

## TOURISM, QUALITY OF LIFE, AND RESIDENTS OF A RURAL TOWN

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Numerous studies have discussed the potential impacts of tourism on residents' quality of life (QOL). Despite this rich body of research, some researchers have identified the need to investigate this dimension using a qualitative approach as well as in rural areas where tourism is under development. Partly in response to these calls, the present study uses the case of a Western Australian town to investigate QOL through the lens of social exchange theory. Through focus groups, face-to-face interviews, and online questionnaires, qualitative data were gathered among the town's residents. Overall, the impacts of tourism on participants' QOL are positive. Four predominant exchanges related to QOL from tourism's effects emerged: economic, bonding, material, and cultural. Although economic exchanges—including job creation and income—are the main triggers of QOL, bonding exchanges—through volunteering and attending events—are also considered as fundamental. This study discusses key implications and suggests future research avenues.

**Key words:** Social exchange theory (SET); QOL; Tourism; Residents; Businesses; Western Australia

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### Introduction

The impact of tourism on the lives of residents of destinations and on communities is a theme actively investigated among tourism researchers (e.g., Ap, 1992; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Ribeiro, do Valle, & Silva, 2013; Vargas-Sánchez, Plaza-Mejía, & Porras-Bueno, 2009; Wang & Pfister, 2008; Ward & Berno, 2011). Various theoretical frameworks, including the subjective well-being (SWB) and bottom-up spillover theory of SWB (e.g., Andrews & Withey, 1976; Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002; Diener & Suh, 1997) are considered

in tourism research to study residents' perceptions of tourism (e.g., Kim, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2013; Sirgy, 2001, 2010; Woo, Kim, & Uysal, 2015). Diener (1984) explained that “the literature on SWB is concerned with how and why people experience their lives in positive ways” (p. 542). Bottom-up theory of SWB, on the other hand, indicates that satisfaction within significant life domains—such as health, work, family life, or leisure—can be a determinant in overall life satisfaction (Neal, Uysal, & Sirgy, 2007).

Predominantly, tourism-leisure research examining residents' quality of life (QOL) incorporates

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scaled items (e.g., Andereck, Valentine, Vogt, & Knopf, 2007; Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Jurowski & Brown, 2001; Kim et al., 2013; Sato, Jordan, & Funk, 2014; Woo et al., 2015). Although this quantitative approach may enhance the understanding of people's QOL, there are calls for alternative methodologies. In the field of psychology, for instance, Thomas and Chambers (1989) underlined the merit of qualitative approaches, including in-depth open-ended interviews when studying "subjective dimensions," which "may not be accessible to survey-type, structured questions" (p. 284).

In tourism research, Andereck and Nyaupane (2010) cited the Morrison Institute for Public Policy (1997) to emphasize the need for policy makers to gather citizens' perceptions of factors affecting QOL by using a qualitative approach. Although these authors used scaled items to gather data, they stressed the importance of investigating community residents' perceptions on how they experience tourism from a qualitative perspective. Similarly, "the extent to which residents feel tourism influences aspects of community life that they deem as personally valuable" (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2010, p. 250) could be examined qualitatively. Previously, Andereck et al. (2007) emphasized the usefulness of qualitative research in adding depth to gain a better understanding "of tourism-related QOL perceptions among community residents" (p. 500). Similarly, although Andereck and Vogt (2000) quantitatively studied (scaled items) residents' attitudes toward tourism, they recognized that "additional insights can be gained using qualitative methods such as interviews with community residents and businesspeople" (p. 35).

Research examining residents' QOL fully qualitatively is very limited. Among the few contributions, Dolnicar, Yanamandram, and Cliff (2012) initially adopted a qualitative approach followed by scaled items to study travelers' QOL.

The present study responds to calls for using a qualitative approach when investigating residents' perspectives of tourism's impact on the quality of life (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2010; Andereck et al., 2007). The study also seeks to address the dearth of knowledge of aspects highlighted in the tourism literature. Indeed, Vargas-Sánchez et al. (2009) identified limited research, including with regard to residents' perceived impacts of tourism in a region

where tourism is in its early stages of development. The present study, with its focus on a Western Australian rural town where currently tourism is experiencing development, is in alignment with Vargas-Sánchez et al.'s research. The following overarching research question is examined:

In what ways, if any, does tourism contribute to the QOL of residents of this rural community?

Addressing this fundamental question using a qualitative approach addresses previous calls for the use of this approach (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2010; Thomas & Chambers, 1989). Furthermore, new information resulting from addressing the above question may provide valuable insights to several stakeholders, including community residents, tourism operators, government agencies, and the research community. These insights include bonding as well as material elements recognized or perceived by community residents, which could support, enrich, or even go beyond notions of agreement and/or disagreement when scaled items are presented to participants. From a theoretical perspective, the study aligns with previous tourism-leisure research (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Perdue, Long, & Kang, 1999; Woo et al., 2015) adopting social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958) as part of the theoretical framework.

## Literature Review

### *Social Exchange Theory (SET)*

According to Emerson (1976), part of the foundation of SET rests on seminal work (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). Blau (1964), for instance, conceptualized social exchange as "voluntary actions of individuals that are motivated by the returns they are expected to bring and typically do in fact bring from others" (p. 91). Social behavior also comprises exchanges of goods, both material nonmaterial, with symbols of prestige or approval being some examples (Homans, 1958). Furthermore, the scope of SET can be conceptualized by a fundamental assumption: "a resource will continue to flow only if there is a valued return contingent upon it" (Emerson, 1976, p. 359). Moreover, "it is a frame of reference that takes the movement of valued things (resources) through social process as its focus" (p. 359).

In fact, a significant notion of SET is that part of understanding social behavior lies in analyzing interactions of “dyadic” relationships, those carried out by two persons (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 10). These interactions can have several consequences. As previously suggested by Blau (1964), Thibaut and Kelley (1959) made a distinction between the rewards that individuals receive and the costs they may incur. Rewards may include the satisfaction or gratification the individual enjoys, whereas cost refers to factors operating to deter or inhibit “the performance of a sequence of behavior” (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, p. 12). For dyadic relationships to survive, they must provide a minimal satisfactory reward–cost outcome to participating members (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959).

Within these exchange relationships, some individuals may encounter different forms of pressure. Homans (1958), for instance, argued that people giving significantly to others “try to get much from them” (p. 606); similarly, individuals receiving much from others feel pressure to give much in return. In these processes of “influence,” whereby people give and/or receive, equilibrium is often achieved to balance out the exchanges (Homans, 1958). However, for individuals engaged in exchanges, what they give may be a cost to them, just as what they receive in the exchange may be a reward (Homans, 1958). Furthermore, Homans posited that individuals’ behaviors change “less as profit . . . reward less cost, tends to a maximum” (p. 606). Thus, not only do individuals seek maximum benefits (profits) in exchanges for themselves, but they also seek to ensure that no one in the group achieves more benefits than they do (Homans, 1958).

The usefulness of SET is highlighted in contemporary research. Among numerous examples, Shiau and Luo (2012) referred to studies employing SET when addressing various business-related areas, including strategic behavior, customer service, business-to-business exchanges, or employee volunteerism (e.g., Bunduchi, 2008; Peloza, Hudson, & Hassay, 2009). Shiau and Luo’s study of reciprocity and reputation in the context of online buying intention and satisfaction also identified the applicability of SET. The authors observed different reactions among online customers between face-to-face and online transactions. However, Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) identified two

shortcomings in the theory, namely, that “SET constructs have not been fully identified” (p. 875) and that “some formulations of SET are ambiguous” (p. 875). Consequently, the authors concluded that the main ideas comprising SET have yet to be effectively integrated and articulated.

### *SET and Leisure Research*

The applicability of SET in the leisure sciences is well documented. The conceptual work of Ap (1992), for instance, discussed the usefulness of SET in the context of tourism, and it noted the further evolution of SET since earlier pioneering research (e.g., Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). Ap (1992) explained that SET is useful to understand “the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interaction situation” (p. 668); in these interactions, actors exchange “valued resources” (p. 668). Ap also acknowledged the work of Foa and Foa (1980) to highlight the definition of resources, namely, symbolic or concrete items that become objects of exchanges among individuals.

In addition, Ap (1992) reflected on the need for exchanges and the participation of community stakeholders as the foundation to sustain tourism. For instance, residents may significantly contribute to tourism development and the well-being of the community, developing, planning, operating tourist attractions, or being hospitable to visitors in exchange for those benefits that can be obtained through tourism. Ap also suggested that, when attracting and developing tourism, one fundamental goal is to reach outcomes that achieve the best equilibrium between costs and benefits for tourism actors and residents.

Ap (1992) and Perdue et al. (1999) referred to SET when they investigated potential interactions between residents’ perceived QOL and attitudes toward gaming. The authors found alignment with previous research (Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990; Perdue, Long, & Kang, 1995), where SET is supported.

Various researchers incorporate SET in combination with one other theoretical framework. Within the context of a developing island nation, Nunkoo and Gursoy (2012) recognized the relevance of SET in conjunction with identity theory. Látková and Vogt (2012) used both SET and destination life

cycle model to investigate the impacts that tourism development may have “on residents’ attitudes when considered in conjunction with a community’s total economic activity” (p. 50). Choo and Petrick (2014) adopted SET and resource theory to examine the potential effects of agritourists’ social interactions on revisit intentions and satisfaction. Finally, Coulson, MacLaren, McKenzie, and O’Gorman (2014) applied a hybrid of SET, amalgamating negotiated and reciprocal exchange when they studied codes of hospitality among an Afghan tribe.

More directly related to the present study is research by Wang and Pfister (2008) in a small rural community where tourism is at its developmental stages. Although the findings suggest the appropriateness of SET, the authors also noticed that positive attitudes toward tourism are in line with views of personal benefits. Moreover, one major contribution of Wang and Pfister’s work is the “recognition of noneconomic perspective of tourism benefits for residents” (p. 84). In other words, perceptions of benefits of tourism are more geared toward “community-building values,” including improvements of infrastructure and “increasing choices for residents” (p. 92). Furthermore, the authors emphasized the notion of community pride when tourism is under development in the region.

### *The Geographic Context of the Study*

The town of Bridgetown has a population of approximately 4,500 residents (South West Development Commission [SWDC], 2014) and is located in the South West region of Western Australia, some 3 hr by car from Perth. As is the case of numerous Western Australian rural communities, the mining industry still holds strategic economic significance, followed by timber and horticulture. More recently, viticulture and other cottage industries—such as olive growing, cheese, and honey—complement the business scene, and they provide an alternative tourism destination in the shadows of the nearby Margaret River region. Indeed, the Blackwood River Valley, a region encompassing the shires of Balingup, Bridgetown, Boyup Brook, Greenbushes, and Nannup, increasingly hosts food and wine, the most popular of which is the “Taste of the Blackwood” event in August, established in 2008. Furthermore, the SWDC (2014) emphasized the increasing

importance of tourism and events for Bridgetown and its surroundings. In 1979, the Blackwood Marathon (<http://www.mccays.com.au/theevent/>) was established and has been organized yearly ever since. More recently, the Bridgetown Blues Festival (<http://bluesatbridgetown.com.au/>) is attended by thousands of music enthusiasts, the majority visiting from other regions, towns, and cities.

## Methodology

### *Proposed Conceptual Framework*

The study examines perceptions of impacts of tourism on residents’ QOL in a rural community where tourism is developing. A conceptual framework is proposed based on SET (see Fig. 1). First, although the visitor group does not directly participate, the study proposes a hypothesis, namely, that two groups (residents/businesses and visitors) are involved in dyadic relationships/exchanges. The resident/business group may become involved in the different activities, including as a service/product provider. Moreover, service provided through involvement in events, as well as volunteering, illustrate actions conducive to exchanges. Research conducted previously in the region of the Blackwood River Valley (Duarte Alonso & Liu, 2013) highlights the importance of volunteering among local residents, including manning visitor centers and providing information to travelers. The second group, visitors and the tourism industry, is also involved in exchanges, particularly during visitation or consumption of tourism products and services.

Dyadic relationships/exchanges lead to potential outcomes, whereby each group perceives benefits. For instance, aligned with contemporary literature (Uysal, Perdue, & Sirgy, 2012; Wang & Pfister, 2008), residents may perceive noneconomic benefits from tourism, such as relationships, other intangible benefits (“feel good” factor), and material (tangible) benefits. In contrast, visitors may perceive other forms of benefits, including the aspect of value-for-money from experiencing or “consuming” the town. At this stage, both groups may estimate a point of balance/equilibrium from the exchanges (higher rewards vs. costs of the exchanges). In the case of residents/businesses, this form of perceived equilibrium may determine

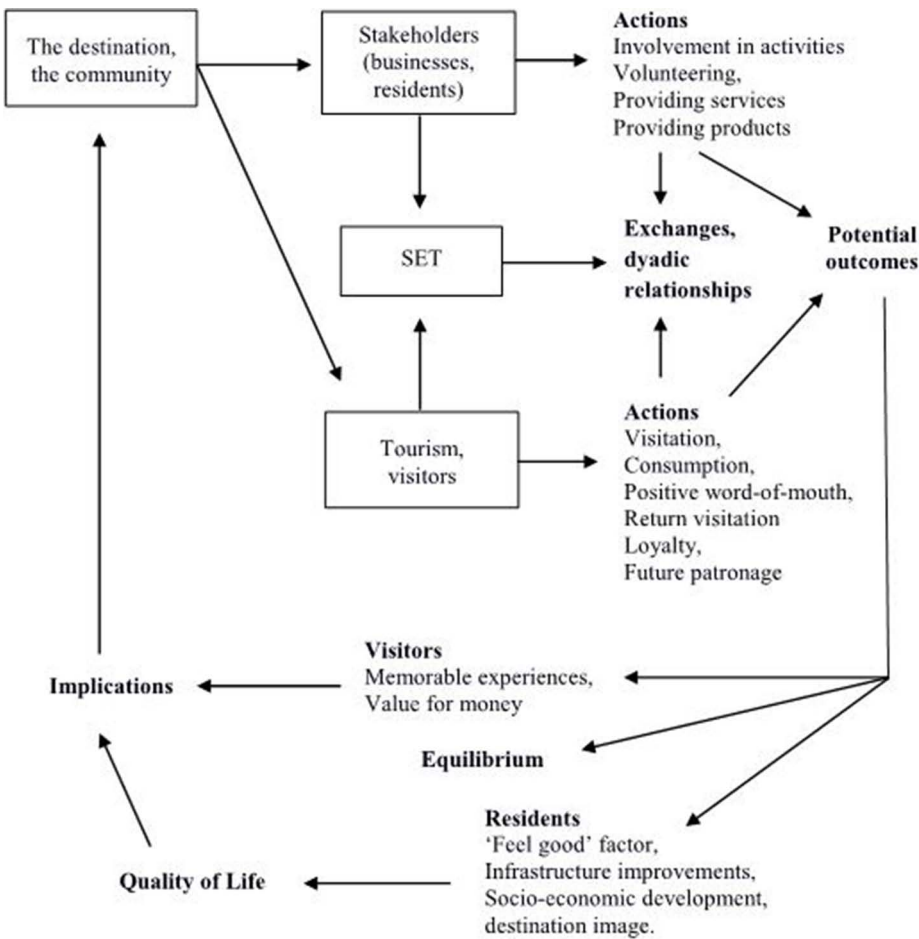


Figure 1. Conceptualization of social exchange theory (SET) in the context of the rural town.

perceptions of QOL from tourism. Implications from QOL may include stronger involvement in exchanges, which may also instill a stronger culture of involvement and volunteering among residents/businesses to showcase the town, its attractions, and its events. Implications from perceptions of value-for-money and memorable experiences may help to create a stronger identification with the town/region and, ultimately, to stronger branding and destination image.

*Procedures*

The Western Australian town of Bridgetown is selected as the site for the data collection. The increasing importance of tourism in the region

where Bridgetown is located (Blackwood River Valley) is one fundamental reason for this selection. Furthermore, boutique accommodation and wine/food industries (e.g., olive oil, honey) are emerging in the town and region. The proximity to the Margaret River region is also significant to the research for gathering perceptions of a neighboring region. For example, the rapid development of tourism in Margaret River and the modest development of the Blackwood River region, albeit two very different regions, are important in the context of QOL among residents/businesses. A visit to the Taste of the Blackwood event in August of 2014 allowed for conducting a preliminary round of meetings and short interviews with local residents and businesses. During the event, the research team



met with various key local informants, some of whom own local businesses. In the following weeks, this initial contact was nurtured via e-mail and telephone communication.

Given the common interests in the research between the key informant and the research group, a one-day event in Bridgetown was proposed and organized for the research team. This meeting allowed for conducting two focus groups and a number of face-to-face, in-depth, unstructured interviews with local business owners and residents of Bridgetown, some involved in tourism/hospitality. At the same time, permission was requested to disseminate a questionnaire among local businesses; this questionnaire was piloted during the first and second meetings. At the time of the research, an estimated 100 businesses existed in the town; the majority of these businesses are micro in size (fewer than nine employees). Several themes were proposed for the interviews, focus groups, and questionnaire. Relevant literature addressing these themes was consulted (e.g., Duarte Alonso & Liu, 2013; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012; Wickens, 2002). For example, apart from perceptions of QOL, this study examines collaboration among businesses/locals, volunteering, and the main challenges the community faces. These additional themes are, however, beyond the scope of this study and might be part of future studies.

In late November of 2014, the research group traveled to Bridgetown and conducted two sessions with as many focus groups and 17 interviews with local residents and business owners. A total of 30 individuals participated, five of them being business owners; thus, in total, 47 business owners and 25 nonbusiness owners participated. The approximate time of the focus group discussions was 90 min, whereas that of the face-to-face interviews was 45 min on average; with participants' agreements, both discussions and interviews were audio recorded.

Due to a lack of business contact details preventing the dissemination of a paper questionnaire, a decision was made to edit a questionnaire online. This decision was supported by the local business association and by several key informants who had access to e-mail contacts of businesses and who disseminated the online questionnaire link among the association's members. Aligned with focus groups and interviews, one section of the online

questionnaire sought to gather participants' perceptions concerning the research question under examination. To this end, space was provided for online participants to type comments. The link to the online questionnaire was active between the end of November of 2014 and the end of January of 2015. During this time, 42 business owners completed the questionnaire.

Given that the two groups of participants were involved in answering the overarching research question, providing verbal comments (interviews/focus groups) or typed comments (online questionnaire respondents), the resulting data were transcribed and collated. Content analysis was used to identify and group the different themes that emerged from the comments gathered. Content analysis is "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278). The software NVivo (Version 10) was utilized to manage the different comments and group them in different threads/themes. Given that overall 72 residents participated (42 business owners, 30 nonbusiness owners), the results are treated with caution. Furthermore, generalizations stemming from the findings should be avoided in the context of Bridgetown or elsewhere.

### *Demographic Information of Participants*

Table 1 illustrates that the majority of participants ( $n = 51$ ; 71%) were 46 years of age or older; also, the majority ( $n = 47$ ; 65%) lived in Bridgetown 11 or more years. Similar percentages are present for the gender composition, with the female group ( $n = 42$ ; 58%) being the predominant one. Furthermore, an almost 40%–60% split is present between participants who were directly involved in tourism—for instance, being employed in hotels/café or owning/managing retail or other businesses—and those who were not involved. In the following sections, participants' comments are labeled as follows: Participant 1 not involved in tourism, P1NT; Participant 2 involved in tourism, P2IT; and so forth.

### *Findings*

Overall, both business owners involved and not involved in tourism as well as residents perceived

Table 1  
Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	<i>n</i> (%)
<b>Age groups</b>	
18–24 years old	2 (2.8%)
25–35 years old	3 (4.2%)
36–45 years old	16 (22.2%)
46–55 years old	21 (29.2%)
56–65 years old	13 (18.1%)
66+ years old	17 (23.6%)
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	30 (41.7%)
Female	42 (58.3%)
<b>Status</b>	
Business owners	47 (65.3%)
Nonbusiness owners (e.g., employee, retired)	25 (34.7%)
<b>Involvement in tourism/hospitality among the 42 businesses</b> (online questionnaire)	
Partly–fully dependent on tourism revenues (e.g., café, accommodation, real estate)	18 (42.9%)
Not dependent on tourism revenues	24 (57.1%)
<b>Overall involvement in tourism/hospitality</b> (e.g., direct employment, retail)	
Yes	29 (40.3%)
No	43 (59.7%)
<b>Years living in Bridgetown</b>	
<1	1 (1.4%)
1–5	9 (12.5%)
6–10	15 (20.8%)
11–20	21 (29.2%)
21+	26 (36.1%)

tourism development as contributing positively to QOL. Table 2 illustrates that four different predominant exchanges emerged; these exchanges are discussed in the following sections.

### *Economic Exchanges*

Predominantly, economic exchanges—for instance, through accommodation bookings, ticket sales at events, or patronizing local shops and restaurants—are the most perceived contribution of tourism toward participants' QOL (see Table 2). This finding aligns with tourism studies applying SET (Ap, 1992; Perdue et al., 1999), including research by Andereck and Nyaupane (2010) concerning economic benefits from tourism development. Economic exchanges are more noticeable in the comments provided in the online questionnaires, with 32 (76%) of the 42 responses clearly highlighting economic benefits from tourism.

Although not directly involved in tourism activities, numerous participants perceived tourism development through economic exchanges as having a major impact on the town. For instance, 22 (69%) of

the 32 comments highlighting economic exchanges were from individuals who did not directly depend on tourism. This outcome partly contradicts the point that Jurowski, Uysal, and Williams (1997) made—that is, theoretically, those individuals making economic gains from tourism are more supportive. The outcome underlines participants' positive perceptions that the community has much to gain from tourism, including through economic exchanges, an aspect closely related to SET (Blau, 1964).

Overall, tourism development was perceived to have resulted in benefits such as increased employment opportunities, additional business start-ups in town, and increased patronage to the businesses. Thus, in the main, whether tourism development contributed to participants' livelihood or not, they viewed tourism development positively; PINT, for instance, made the following statement:

It [tourism] has allowed more businesses to commence, flourish, and employ people on an ongoing basis rather than a seasonal basis, as the tourism now seems to go all year round, especially with the advent of our Bridgetown Winter Festival. The variety of businesses supported by both tourism

Table 2  
Identified Exchanges (Content Analysis)

Exchange/Categories	Occupation/Status		Total
	Involved in Tourism	Not Involved in Tourism	
<b>Economic</b>			
Economic benefits	18	24	42
Employment opportunities	6	11	17
Building connections	5	4	9
Start-up businesses	2	4	6
<b>Bonding</b>			
Community pride	7	10	17
Sense of community	8	8	16
Feel good factor	7	8	15
Volunteering for events	5	7	12
Vibrancy in town	3	5	8
<b>Material</b>			
Infrastructure improvement	4	7	11
Increased choices	5	3	8
<b>Cultural</b>			
Exchange of different outlooks	4	3	7
Family values	2	1	3

and locals enriches the lifestyles of the locals, which would otherwise not be able to continue business with the support of locals alone.

Butler’s (1980) tourism lifecycle is also a useful tool to partly explain the above findings. Indeed, an argument could be made that participants not involved in tourism favorably perceive the potential for further development of the region’s tourism, or even a “rejuvenation” stage (Butler, 1980), with the increasing offerings of cultural and gastronomic events. In contrast, those participants involved in tourism may perceive challenges that suggest a stage of stagnation or even decline. Moreover, comments from participants involved in tourism underline both opportunities and threats. First, P2IT perceived the economic benefits of tourism through a dyadic lens, confirming the notion that all stakeholders are winners within the exchange, stating that “It provides income for accommodation businesses who support local events and shops thus keeping both money and jobs in the Shire.” However, other participants were sceptical, feeling that a potential growth would be detrimental to QOL. For instance, P3IT referred to tourism as “a double-edged sword, you do want it, but you don’t want too much.” P4IT explained that Bridgetown’s

community does not want a major tourism industry and that moves toward such growth would be rejected as development might affect residents’ QOL. However, P4IT stated that “everyone is quite happy to have it in Manjimup [neighboring town],” and that “it is inevitable that Bridgetown will one day be like Margaret River,” which, from originally being a tranquil beach village has grown significantly to become the largest tourist destination south of Perth in recent decades.

*Bonding Exchanges*

Although fewer compared to economic exchanges (see Table 2), in-depth interviews and focus groups clearly identify bonding exchanges as a key finding. Putnam’s (2000) research has emphasized bonding social capital as an element enhancing reciprocity as well as helping mobilize solidarity. In the context of the present study, bonding exchanges fundamentally relate to participants who feel compelled to actively become involved in tourism as a “give back” measure. Examples include solidarity through participating in volunteerism, actively providing ideas to different tourism stakeholders about how tourism could be better developed, and generally exhibiting community pride.



Associations between the findings and SET emerge again. First, volunteerism and other “feel good” activities may help add value to exchanges with visitors. Indeed, such exchanges help provide a hospitable environment (Ap, 1992) and build lasting positive memories in visitors' minds. Second, providing ideas is linked to the notion that exchanges and participation of the community, either operating or planning tourist attractions, can be crucial to develop tourism (Ap, 1992). Together, these aspects may also have direct implications for residents' perceived QOL.

During focus groups discussions, residents recounted that events that draw tourists to the town could not be carried out successfully without local volunteers. P2NT, for instance, noted, “When you involve hundreds of people, nobody has to do [a] huge amount. It's a lot of people doing small jobs that fit it all together.” This finding is partly associated with that of Coyne and Coyne (2001), who, in the context of a golf event, noticed that the more veteran volunteers are more motivated by building relationships, enjoying the camaraderie, and the feeling of supporting the local community.

The strong sense of community pride and emotional well-being accentuates the bonding exchanges perceived by both community business owners and residents. This emerging element is also discussed in the SET literature (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) regarding the gratifying rewards of exchanges. Several researchers have noticed that tourism development contributes to increased community pride and satisfaction with life in general (Andereck et al., 2007; Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002). The notion that participants' QOL surpasses expectations is supported. Most participants involved in the interviews and focus group discussions chose to move to the town from other places in Australia and also from abroad, especially the UK. Participants affirmed an affinity to the town and expressed the wish “to show where we live and how beautiful it is” (P5IT) to visitors, or they described an emotional attachment to the town:

I feel incredibly fortunate to be able to call this place home, and I just love the connections, networking, and the community spirit that exist down here that I would love to share with more people and let them experience it as well . . . I would hate to see it become too big, like Margaret River. (P6IT)

Once again, the “feel good” factor element becomes clear in these and other comments, and it suggests the manageable rate of tourism development. A certain tone of possessiveness is identified in terms of controlling the growth of tourism into a sustainable model that would complement participants' QOL:

P3NT: Thoughtful tourism can add value to all aspects of a town's life, and be a positive and rewarding experience for the visitor and locals. It is important that such tourism is locally driven and reflects intrinsic values of the area, rather than becoming a generic copy from elsewhere. Income and awareness from tourism can enhance those intrinsic values and natural assets. (P3NT)

### *Material Exchanges*

The data collected present support for the idea that tourism development contributes to a wider choice of amenities and other infrastructure improvements, which, in turn, positively contributes to residents' QOL. These material exchanges stemming from tourism are perceived to result in improvements such as well-maintained roads, public amenities, and access to medical facilities. Along these lines, P7IT made the following statement:

Visitors ensure the viability of businesses that would otherwise struggle to survive, they ensure we have good food outlets, good medical services, a wider selection of goods and services, and a choice of service providers, all of which would be less if they were surviving on a population of less than 4,000. They bring vibrancy to town; empty shops indicate a declining town and even the locals will start to shop elsewhere. They also bring an expectation of good quality goods and services requiring staff training and attention to detail . . . They are an essential component in improving the quality of life in Bridgetown.

Another illustration is that, as a result of tourism development, participants perceived that the town now has a wider choice of activities for both visitors and locals to enjoy. Moreover, without the number of tourists coming into Bridgetown periodically, based on the town's small population, these facilities would not be available or receive government support:

Tourism—and the Shire’s commitment to it—means that the locals get to share and enjoy the facilities that are put in place for visitors, e.g., interpretive signage at the river and other places, good roads, the many special events that are held in Bridgetown to draw people to town. People comment to me on how “vibrant” the main street is, and that there is a real buzz to the place. (P8IT)

The element of material exchanges is also aligned with SET. In fact, participants’ positive perceptions of tourism are intrinsically related to potential benefits, or the rewards (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) that provide valuable returns (Emerson, 1976). Moreover, as long as the perceived benefits from tourism outweigh costs from exchanges, resources may continue to flow (Emerson, 1976). These resources may include the availability of events, and supporting infrastructure to host visitors, and therefore emphasize the significance of the noneconomic perspective (Wang & Pfister, 2008), which includes increasing choices and enhancements in infrastructure. Wang and Pfister (2008) identified these two elements as attributable “to an improved quality of life in the community” (p. 90). Along these lines, a study focusing on the impacts of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games (Jurovski et al., 1997) identified residents’ positive views of material rewards, including reimagining and revitalization of a site and the legacy of sports facilities.

### *Cultural Exchanges*

Cultural exchanges as a result of tourism development were viewed favorably, and participants were appreciative of the opportunity to share the town with people from different generations and cultures:

We get different groups of people that come down for different things . . . like, next week, for the Blues festival, the population will triple at least . . . it is interesting with the Blues, because you watch families come down with their kids . . . right through to people who have been coming since the Blues has been going . . . 22 years I think this year, and some of them came as kids, and now they are coming with their own families . . . and the town benefits tremendously from the Blues. (P9IT)

Brida, Osti, and Faccioli (2011) identified the cluster “tourism supporters” as those engaging the

most in cultural exchanges with visitors. This cluster is also inclined to promote the local culture and perceives that tourism can be conducive to maintaining local customs and traditions. The inclination toward cultural exchange brought by tourism development extends to visitors from different countries. Residents actively organized cultural exchange opportunities to ensure that this perceived positive benefit was shared within the community:

We have a lot of “woofers” . . . you give them accommodation and food and they work . . . on strawberry farms or whatever . . . and then they have time to travel around and appreciate the place. And for me, young people coming from the Netherlands and Germany . . . and some of them have some amazing stories . . . they come to the school and talk to the kids, and for the kids to hear these stories . . . this kind of thing opens Bridgetown to the world. (P10IT)

The comments above are aligned with some elements of SET, particularly in terms of taking the movement of valuable resources through social processes (Emerson, 1976). In this context, and although arguably residents seek to maximize exchanges, or the reward–cost outcome of dyadic relationships (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), the findings above indicate that social exchanges through tourism development provide opportunities for communication, for educating visitors, and for spreading the word about Bridgetown as a destination. Additionally, Ap’s (1992) point of actors exchanging valued resources, in this case, symbolic gestures resulting in cultural enrichment, becomes apparent. Further alignment with SET is noticed with regard to social behavior, which encompasses material and nonmaterial exchanges and includes symbols of approval or prestige (Homans, 1958).

### *Conclusions*

Residents’ perceptions and attitudes of tourism, as well as how tourism may impact the community and QOL, have been discussed by various researchers (e.g., Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Ap, 1992; Kim et al., 2013; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2009; Wang & Pfister, 2008; Ward & Berno, 2011; Woo et al., 2015). Regarding QOL-related research, a prevalence of using scaled items to measure

perceptions of residents and/or visitors is identified. At the same time, calls are made about the need for qualitative data collection approaches, including in the field of tourism (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2010). Finally, residents' attitudes toward tourism in regions where tourism is starting to develop, as well as relationships between community satisfaction and tourism, have been studied to a very limited extent.

The present research is an attempt to address the above gaps in research, predominantly using a qualitative approach to study QOL among residents in a rural community. The overall findings provide various practical as well as theoretical contributions. From a practical perspective, four predominant exchanges (economic, bonding, material, and cultural) are identified. In particular, the study aligns with other studies (e.g., Andereck et al., 2007; Coyne & Coyne, 2001; Gursoy et al., 2002; Wang & Pfister, 2008) in that economic exchanges are almost equally as valuable to participants as bonding exchanges. The "feel good" factor, emphasizing the opportunity to be active in various nonpaid activities, including volunteering at events, is very significant to many participants. Although a distant third factor, material exchanges via infrastructure improvements and increased choices also seem to enhance participants' QOL.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings confirm the applicability of the SET in the context of QOL and tourism development. Throughout the four identified exchanges, several alignments with the SET literature are noted. However, regarding cultural exchanges, although consciously or unconsciously participants may seek to maximize exchanges above the profit-cost equilibrium (Homans, 1958; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), an interest in making gains from such exchange does not appear obvious. Thus, although SET may partly emphasize that humans would seek gains from dyadic relationships, to some extent, the aspect of "giving genuinely" without expectations of returns is noticed (e.g., P9IT, P10IT).

### Implications

Several implications emanate from the findings. Alignment with SET confirms the usefulness and applicability of the theory to study QOL in rural communities where tourism is developing. The four identified exchanges have both practical and theoretical usefulness for community, government, and

other stakeholders such as researchers. For example, the economic exchange points at the need and opportunities for tourism and government agencies to support and nurture an environment conducive to the creation of enterprises and employment for locals. Moreover, the notion that as long as value returns are perceived resources may continue to flow (Emerson, 1976) seems applicable to the local shire in further supporting local entrepreneurship. In the case of Bridgetown and surroundings, previous research (Duarte Alonso & Liu, 2012) has identified opportunities for boutique-type businesses, which could be materialized by new or existing entrepreneurs.

However, to enhance QOL, a balance should be maintained, maximizing economic opportunities while building sustainable tourism. In this regard, various participants voiced concerns of Bridgetown becoming like Margaret River, with tourism bustling in the town. This potential scenario could also lead to changing people's behavior, with voluntary actions motivated by returns (Blau, 1964) becoming altered in favor of a more commercial culture. Moreover, this situation could also seriously affect dyadic relationships (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) in that bonding exchanges may weaken, and as a result the community's social capital (Putnam, 2000), with implications for maintaining or building a hospitable environment (Ap, 1992), and for the community's QOL. Finally, the perceived importance of material and cultural exchanges cannot be ignored. Moreover, the first helps maintain vital resources for locals and visitors, and the second increases residents' knowledge of the world, and that of outsiders about the rural environment, with further implications for destination image.

### Limitations and Future Research

This research is not free of limitations. First, gathering the perceptions of 72 local residents, business owners, and nonbusiness owners combined, compared to the 4,500 residents of Bridgetown, may be insufficient to generalize the findings in the context of the town. Second, the data were collected at one point in the calendar year (beginning of summer months), and only once, as opposed to at various points in time, preventing potentially useful time-based comparisons. Finally, factors other

than tourism, including participants' income, levels of education, or profession could also play a role in participants' overall perceptions of QOL. For all these reasons, the overall findings must be treated with caution. However, as noted above, despite the limitations, the study offers various insightful results, both practical and theoretical.

These limitations provide opportunities for future research. For example, gathering the perceptions of a larger number of participants, as well as those of community stakeholders in neighboring towns, could also be useful in making comparisons regarding the perceived impact of tourism on communities' QOL. Similarly, longitudinal studies conducted in Bridgetown or neighboring towns/regions could help inform different community, tourism, and government stakeholders, particularly in the case of tourism growth or decline. The further applicability of SET could also be considered in future research, including consideration of refinement in the context of tourism and QOL in rural regions. In an age when concerns of sustainable tourism development and QOL are significant, gathering community residents' perceptions regarding tourism development could be of vital significance to rural communities vying to benefit from tourism.

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