

## Assessing the Willingness to Pay in the Context of Communal Land Values: The Case of Backpackers in Fiji

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### Abstract

Communal land values can, on the one hand, be an integral part of the socio-cultural experience which tourists seek and enjoy while visiting Fiji. Partly inherited from the land, such values are still vital as basis of survival in rural Fiji. They are passive so they do not command a price and therefore largely considered free however, indigenous Fijian landowners tend to perceive that such values are an inseparable part of their land and may often expect that these ought to be paid for when land is taken up for development such as in tourism. This dilemma within the tourism system could underpin land conflicts between traditional landowners and tourism entrepreneurs. As tourists ultimately bear costs, the problem can be partially addressed by focusing on their willingness to pay for communal use of land.

This research assesses the backpackers' willingness to pay (WTP) for communal values of land in Fiji, including their opinions, feelings, attitudes and perceptions. It uses a social, psychological-economic theoretical framework which postulates firstly, that backpackers will pay in order to maximise satisfaction and, that utilities from passive values can be derived and measured. Secondly, as backpackers search for authenticity, adventure and meeting local people they would tend to be self actualised and therefore willing to pay. A contingent valuation study was undertaken in Fiji from February to June 2003 with a relatively high participation and response rate. Semi-structured interviews were conducted from February to March, 2005 to elicit backpackers' knowledge, feelings, perceptions and attitudes regarding their willingness to pay for the communal use of land.

A great majority of respondents were willing to pay. CV respondents were willing to pay an average of F\$6.50 for the communal value of land but the younger, highly educated and long haulers would pay less. Though a high proportion of respondents were willing to pay because they valued the communal use of land, for the majority the main reason was financial. Interviewees were willing to pay for economic, psychological and egocentric reasons. The latter two were particularly based on their motivational satisfaction and understanding of the traditional land-based survival skills. Respondents' perceptions of communal values of land, incomes and psychological attitude were also major factors underlying why they were not willing to pay.

In light of the study's findings, it was suggested that the backpacker concept may need to be re-examined as they tended not to be necessarily as budget-minded and exploitative as generally depicted to be. Similarly, they tended to be self-actualising and also espousing motivations similar to those of mass tourists. It was also proposed that WTP can provide a basis for economically analysing the use of passive values of environmental tourism resources, such as land, which can facilitate the industry's ability in decision making, and management. As an incentive, WTP for communal values of land can be crucial in enhancing and sustaining tourism in a land-scarce economy such as Fiji. In the interim, WTP for communal land use could also provide informed decisions to address current issues such as the Customary Fisheries Bill. Indeed, this pioneering

study examines the very issues of passive values for traditionally owned resources which can be applied more broadly; not only in Fiji, but also in other parts of the Pacific.