by applying Butler’s tourism area life cycle model and Doxey’s irridex model. These models provided the framework for qualitatively determining the level of tourism development. An e-survey was conducted among residents about their expectations of tourism development. St Helena has been trapped in the *involvement stage* for decades while being inhibited by its remoteness and accessibility issues. It is clear from the evidence that some of the island’s tourism characteristics relate to the *involvement stage*, whereas others are synonymous with the *development stage*. It is thus reasonable to argued that St Helena currently lies in a flux between the *involvement* and *development stages* of the Butler model. The opening of the airport is conceivably the springboard necessary for leaving behind all the impeding features of the *involvement stage*.

**Keywords:** St Helena Island, tourism development, irridex, tourism area life cycle model, tourism impacts

### Introduction

St Helena Island (hereafter referred to as St Helena) is a solitary island in the South Atlantic often regarded as one of the most remote places on earth. It is an Overseas Territory of the United Kingdom (UK) and geographically considered ‘part’ of Africa as it lies some 1,950 kilometres west of the Angolan coast. St Helena is small, measuring 16 by 8 kilometres and has a population of 4,349 (2016 census) of which 75% are employed, and the majority (57% of inhabitants) are aged between 20 and 64 (Labesh, 2020). Economically the island is wholly

dependent on British aid. Ascension, Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island are dependencies of St Helena.

When the island was discovered by the Portuguese on 2 May (the feast day of St Helena) 1502, there were no indigenous people living there. The Dutch formally claimed St Helena in 1633, although there is no evidence that they ever occupied, colonised or fortified it. By 1651 the Dutch had virtually abandoned the island in favour of their settlement at the Cape of Good Hope. In 1659 the East India Company occupied and administered the island as a key station on the route to Asia until 1834 when it became a British colony. Since the early 1800s the value of the island diminished due to British occupation of the Cape in South Africa, the change from sail to steam and the opening of the Suez Canal, all progressively contributing to a reduction in the number of ships stopping over at the island. In the decade after the Second World War (the 1950s) the global shift to air travel, the fewer than 20 ships a year calling, at the island and the absence of an airport caused the island to be “completely cut off but for the minimal shipping service subsidized by Britain” (Gillett, 1983, 7). Union Castle withdrew from the route at the end of 1977, forcing the British government to purchase a ship to service the remote island and its three dependencies from Cape Town. The first Royal Mail Ship (*RMS St Helena*) was too small for the island’s needs and by 1990 the new *RMS St Helena*’s maiden voyage took place. The *RMS St Helena* was one of the last RMSs in the world and it was a special cargo-passenger ship that provided a steady flow of small numbers of tourists to the island. Although the ship became the prime feeder of tourists to the island, it made its last trip to St Helena in January 2018.

Once important as a stop for trading ships for some 400 years, the island has suffered the same problems faced by many other small island economies: a lack of natural resources, diseconomies of scale, net outmigration, and a dependence on aid and remittances (Royale, 2004; Wortman et al., 2016). The academic literature on the tourism geography of St Helena is limited to the pioneering work of Royle (1991a, 1991b, 1992, 1995, 1997a, 1997, 2010). In his inaugural address paper he concluded that the problem is that the RMS “cannot deliver enough visitors to make much difference to the island’s bleak economic situation [and] without an airport the economy of St Helena will remain moribund; its society subject to massive emigration loss; and the future of the island itself must be in some doubt” (Royle, 2010, 19-20). A mere ten years after this comment the main question was how the island would be transformed and develop into a viable tourism destination?

For small islands like St Helena “accessibility is a key quality, since isolation and small size are considered as inherent characteristics of ‘islandness’” (Karampela et al., 2014, 293). The completion of the St Helena Airport in 2016 literally opened the island to the world. The first scheduled airline service in St Helena’s history occurred on 14 October 2017 when SA Airlink (the only airline currently with an air-service licence) began weekly flights between Johannesburg and St Helena Airport transporting fewer than 100 passengers at a time. The island therefore qualifies as a special case study for exploring how tourism development could take place given the advantage of learning lessons from other established tourism places around the world. Because it may be too soon to start investigating opinions, especially among the island’s residents, regarding the way in which tourism development is seen to unfold, the findings must be seen as preliminary indicators of issues that may emerge in the near future. The paper is based on an e-survey exploring residents’ expectations of tourism development.

### **Theoretical context**

The historical development of tourism areas is complex, diverse and site dependent. As a case study, St Helena presents an ideal opportunity to investigate tourism development by applying Butler’s (1980) tourism area life cycle model and Doxey’s (1975) irridex model. Butler

recognised how fragile tourist attractions could be and how they need to be carefully managed in order to prevent them from exceeding their capacity limits. The model involves a tourism life cycle comprising six stages, the sixth stage featuring five possible scenarios ranging from total decline to complete rejuvenation. It is a standard model used in tourism studies and has been successfully applied to many different tourist areas across the globe (Zhong et al., 2007). According to the Butler model visitors will initially come to an area in small numbers due to restrictions on access and facilities as well as limited knowledge about the destination. As more facilities are provided and awareness grows, visitor numbers begin to rise. With greater marketing efforts, the spread of information about and knowledge of the destination as well as improved facilities, the popularity of the area grows rapidly (Butler, 1980). The destination eventually reaches its carrying capacity followed by a decline in the number of visitors. This downturn can be the result of social factors (e.g. overcrowding, displeased locals), environmental factors (e.g. pollution, land scarcity) or physical factors such as a deterioration of the tourism infrastructure. As the attractiveness of the area weakens due to overuse and the adverse impacts of visitors, the actual numbers of visitors start to wane (Butler, 1980).

The first period in the Butler model is the *exploration stage* which represents the starting point of the tourism development process. This stage portrays a very limited number of tourists visiting an area. It is a stage often linked to Cohen's (1972) idea of characterising early tourists as 'explorers' who pioneer the discovery of the new tourist area. Such tourists are generally attracted to the area because of its 'uniqueness' as well as its considerably different natural and cultural features (Butler, 1980). Johnston (2001) regards it as the pre-tourism stage in the development process. During the exploration phase there are very few, even none tourist facilities in place so that visitors are forced to use the facilities the local residents use, so leading to high levels of interaction between locals and visitors. This strong interaction and involvement with local communities may itself be a special attraction for some visitors. During this stage the physical and social aspects of the tourist area remain quite unaffected by the influence of tourism. The natural environment retains its virgin characteristics as it has not been subjected to modifications by tourist interference. Continued visits by tourists to the area may prompt local residents to react to the potential economic benefits so beginning to provide basic services and facilities for tourists. This triggers the *involvement stage* of tourism development.

As visitor numbers slowly rise and assume a degree of regularity in the arrivals and departures, some local residents may enter this next stage. Residents may begin to realise the economic opportunities of tourism in their area associated with the swelling of visitor numbers. Residents begin to provide services and facilities aimed directly at tourists. Interaction between visitors and locals remains high and may even grow as a result of locals catering for visitors (Butler, 1980). Patterns in tourism arrivals begin to evolve with certain times of the year receiving more visitors than other times. Adjustments to the social patterns of the locals involved in tourism can be expected and may lead to the emergence of acknowledged tourist seasons in the area. These signal the start of the destination's tourism era as it begins to develop an established reputation, either through word of mouth by tourists who have visited the area or through advertising and promotional activities (Williams & Lew, 2014). At this stage the basic initial market area for tourists becomes well defined. Tourist travel arrangements become better organised and access to the tourist area becomes easier. Local residents may begin to put pressure on government and public agencies to provide facilities and services for visitors while also upgrading existing infrastructure to better cater for tourism. Tourist attitudes during the involvement stage correspond with stage one of Doxey's irridex model which is known as 'the level of euphoria' when locals become excited and enthusiastic about the prospects of tourism development in their area. Local residents are welcoming to visitors and there is a mutual sense

of satisfaction. Locals realise that opportunities are aplenty while money begins to flow into the destination area (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017).

During the third stage, the *development stage*, the tourist market area becomes well defined, mostly as a result of the intense marketing and advertising of the destination area. This stage represents a move away from local involvement in and control of the tourism development process. Most local residents no longer provide the basic tourism facilities and services having been superseded by larger external organisations and tourism businesses (Butler, 1980). Local facilities begin to fade away and are replaced by larger, more modern tourist facilities. The involvement and planning of tourist facilities becomes subject to national and regional governments and corporations. The tourist destination begins to attract increased local and foreign investments with inevitable higher levels of external control. Specific types of tourism ventures become apparent as the tourism products in the area diversify. This stage is characterised by the development and specific marketing of natural and cultural attractions. As these places continue to gain popularity the original attractions may be supplemented by artificial imported facilities (Butler, 1980). As the destination's popularity grows and advertising campaigns escalate, the area develops a rapidly expanding clientele drawn from a wider geographic market (Williams & Lew, 2014). During this stage changes in the appearance of the tourist destination become noticeable as tourism activities begin to alter the natural and physical landscapes. It can be expected that such changes will not be welcomed or approved by all of the local population. According to Doxey's irridex model it can be expected that during the development stage some members of the local population may develop feelings of irritation toward tourists and tourist activities as a whole. At this stage the tourist season has become well established and tourist numbers during peak times will probably equal or even exceed the number of permanent residents (Butler, 1980). This leads to higher levels of irritation among some of the local population (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017). The stage paves the way for the 'individual mass tourist' according to Cohen's (1972) classification of tourist typologies. Such tourists enjoy the comfort of guided groups although some may occasionally venture out on their own. Eventually, the rate of increase in visitor numbers will begin to slow down thus signalling that the *consolidation stage* has been reached, followed by a post-stagnation stage of which Butler proposes two alternative stages: the *decline stage* or the *rejuvenation stage* (Williams & Lew, 2014).

Doxey's irridex is based on the premise that local communities pass through a sequence of reactions and attitudes in line with tourism growth and development in their area. The model measures residents' feelings toward tourists or more specifically, their level of irritation. Feelings range from levels of euphoria (stage one) to outright antagonism (the fourth and final stage). During the early stages of tourism development host communities are generally enthusiastic and thrilled about the novel developments taking place. There are many new opportunities for locals and tourism is seen as beneficial to all. During this first stage attitudes to tourism are the most positive. As the tourism industry in an area begins to expand, locals begin to take tourists for granted. Locals see tourists as targets for profit making and the interactions between them become less personal and more formal. This is the second stage of the irridex model where locals begin to show signs of apathy. The third stage is entered when a tourist area begins to reach a saturation point and irritation among locals becomes evident. The area begins to struggle to handle the high tourist numbers and locals become affected as a result. The fourth and final stage is reached when irritation among locals becomes more overt and mutual politeness completely gives way to antagonism. People see the tourist as a negative entity and the harbinger of all things wrong with the tourist area (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017).

## Methodology

The paper is a qualitative exploration of participants' reported experiences. An online questionnaire survey directed at residents of St Helena was undertaken using Google Forms. The purpose was to determine the residents' opinions and perceptions of tourism development on the island since the opening of the airport. Open- and closed-ended questions as well as ranking and rating-scale questions were asked. The social media platform Facebook was used as the distribution point for the questionnaire. The survey material was posted on three popular Facebook pages, namely, *St Helena Travel*, *St Helena News* and *St Helena Tourism* which have a combined following of approximately 25,000 users. The administrators of each Facebook page were contacted beforehand and their permission requested. The survey material consisted of a consent form, a document specifying the ethical clearance for the project given by the University of Stellenbosch (project number GEO-BA-2018-7273), and the questionnaire link to Google Forms. The survey yielded 25 responses.

In addition to the online surveys the *St Helena News* Facebook page was also to mine opinions and comments regarding a proposed large development called Trade Winds Ocean Village. This was done to get a counter-response to the formal environmental impact assessment's (EIA) public participation process done for the development. Moreover, an inventory of secondary data the current tourism product (hotels, guest houses, attractions, activities, etc.) was gathered through an analysis of existing literature and studies of tourism on St Helena. A variety of sources, including government plans, academic journal articles, books and travel websites, was used for this component.

## Results

### *The current tourism product*

Tourism growth and development was kick-started with the opening of the St Helena Airport in 2017. Tourism products were categorised as primary and secondary products according to Jansen-Verbeke's (1986) framework. Both types of product are distributed across the island with the main cluster in the island's capital Jamestown. Historical, cultural and natural tourism products were classed as primary and accommodation, restaurants, shops and places of entertainment were all classified as secondary.

Historically, the island is significant because it is the second oldest British colony in existence. Its remote location meant that it was used as a place of exile for the likes of Napoleon Bonaparte (1815-21), Zulu King Dinuzulu kaCetshwayo as well as over 5000 Boer War prisoners. Napoleon died on the island in 1821. The majority of residents on St Helena are of the Anglican faith and there are several churches on the island. Tripadvisor reviews have become a valuable source of information in the tourism sector (see for example Fitchett & Hoogendoorn, 2019; 2018). Jacob's Ladder in Jamestown is an iconic landmark on St Helena and popular attraction for tourists (SHT, 2018). It has been voted as one of the 'seven wonders' of St Helena and also rated by Tripadvisor as the number one thing to do on St Helena.

Millions of years of isolation have allowed the evolution on St Helena of distinctive biogeography existing in few other places. The island is home to an astonishing 30% of all endemic species found throughout the UK and its overseas territories. Its almost pristine natural environment is a major drawcard for tourists who want an authentic natural experience. Both on land and the surrounding sea, the island hosts an abundance of flora and fauna. St Helena is home to approximately 1100 land vertebrates, 400 of which are endemic to the island (Cronk, 1987). The geology of the island is unique and adds to the spectacular scenery of the island. Much of the coastal areas have no vegetation, only barren rock and jagged cliffs (Royle, 2004). The island has its own microclimate.



Insofar as the secondary tourism products are concerned the island offers a range of different accommodation options for potential visitors. In this study the accommodation options available on the island we divided into four categories: hotels, guesthouses, self-catering and bed and breakfasts (B&Bs). The island's total sleeping capacity in 2018, taking all accommodation types into account was 236. Hotels constitute the largest room capacity of the accommodation types at 102 (43% of the island's total room capacity), followed by self-catering (77), guesthouses (50) and B&Bs (7). Self-catering accommodation represents the second largest contributor to St Helena's total accommodation capacity with a total of 22 properties. None of these properties appear on Tripadvisor and only one can be seen on Airbnb. The rest of the accommodation on the island is provided by B&Bs and guesthouses which differ from self-catering in that they include meals as part of the stay. There are three B&Bs and six guesthouses which together constitute 24% of the island's total accommodation capacity. Guesthouses have a more visible online presence than self-catering properties with three of the six guesthouses appearing on Tripadvisor and one on Airbnb. Restaurants always play a part in the attractiveness of tourist destinations (Sparks et al., 2001). According to St Helena Tourism (2018) there were 23 restaurants on the island in 2018 including traditional restaurants and bars, cafes and takeaway outlets. Fourteen of the 23 restaurants are located in Jamestown. There is not one chain or franchise restaurant and all are locally owned. According to St Helena Tourism there are 12 registered island tour operators as well as six marine and fishing tour operators. These operators offer a variety of services, including guided walks, driven excursions, nature tours, fishing tours, historic tours, diving tours and conservation tours. Operators offer flexible tours where visitors can personalise their island experiences. The tour companies on the island are all locally owned and run as private establishments. These organisations are usually very basic with no website and the only way to contact them is by direct email to the proprietor or via contact with the tourism office. Only four of the 18 tour operators have their own websites through which their activities and offerings can be viewed and bookings arranged.

### ***Tourism market***

The dominant inhibitor of tourism development on St Helena has long been its extremely remote location (Royale, 2004). Prior to the completion of the St Helena Airport in 2016 the only way to reach the island was by boat. Historical data collected aboard the *RMS St Helena* (previous the primary mode of transport to the island) revealed that the mean age for tourists visiting the island was over 60 years. Commercial flights between Johannesburg and St Helena began operation in October 2017<sup>1</sup>. The flights are weekly and are operated by SA Airlink, a privately owned South African airline. The Embraer190 aircraft can accommodate up to 98 passengers (SA Airlink, 2018). However, history was made in July 2020 when a large passenger jet, a chartered Titan Airways Boeing 757-200, landed safely on the island on its first attempt.<sup>2</sup> The flight was part of a repatriation mission due to Covid-19.

---

<sup>1</sup> A return flight from Johannesburg costs around R17 000 (as of November 2019) which is approximately twice the cost of a flight from Johannesburg to New York City. The price and convenience factors are even worse for non-South African visitors who have to travel to Johannesburg first and only then to St Helena. In the summer season there are additional flights direct from Cape Town. The additional flights mean that visitors have the option of stays of three, four, seven or even ten nights as opposed to one week.

<sup>2</sup> After the completion of the airport in 2016 it was discovered that its location was in the direct path of strong crosswinds. This phenomenon, known as horizontal wind shear, means that only small aircraft can safely land and take off at St Helena Airport. Large aircraft, it was believed, cannot land on the island so that long-haul flights from distant locations are not an option (Buckley, 2017). Even small aircraft struggle to land because of the

Given the introduction of scheduled flights, it is envisioned that visitor demographics will vary and very likely reflect a lower median age. Currently, St Helena’s two largest source markets are South Africa and the UK, with smaller markets in France, Germany and the USA. As part of the island’s Tourism Marketing Strategy marketing efforts in the UK and South Africa will continue unabated while increasing the marketing aimed at the rest of Europe (particularly France due to the Napoleonic heritage) and North America (SHT, 2018). However, at a post-Covid-19 tourism recovery workshop in June 2020 it was noted that there is a common belief that the air service should be a direct flight from the UK and not via South Africa (*St Helena Independent*, 2020) and that the primary source market target should be Europe.

The escalation in visitor numbers in terms of the mode of travel is evident in Figure 1. Within two years of air connections these visitor numbers have surpassed those of the RMS of previous years. Most arrivals in St Helena are non-Saint tourists (‘citizens’ of St Helena are referred to as Saints), followed by returning Saints (visiting friends and relatives (VFR)), returning residents and business arrivals. Non-Saint tourists tend to stay for a week, whereas VFR Saints stay for about a month. Some 37% of tourists are British, 21% South African, 13% European other than British, German or French, 9% American or from the Caribbean and the rest from elsewhere in the world (Economic Development Committee Meeting Summary, 2020).

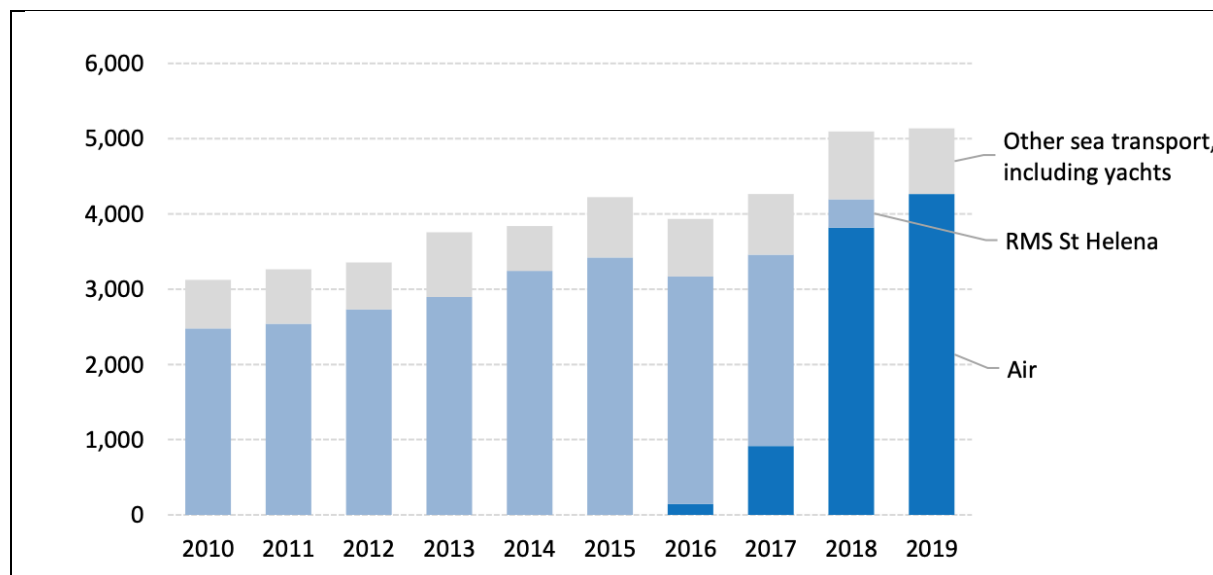


Figure 1. Visitation numbers according to mode of transport: Tourist arrivals 2010-2019 (Source: St Helena Government, 2020, 1)

St Helena tourism has noticeable seasonality trends, typically receiving the most visitors during the summer months, generally October to April. December was the most popular month for tourists arriving on the *RMS St Helena*. February is the premier month for visitors arriving by yacht.

A study of past visitors to the island by Forssman (2018) noted that 90% of the survey respondents were taken by the friendliness of the Saints, suggesting Doxey’s phase of euphoria. This finding is however, not without some doubt as friendliness may just be a cultural trait of

extreme crosswinds and many flights have been delayed and disrupted as a result (SA Airlink, 2018). The variability of weather conditions on the island is thus a concern for travellers and this places added pressure on the growth of air transport to the island.

the islanders. For example, in an article in the *St Helena Independent*, Williams (2020, 15) has noted that: “A tourism strategy for the island is useless without the ‘Soul’ of St Helena which is the people themselves who are working within the industries, within the soul is a depth and character that surpasses policy and plans and, if the policy is not ‘people’ focussed then it is doomed to failure [as] policies are renowned for driving a wedge between the private and public sectors.”

### ***Residents’ attitudes***

Doxey’s irridex model justifies residents’ feelings at the different stages of a tourist destination cycle. This relatively simple conceptual model is applicable since it presents a clear indication of levels of tourism development and changes in the attitudes of host populations (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017). St Helenian residents having access to the Internet were targeted to participate in this study (see methodology section). The aim was to determine their attitudes to tourism development after the improved access to the island owing to the airport. The survey revealed that 17 of the 25 participants were in favour of continued tourism development on the island while eight were against it. One respondent expressed resentment at increased tourism due to the economic and cultural changes it engenders, as:

The expenses for the locals, their wages will not cover the increase of utility bills, food and produce, and the affordability of properties. The attitude of local lifestyle and community structure will change and have a negative effect on the culture. The rich will become richer and the poor...poorer!

Another respondent was more blunt about the fact that the current shortcomings need to be looked at first:

It’s a waste of taxpayers money, the many problems Saint Helena already have needs attention, roads and infrastructure needs [sic] a high level of focus, schools and education needs [sic] reviewed, schools needs renovation as these buildings are so old, dump and out dated, Tourism is a joke, a waste of taxpayers money and a scam in front of our very eyes.

It is noteworthy that 18 of the respondents felt that tourism is essential for prosperity of St Helena. This confirms that locals are optimistic about tourism and that they are aware of the tangible benefits tourism can have for the islanders. This idea is reinforced by a respondent who observed that “Everything is in place for tourism to flourish, the only thing needed are the actual tourists.” Fifteen of the respondents reported that they had not identified any rise in tourist numbers since the completion of the airport. Overall, the respondents agree that there is a positive bond between locals and tourists; that more flights to the island are necessary; that the number of Saints involved in tourism has increased over the past couple of years; that current developments taking place on the island are geared more to the needs of tourists than those of locals; that tourism numbers need to increase; and that locals are tolerant of tourists. These findings confirm that the Saints are eager for the tourism benefits to expand become greater but that the current visitor numbers are simply not sufficient for this to happen. The results regarding whether tourism will affect the traditional way of life on the island were inconclusive.

According to Baldacchio (2006, 189) the tourism footprint is “much less significant on cold water islands [such as St Helena], even though the potential damage which even that may cause to the environment is larger.” Regarding potential impacts on the natural environment 17



of the respondents maintained that the island's natural environment is not under threat. One respondent stated that there are:

Not sufficient numbers of tourists to threaten the natural environment. Indeed it [has] had a positive effect insofar as this type of tourism has encouraged more tourism and brought the issue of safeguarding the environment to everyone's attention. Hopefully residents will now be more considerate [for] the environment we live in.

Another respondent argued that:

We need to put in place more regulations/policies regarding the natural environment. A good example is that recently an overseas company wanted to start diving holidays targeting Whale Shark aggregation sites. As St Helena is the only know location in the world where both sexes of mature Whales Sharks gather, it is probable that it is extremely important. There is no data on what affect a large increase in diving would have.

Respondents were questioned whether St Helena's tourism strategy of attracting 600 visitors per week before 2021 is realistic. Eighteen contended that it is unfeasible, this despite 18 having asserted that tourism is be essential for the prosperity of the island. The responses pointed to the concern that a focus on tourism will take centre stage. One respondent remarked: "Basic areas of the island need rapid improvement before our island is swamped with tourists" as 600 visitors per week will be far too many for such a small island and its facilities. It will disregard the locals' lifestyle culture. The respondent further stated:

It will spoil and ruin the uniqueness, local culture that the island has to offer. We would like to attract the right kind of tourists who will appreciate and respect the island and its people.

Another respondent pointed out some weaknesses and problems the island experiences:

It's rather difficult to understand the current government and the philosophy of what it is trying to do. In my opinion I don't understand how some local people can survive on the St Helena ... The island as it stands cannot feed, water and supply the people that is already here. By adding more people the Government and the Island must first face and fix the many problems it already has.

There were also positive sentiments about the benefits that accrue from spending:

Provided that the 600 visitors spend money on St Helena which goes back into the economy to develop infrastructure and services, i.e. roads and airport maintenance [the plan's targeted is worthwhile]. Increased tourism will help to create employment opportunities and promotes cultural awareness, whilst helping to preserve local culture and traditions.

In small isolated places like islands, socio-political dynamics can change quickly. In August 2019, a year after the online survey was conducted, South African businessman Paul O'Sullivan, self-described (through his St Helena Corporation PLC website) as the single largest investor (second only to the UK Government) in St Helena, announced plans to develop

an estate on the 105 acres of land he purchased in the Horse Pasture area. His intention is to develop the area into a luxury residential estate with a planned 145 units. Eight acres comprising a public country park, picnic and camping areas with children's playground and ablution facilities will also be included. The developer's vision for tourism to the island is targeted at very high-income travellers, yet low in volume. Known as Trade Winds Ocean Village, the development will complement the developer's proposed Trade Winds Golf Resort and Hotel development to be located nearby. O'Sullivan said:

This latest acquisition is intended to consolidate our position on the island, in advance of a capital-raising to commence the developments we have lined up. Together with our ambition to establish direct flights from Europe we believe the island has a very bright future in terms of attracting tourism and investment ([Saint FM Community Radio](#) Facebook page, 12 August 2019).

He intends to enhance foreign investment through homeownership. The lodge-style homes are expected to sell for ZAR 1.2 million to ZAR 16.9 million each. In all four public participation meetings held as part of the EIA (which was attended in total by 55 persons) not a single negative comment was raised (Labesh, 2020). However, the outrage generated over this project on social media presented a very different picture. Individuals commenting on the *St Helena News* Facebook page made the following selection of remarks:

I always thought that there were strict rules on who could purchase land and property on St Helena. I always thought it was Saints or those of Saint descent or a naturalised Saint that could purchase land and property.

This shouldn't be granted as the next thing is that St Helena would be flying the South African flag. Wake up and think what you are agreeing to. Listen to the Saints and forget about the fffff signs.

From all these posts there is one common bond and that is for the protection and unity of the island and its Saint Helenian Heritage.

Nooo!!!! This should not be allowed to happen. We are losing our little island bit by bit to outsiders.

The island is for sale to the highest bidder. End of my theory.

Why don't Mandy sell this land off to the locals who are looking for land to build their homes. Our land, our heritage, our memories being sold down the lane. We must stop these sales and purchases ... and especially to controversial people!!!!

One Facebook comment spoke directly to one of the EIA requirements regarding the "impact on the sense of history, sense of place and heritage of the area and the sociocultural and cultural-historic characteristics and sensitivities of the area" (Labesh, 2020, 30). The EIA report misleadingly indicated that such impacts would be addressed as follows:

The proposed development should be halted if any other unknown objects, sites or features of an archaeological nature are uncovered during development activities, until inspection and recommendations of the way forward can be given.

More often than not developers (especially those coming from outside) think they incorporate sense of place and history in their plans but, in fact, do they provide the impetus for the destroying these.

## Discussion

Butler's (1980) model premises that during the *development stage* a tourist area will begin to develop a clear tourist season, i.e. times of high tourist activity and times of low tourist activity are noticeable and consistent. As the island reached a passenger arrival total of 5,000 for the first time ever in 2018, one has to interpret this significant number in the context of the current accommodation available on the island. Tourist accommodation is still relatively modest with only three hotels complemented by self-catering lodges and guesthouses owned by Saints. Only one hotel, the Mantis St Helena, is owned by an international hotel chain (SHT, 2018). A similar situation of local ownership exists for the restaurants on the island with no chain restaurants or fast-food outlets, only homespun establishments owned and run by Saints. This corresponds best to stage two, of the *involvement stage*, of the Butler model where residents provide the majority of the services and facilities for visitors. This is reflected in the tours and activities arranged on the island by companies that are basic and locally run (SHT, 2018). Some of the destination life cycle and tourism impacts mentioned by Szromek (2019), such as economic impacts (employment, currency exchange), environmental impacts (unspoiled), destination characteristics (visitor growth rate is low, expenses per person are high) substantiates St Helena being in an involvement stage.

Residents' attitudes concerning the evolution of tourism are crucial determinants of the ability of a destination's tourism sector to develop (Figueroa & Rotarou, 2016). This investigation has revealed that residents of St Helena feel that tourist numbers are too, that they should increase and that tourism is essential for the prosperity of the the island's inhabitants. It was found that most Saints have a positive attitude to tourists. The locals also reckon that there are not enough tourists visiting the island and that they would like the introduction of more flights to the island. It is clear that the residents of St Helena are still in the first stage of Doxey's model, that is the euphoria stage. During this stage tourist numbers remain low and while optimism about the benefits of tourism are high (Doxey, 1975). The Doxey model can the Butler model are consistent with one another in the sense that locals' attitudes shift according to the different stages in the tourism area development life cycle (Pavlić & Portolan, 2016).

Faulkner and Tideswell (1997) note that the irridex and the life cycle models assume some degrees of homogeneity and unidirectionality in community reactions to tourism development. This shows that the Saints are very confident about tourism and the benefits it can bring, so confirming the island to be in the *involvement stage* of the Butler model. The majority of the survey participants stated that they have noticed an increment in the number of Saints involved in the tourism industry over the last decade, thus correlating with the *involvement stage* of the life cycle model where local involvement in tourist activities is high. The respondents agreed that most of new developments on the island are geared toward tourism and that the government is responsible for promoting such developments. These findings match up with the characteristics of Butler's *development stage* where tourist facilities become subject to national and regional governments.

As mentioned in the literature overview, the stages of the Doxey and Butler models are to some extent congruous (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017). The findings of the residents' interviews showed that the attitudes of the locals are consistent with the early stages of Doxey's model which corresponds to stages one and two of Butler's model. When perceived benefits are higher than perceived costs, local residents are likely to have positive attitudes to further development

of the tourism sector (Diedrich & García-Buades, 2009; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). This relationship can be explained by social disruption theory which is closely linked to ‘boomtown’ sociology literature. Boomtowns are “locations experiencing a sudden rapid growth in demand for social services and community infrastructure” (Diedrich & García-Buades, 2009, 518). The theory suggests that once the first shock of change wears off, local residents adjust to the new situation and the perception of costs may level off or even decline. However, when rising perceptions of benefits slow down, the rate in perceptions of costs will start to rise again. This latter rise in perceptions is no longer offset by a rapid increase of benefits, so leaving local residents with a more negative view of tourism development (Diedrich & García-Buades, 2009). Residents’ feelings will “range from euphoria to regret over the span of the life cycle” (Johnson, Snepenger & Akis, 1994, 630). Furthermore, the economic dependence factor hypothesises “that the greater the economic dependence on tourism of an individual resident or a community, the more favourable the individual or collective attitude towards tourism whereas the absence of economic dependence on tourism-related activity is associated with a lack of support for its further development” (Vargas-Sánchez, Porrás-Bueno & Plaza-Mejía 2009, 31). Contrarily, it has been found that where residents of communities depend on tourism, they “prefer less tourism development and perceive the impacts of tourism as more negative than the residents of communities that depend less on this activity” (McGehee & Andereck, 2004, 133). Research has shown that on small islands one generally finds highly positive resident attitudes to tourism, for three main reasons, namely they are aware of their peripherality, island communities may be willing to tolerate the inconveniences of tourism (Buhalis, 1999; Cavanan, 2014; McElroy & Lucas, 2014) and case studies have shown that residents adapt to the industry (Cavanan, 2014). General sustainability of local tourism means that tolerance and adaptability are not exceeded. The findings of the St Helena study suggest that while the positive impacts of tourism are well recognised by the residents (through the online survey), they are also concerned about some negative effects of tourism development (evidence from the Facebook analysis).

It has been widely argued that demand for second homes causes the displacement of and resentment by permanent residents (Marjavaara, 2007; Wortman et al., 2016). The proposed tourism-related residential development of Trade Winds Ocean Village is a case in point. Outrage expressed in the social media has shown that the official narrative, namely the EIA report, and the unofficial narrative, namely the voices on social media are worlds apart. This discussion has revealed that the application of Butler’s life cycle model to a particular place is not necessarily a straightforward exercise due to the dynamic nature of tourism development (Butler, 2004). The individual components comprising the tourism sector may be at different levels of development and this can pose formidable challenges to determining where the tourism sector as a whole lies. St Helena has been trapped in the *involvement stage* for decades while being inhibited by its remoteness and accessibility issues. It is clear from the discussion that some of the island’s tourism characteristics relate to the *involvement stage*, whereas others are synonymous with the *development stage*. It is thus reasonable to argued that St Helena currently lies in a flux between the *involvement* and *development stages* of the Butler model. The opening of the airport is conceivably the springboard necessary for leaving behind all the impeding features of the *involvement stage*.

## Conclusion

Tourism to islands is a special form of tourism that often calls for specific considerations as distinctive characteristics of islands, such as fragile environments as well as historical and sociocultural aspects, present singular challenges to developing a successful island tourism destination (Cave & Brown, 2012). Despite its small population, the economic implications of

tourism nevertheless pose notable problems while in a cold-water island such as St Helena the environmental and social impacts may remain insignificant (Baldacchio, 2006). The primary purpose of this reported study was to determine the level of tourism development on St Helena using Butler's tourism area life cycle model and Doxey's irridex model. It has been revealed that the local Saints are eager to welcome more tourists to the island in light of current arrival numbers being insufficient. Visitor attitudes confirm that St Helena island is still in its early stages of tourism growth. Given that the island is currently at the tail end of the *involvement stage* and fast approaching the *development stage* of Butler's model, the future viability of tourism on the island hinges on three key issues, that is, increased airline access, increments in secondary tourism products and expanded marketing. Because there are scant research findings on the tourism dynamics following the opening of the airport particularly how the island will cope with increased tourist demands, the island presents an excellent opportunity for investigating tourism development holistically. St Helena will, without doubt, soon become a laboratory for researching a range of issues pertaining to socio-the sociocultural, environmental, management and economic impacts of remote island tourism.

### Acknowledgement

Thanks are due to the two anonymous reviewers whose comments have added great value to the paper. Language editing of Pieter de Necker is appreciated.

### References

- Baldacchino, G. (2006). Warm versus cold water island tourism: A review of policy implications. *Island Studies Journal*, 1(2), 183-200.
- Buckley, J. (2017). *Why you should visit St Helena, home to the 'world's most useless airport'*. The Independent. [Online]. Available at <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/africa/st-helena-what-to-see-do-best-guide-island-distillery-tortoise-coffee-where-to-stay-consulate-hotel-a8132291.html> [Retrieved 12 October 2018].
- Buhalis, D. (1999). Tourism on the Greek Islands: Issues of peripherality, competitiveness and development. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 1, 341-358.
- Butler R. (1980). The concept of a tourist area cycle of evolution: Implications for management of resources. *The Canadian Geographer*, 24 (1), 46-53.
- Butler R. (2004). *The tourism area life cycle in the twenty-first century*. In Lew, A.A., Hall, C.M. & Williams, A.M. (Eds.), *A Companion to Tourism* (pp. 159–169). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Canavan, B. (2014). Beyond Doxey, beyond butler: Building upon insights in small island tourism research to extend tourism theory. In: British Academy of Management Conference 2014, 9 - 11 September 2014, Belfast, N Ireland. (Unpublished). <http://eprints.hud.ac.uk/id/eprint/26547/> [Accessed: 18 September 2020]
- Cave, J. & Brown, K.G. (2012). Island tourism destinations: An editorial introduction to the special issue. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research* 6(2), 95-113.
- Cohen, E. (1972). Towards a sociology of international tourism. *Social Research*, 39, 82-164.
- Cronk, Q.C.B. (1987). The history of endemic flora of St Helena: A relictual series. *New Phytologist*, 105(3), 509-520.
- Diedrich, A. & Garcia-Buades, E. (2009). Local perceptions of tourism as indicators of destination decline. *Tourism Management*, 30(4), 512-521.



- Doxey, G.V. (1975). A causation theory of visitor-resident irritants: Methodology and research inferences. The impact of tourism. (pp. 195-198). Travel Research Association, 6th Annual Conference Proceedings, San Diego, September 8-11.
- Economic Development Committee Meeting Summary. (2020).  
<https://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/2020/news/economic-development-committee-meeting-summary-thursday-23-april-2020/> [Accessed 3 August 2020].
- Faulkner, B. & Tideswell, C. (1997). A framework for monitoring community impacts of tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 5(1), 3-28.
- Figueroa, E.B. & Rotarou, E.S. (2016). Tourism as the development driver of Easter Island: the key role of resident perceptions. *Island Studies Journal*, 11(1), 245-264.
- Fitchett, J.M. & Hoogendoorn, G. (2018). An analysis of factors affecting tourists' accounts of weather in South Africa. *International Journal of Biometeorol*, 62, 2161–2172.
- Fitchett, J.M. & Hoogendoorn, G. (2019). Exploring the climate sensitivity of tourists to South Africa through TripAdvisor reviews. *South African Geographical Journal*, 101(1), 91-109.
- Forssman, A.O. (2018). Tourism development and the tourism area lifecycle model: a look at St Helena Island. Unpublished honours research project, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Stellenbosch University.
- Gillett, S. (1983). Developing St. Helena. *Public Administration & Development*, 3(2), 151-160.
- Jansen-Verbeke M. (1986). Inner-city tourism: Resources, tourists and promoters. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 13(1), 79-100.
- Johnston, C.S. (2001). Shoring the foundations of the destination life-cycle model. *Tourism Geographies*, 3(1), 2-28.
- Johnson, J.D., Snepenger, D.J., Akis, S. (1994). Residents' perceptions of tourism development. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 21(3), 629-642.
- Karampela, S., Kizos, T. & Spilanis, I. (2014). Accessibility of Islands: Towards a new geography based on transportation modes and choices. *Island Studies*, 9(2), 293-306.
- Labesh. (2020). Establishment of Trade Winds Ocean Village on parcel no 186, block 1, Thompsons Hill, St Helena Island. Environmental Statement.  
<https://tradewindspc.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/03-Trade-Winds-EIA-2020-03-11.pdf> [Accessed online 4 May 2020]
- Marjavaara, R. (2007). Route to destruction? Second home tourism in small island communities. *Island Studies Journal*, 2(1), 27-46.
- McGehee, N. & Andereck, K. (2004) Factors predicting rural residents' support of tourism. *Journal of Travel Research*, 43(2), 131-140.
- McElroy, J.L. & Lucas, H. (2014). A note on the significance of geographic location in island studies. *Island Studies Journal*, 9(2), 363-366.
- Nunkoo, R. & Ramkissoon, H. (2010). Small island urban tourism: A residents perspective. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 13(1), 37-60.
- Pavlić, I. & Portolan, A. (2016). Irritation Index. In Jafari J., Xiao H. (Eds.) *Encyclopedia of Tourism*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01384-8\\_564](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-01384-8_564)
- Plog, S. (2001). Why destination areas rise and fall in popularity: An update of a Cornell quarterly classic. *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, 42(1), 13-24.
- Royle, S.A. (1991a). The world's remaining colonies: St Helena, a colonial case study. *Geographical Magazine*, LXIII, 16.
- Royle, S.A. (1991b). St Helena: A geographical summary. *Geography*, 76, 266-268.

- Royle, S.A. (1992). Attitudes and aspirations on St Helena in face of continued economic dependency. *The Geographical Journal*, 158(1), 31-39.
- Royle, S.A. (1995). Economic and political prospects for the British Atlantic dependent territories. *Geographical Journal*, 161, 307-322.
- Royle, S.A. (1997). Tourism to the South Atlantic islands. In D.G. Lockhart & D. Drakakis-Smith (Eds.) *Island Tourism: Trends and Prospects* (pp. 323-344), London, Pinter.
- Royle S. (2004). *Geography of Islands: Small Island Insularity*. Routledge.
- Royle, S.A. (2010). ‘Small places like St Helena have big questions to ask’: The inaugural lecture of a professor of island geography. *Island Studies Journal*, 5(1), 5-24.
- SA Airlink. (2018). Flight status checks. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.flysaa.com/manage-fly/manage/flight-status> [Accessed 10 October 2018].
- SHT (St Helena Tourism). (2018). St Helena Tourism Marketing Strategy, 2018 – 2019. <http://octa-innovation.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/St-Helena-Tourism-Marketing-Strategy-2018-2019.pdf> [Accessed 18 June 2020]
- Sparks, B., Wildman, K. & Bowen, J. (2001). Restaurants as a contributor to tourist destination attractiveness. *Australian Journal of Hospitality Management*, 8(2), 17-30.
- St Helena Government. (2020). Passenger Arrivals and Departures. Statistical Bulletin No. 6, 2020.
- St Helena Independent. (2020). Tourism Recovery Strategy Discussion Attracts 70 People. *The St Helena Independent*, XV(30), Friday 3rd July 2020. <http://www.independent.sh/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/St-Helena-Independent-20200703.pdf> [Accessed 15 June 2020].
- Szromek, A.R. (2019). An analytical model of tourist destination development and characteristics of the development stages: Example of the Island of Bornholm. *Sustainability*, 11, 6989; doi:10.3390/su11246989.
- Vargas-Sánchez, A., Porrás-Bueno, N. & Plaza-Mejía, M. (2009). Residents’ attitudes towards tourism development in the Spanish province of Huelva. *Narodnostopanski Arhiv, International Edition*, 2009, 31-60.
- Williams, T. (2020). Tourism: Putting people first. *The St Helena Independent*, XV(29), 5. <http://www.independent.sh/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/St-Helena-Independent-20200626.pdf> [Accessed 1 August 2020].
- Williams, S. & Lew, A. (2014). *Tourism Geography: Critical Understandings of Place, Space and Experience*. Routledge.
- Wortman, T., Donaldson, R. & Van Westen, G. (2016). “They are stealing my island”: Residents’ opinions on foreign investment in the residential tourism industry in Tamarin, Mauritius. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 37, 139-157.
- Zaidan, E. & Kovacs, J.F. (2017). Resident attitudes towards tourists and tourism growth: A case study from the Middle East, Dubai in United Arab Emirates. *European Journal of Sustainable Development*, 6(1), 291-307.
- Zhong, L., Deng, J. & Xiang, B. (2007). Tourism development and the tourism area life-cycle model: A case study of Zhangjiajie National Forest Park, China. *Tourism Management*, 29(5), 841-856.