



## **Leisurely Development? Tourism in the Gullah Region**

Have you ever looked forward to a vacation away from home, planned a trip to a foreign country, or thought about having a vacation or retirement home somewhere warm? If so, you are among the millions of people a year who participate in leisure activities, fueling the booming tourism industry. Tourism is a multi-trillion dollar industry that directly and indirectly employs over 200 million people worldwide. Tourism is a major export and foreign exchange earner for developed and developing countries and the industry is often viewed as a means for impoverished communities to earn the necessary revenue for development.

Because of this perceived high earning potential, tourism development has been hailed by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs--World Bank, International Monetary Fund) and the World Trade Organization as a means for economic gain by creating jobs and enabling states to earn foreign exchange to invest in development. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and Regional Trade Agreements (RTA's) have been used as a means to liberalize the industry worldwide to promote development.

However, liberalization in the tourism sector, as in many industries, has led to corporate domination of the industry and market concentration, with a few firms controlling most of the industry. As IFI and trade agreements encourage host governments to open up their industries, these firms use new and existing legislation to access land and resources for their corporate financial gain. Legislation meant to attract tourism investors, often through tax free incentives, ensure that the revenue firms earn from their business in the host country is most often under the control of corporate headquarters and neither the host government nor its citizens reap the financial benefits from an industry in which they bear the burden. RTAs exacerbate this situation by encouraging (or coercing) developing countries to change property rights, tax codes and hiring policies in return for foreign investment.

The negative impacts of the industry extend beyond financial and economic impacts. In many countries, developed and developing, services such as water and sanitation are provided in or diverted to tourism locations at the expense of the local population. The environmental impacts of carbon emissions from airplanes and global shipping add to the global climate change crises. The perceived benefits of working in the tourism sector have encouraged the abandonment of local food production activity. Global supply chains reinforce dependence on exports, often grown or processed by multinational agribusinesses and manufacturers, leading to a loss of food sovereignty, a decrease in food security, breakdown of local economies, and loss of livelihoods.

The impact of the international trading system on the tourism industry makes the industry an ideal case study as the Center looks to the coming year. As part of our Strategic Partnership Initiative, a project which highlights local communities impacted by the international trading system and through which we partnered with the Delmarva Community Alliance on the poultry industry, we will analyze the impact of tourism on local communities in the U.S. and abroad.

The Gullah Islands serve as one of the best U.S. examples of how mass tourism negatively impacts local communities worldwide. The islands have suffered environmental degradation due to corporate development of hotels, resorts, golf courses, and elite communities. The local population has experienced the loss of land and land rights, displacement onto the mainland, loss of livelihoods particularly in the agricultural sector, and increased dependence on the corporate entities for economic survival as workers return to work in the industry that has displaced them.

These impacts have led to a need for different rules that encourage local economic growth through local entrepreneurs, sustainable development, historical and cultural preservation, as well as the maintenance of rights of the local population. The Center is currently working to establish a partnership working on these issues on behalf of the local population.

Abiosseh Davis  
Center of Concern  
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