

# Potential for Community Managed Sustainable Tourism Development on Apolima Island

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## Abstract

*Apolima Island is the least populated island of Sāmoa, with a natural environmental and cultural setting that could potentially add value to Sāmoa's sustainable tourism future. However, to date, Apolima Island has remained dis-engaged from tourism activities. This study focused on understanding why tourism has not manifested on the island, using talanoa<sup>1</sup> as a method of social inquiry to obtain community perceptions as well as those of the tourism sector, of the potential for community based sustainable tourism development. Themes narrate these findings indicating an overall acceptance of small-scale tourism developments amongst the community members. However, the community felt that it was more important for other developments (mainly infrastructural) to occur before tourism activities begin. This study contributes to our knowledge of island tourism, specifically South Pacific tourism highlighting the sustainable tourism spectrum in Sāmoa and the challenges associated with peripherality. Furthermore it contributes to the use of talanoa as an appropriate method for indigenous researchers to retrieve data from an indigenous population.*

**Keywords:** community based tourism, sustainable tourism development, island tourism, peripherality, talanoa

## Introduction

Islands are peripheral tourism destinations that have drawn a great deal of interest because of their physical conditions and socio-cultural structures. Popularised through Western literature and imagery, the global tourism interest in islands is strong. With such interest, however, come challenges of developing an industry in such fragile physical and socio-cultural environments. Tourism is often perceived by island peripheries as an economic diversification tool. However, tourism can be a double-edged sword, promising modernisation and development while placing pressure on natural and cultural resources (Apostolopoulos and Gayle 2002; Gossling and Wall 2007) and posing resource management and governance challenges (Graci and Dodds 2010). Many island destinations recognise that rapid tourism growth has brought negative economic, social and ecological impacts (Graci and Dodds 2010), has created a cycle of dependency (Gossling and Wall 2007) and potentially jeopardises islands' sustainability (Twining-Ward and Butler 2004).

Thus, more sustainable forms of tourism development are desired and indeed this is the current goal of a number of South Pacific Island destinations. But it is clear that within such challenging social, cultural and political environments that tourism is a contested form of development, and can be expected to face both infrastructural and attitudinal, community-related challenges. A community may be defined as a group or inhabitants who share "... common beliefs, attitudes, interests, identities or other types of connections" (Dredge and Hales 2012: 528), and who may collectively participate in tourism initiatives or developments. Community involvement and prioritising tourism integration through a bottom-up approach may help to address concerns about the potential impacts of tourism development. Specifically, community based tourism (CBT) is a form of tourism which "seeks to increase people's involvement and ownership of tourism at the destination end" (Mowforth and Munt 2008: 368).

This paper presents the findings of research undertaken in October, 2015 that focused on the potential for tourism on Apolima Island, Sāmoa. The paper considers the depth of Apolima Island's

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<sup>1</sup> Meaning talk, converse or chat.

integration into the overall Sāmoa sustainable tourism development strategy, exploring infrastructural as well as attitudinal barriers to tourism development on the island. In particular the paper considers the challenges faced in the 'pre-exploration' phases of development of a potential tourism destination, further exacerbated by the island's characterisation as a periphery of an already peripheral destination—Sāmoa.

### **Theoretical Background**

Islands are commonly small and isolated peripheries, not only in terms of physical isolation (Conlin and Baum, 1995; Depraetere and Dahl, 2007) but also in terms of political-economic isolation (Baldacchino 2015; Carlsen and Butler 2010). A mass of leisure tourists visit the warmer islands spread out in the Mediterranean, Caribbean and the South Pacific basin (Carlsen and Butler 2010), mainly for relaxation and rejuvenation (Conlin and Baum 1995) usually compelled by early colonial exploration imagery (Harrison 2002) of warm clear waters, and an abundance of food and hospitality, resembling a 'good life' (Gossling and Wall 2007; King 1997). In addition to the islands' sun, sea and sand component, there is a growing interest in cultural and heritage tourism valuing the islands' historical significance (Graci and Dodds 2010). However, developments including tourism developments in peripheral destinations are restricted by poor infrastructure, limited human resources, lack of local capital and high dependence on export markets (Gossling and Wall 2007). Furthermore, operational limitations such as centralisation of operations, elite influence and domination, and cultural limitations in the form of traditional power or limited local capacity (Hamilton and Alexander 2013; Tosun and Timothy 2003) may impede growth. Peripheral destinations are also prone to natural disasters and vulnerable to global changes (Sharpley 2012).

South Pacific Island tourism utilizes a year round warm climate, white sandy beaches, endemic marine and land eco-systems, lush terrains of the larger islands, distinctive cultures and social structures, as well as history linked to Western penetration, including wars and colonialism (Panakera et al. 2011). However, these islands can expect to face challenges to tourism growth as peripheral destinations and as their MIRAB (Migration, Remittances, Aid and Bureaucracy) economies (Bertram 2006) restrict development opportunities, including tourism specific infrastructure.

Secondly, tourism development is commonly viewed to be associated with socio-cultural disruption, including the commodification of local culture (Ryan 2001; Weaver 2002). While tourism's threat in terms of acculturation is acknowledged, conversely, some argue that it can play a role in preserving local culture (Besculides et al 2002). It is acknowledged, though, that even a small number of tourists can influence the local culture (Mowforth and Munt 2008) leading to hesitation or division within local communities on whether or not to engage in tourism. Ultimately, some local communities (or individuals) may not respond positively to tourism development as Doxey's Irritation Index illustrates, the host-guests relationship over time can lead to irritation and finally antagonism (Hunt and Stronza 2014). Ecological challenges are also a reality for island destinations given their limitations in terms of land and natural resources, local use needs and the pressure of tourism resource-intensive activities (Graci and Dodds 2010). These challenges pose both infrastructural and attitudinal barriers to island tourism development.

Adopted from the globally inspired approach towards development in the 1980s (Miller and Twining-Ward 2005), sustainable development has emerged as a means to integrate the economic,

socio-cultural and environmental aspects of development. The notion of sustainability raises debate concerning tourism's long-term viability, its inter-connected nature (Liburd and Edwards 2010), and that it should not just be business (Butler 1991). Furthermore, in the name of sustainability, the possibility of a less tourism-centric approach must be considered (Miller and Twining-Ward 2005). Graci and Dodds (2010) assert that long-term viability of tourism depends on the constant availability of both natural and cultural resources, highlighting the need for planning and managing these resources and to broaden understanding of the economic, social and environmental factors that affect them. To assist with broadening our understanding of such factors, it is beneficial for island communities to identify where they are in terms of potential tourism development pathways. Butler's (1980) tourism area life cycle (TALC), depicts the development of tourist areas as occurring in six distinct phases with specific planning and management needs at each. The initial discovery stage of a tourism potential area is called the 'exploration phase', which is followed by the 'growth and development stages' demonstrated by increased local community involvement, marketing activities and then eventually less local involvement and control (Butler 1980). This may further lead to the 'consolidation' phase where decisions are prompted by capacity issues as the destination has reached 'popularity' and local resentment of tourism is evident (Butler 1980), despite tourism being the major contributor to the local economy. Associated with a decline in environmental quality along with social impacts, the destination may then stagnate, reaching a final stage where efforts may be needed to initiate a rejuvenation. Most significant for this study is the 'exploration phase' where the area could 'possibly' be a tourist area (Graci and Dodds 2010), however little research has contributed to our understanding of critical issues at this stage, and how community attitudes may influence progression from this to the next stage of 'Involvement'.

It is common for Pacific communities to accept tourism development (Movono, Pratt, and Harrison 2015), especially community based tourism (CBT) because of the perceived benefits to local communities (Tolkach and King 2015). The functional view of tourism highlights collaboration through joint decision-making between stakeholders (Jamal and Getz 1995; Sautter and Leisen 1999) valuing the over-arching nature of sustainable tourism (Hunter 1997). Collaboration counters top-down management typical of tourism development (King et al. 2000), while nurturing a sense of ownership among stakeholder, decentralizing power (Hamilton and Alexander 2013; King et al. 2000) and ensuring a more equal distribution of benefits. Collaboration ensures an affective bond between stakeholders, and ideally the community as the main stakeholder.

General support from the community for tourism ventures is desirable, because as a key stakeholder, their participation is seen to make an essential contribution to sustainable tourism development (Sebele 2010; Wahab and Pigram 1997). A community approach to tourism or CBT can provide benefits such as: tourism development acceptable to local residents; control over what is or not accepted; empowerment to integrate tourism and other activities; opening up of opportunities for sharing ideas; reinforcing positive operations in the area; and facilitating the establishment of codes of conduct (Liburd and Edwards 2010). The primary intention of CBT is no longer about the development *of* the community but development *in* the community (Hall 2008). This intention places priority on the community's natural and cultural heritage. However, CBT has been challenged on the basis that it works from a "stereotypical idealization of community" which "assumes shared interests and a consensus on the preferred tourism outcomes" (Blackstock 2005: 42). Critics argue that most communities are heterogeneous, and that the above conceptualization

of community ignores how individuals or groups can act out of self-interest rather than for the collective good (Blackstock 2005; Silk 1999).

This research aims to explore the opportunities and obstacles—attitudinal and infrastructural—for the development of CBT on Apolima Island, while also contributing to our understanding of peripheral destinations that are in the exploration phase of tourism development.

### **Sustainable Tourism Development in Sāmoa**

In the early 1990s, Sāmoa recognised that tourism development must be both environmentally responsible and culturally sensitive (Scheyvens 2008) to benefit both the visitor and the host, aligned with Sāmoa's Strategy for development vision of an 'Improved Quality Life for All'. Sāmoa has shown a determination to protect the fa'asāmoa and land ownership, thus has taken a cautious approach to tourism, adopting a low-volume high-yield policy focused on small-scale tourism operations (Sāmoa Tourism Authority [STA] 2014a; Scheyvens 2008).

As a peripheral destination, the cornerstones of Sāmoan tourism are a pristine natural environment and a unique culture. These orchestrate the image making of Sāmoa as an emerging tourist destination, under the brand of "The Treasured Islands of the South Pacific", largely featuring beaches, rainforests, volcanic activities and a vibrant Polynesian culture (Scheyvens 2005). Traditional authority secures local ownership and encourages community management of attraction sites, accommodations and overall Sāmoa tourism activities. Thus local participation in tourism conditions the vision, tourism indicators, priorities and activities of tourism in Sāmoa. Local participation is organised in line with fa'a Sāmoa and because of this, many villages engage in community-based tourism activities. For example, in order to enhance experiential travel, Sāmoan tourism recognises the need to increase community-based tourism income and the support services available to local providers to better enable them for effective operations management (STA 2014b). Sāmoan tourism also recognises that in order to build local tourism capacity, there needs to be "toe dipping" opportunities for the people in the villages to test and experience tourism activities, for instance, engaging as tour guides to take tourists around their village (STA 2014a), the goal being the collective benefit of the village.

Sāmoa interprets sustainable development as the pathway to an Improved Quality of Life for All, and its tourism sector holds the overall aim to be recognised as the leading Pacific destination for sustainable tourism, which engages both visitors and the local community (STA 2014a). Sāmoa is an emerging tourism destination that appreciates sustainable development and values tourism in its economy (STA 2014b). The growth of the beach fale accommodations in Sāmoa is a unique example of successful small-scale operations (Scheyvens 2008) which are community-based, locally owned budget accommodations along the coastal area. According to Scheyvens (2008), beach fale operations complement the existing livelihood of Sāmoans, for example, the hospitality, food and activities available for visitors is not far from the reality of everyday Sāmoan life which does not necessarily strain the host-visitor relationship. The owners are people from the village, and the village renders support. The idea is to generate a healthy multiplier effect for the community, and beach fale owners for example, buy fish from the village fishermen, make donations to the church and village projects and provide village people with employment. In general, many of the tourism activities are operated by local people and communities. Thus the tourism system is well integrated

into the Sāmoan community; however Apolima Island's degree of involvement in this system is unclear.

## Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach to retrieve data to gauge community perspectives and attitudes towards tourism on Apolima Island, and to investigate the potential for community based sustainable tourism development on the island. The research population included the community of Apolima Island (Group 1) and the Sāmoa tourism sector (Group 2) which includes representatives from the Sāmoa Tourism Authority and Government ministries within the sector. This exploratory study employed purposive sampling to recruit participants with a degree of diversity (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Five participants were confirmed from Group 1 and four from Group 2, which, in this study was considered adequate to achieve data saturation. These participants are the stakeholders referred to throughout this article. It has been noted that data saturation may be attained by as little as six interviews (Guest et al. 2006). Furthermore, there is general agreement that data saturation is not about the numbers *per se*, but about the depth of the data, and that it is better to focus upon the richness of the data rather than the size of the sample (Burmeister and Aitken 2012). Group 1 participants were purposively selected to fully represent the common perspectives of potential and existing community development through their roles as *matai*<sup>2</sup>, *taule'ale'a*<sup>3</sup> and *tama'ita'i*<sup>4</sup>. Likewise Group 2 participants were selected as working experts in the tourism sector, clearly informed of community engagement through various projects and platforms. The selection included both gender, and considered participants' role, or traditional status (with or without authority) in the community and all were more than 18 years old.

This study also utilizes the researcher's status firstly as a Pacific person, a Sāmoan, a female academic, and a *nofotāne*<sup>5</sup> of Apolima Island. These 'credentials' steered the accessibility to information and the contextualized analysis of this study. Ethical considerations for the research processes were aligned to the Otago University Research Ethics and Pacific Research Protocol.

While qualitative interviews have been used effectively in the field of CBT elsewhere (Lepp 2007; Okazaki 2008) in the Pacific context, *Talanoa* is an appropriate method of social inquiry. *Talanoa* is, similar to in-depth interviews, guided by topics to lead informal conversations and/or standardized open-ended interviews (Marshall 2011). *Talanoa* in Sāmoan "...refers to loose, casual conversation" (Suaalii-Sauni and Fulu-Aiolupotea 2014) extended by *soālāupule*<sup>6</sup> "...to include the idea of engaging people in serious conversations about matters of importance...redefining its usage..." (p. 341). Thus as a research method, *talanoa* acknowledges a Sāmoan world view and cultural specificity which qualitative research can be devoid of. *Talanoa* sessions were flexible face-to-face engagements that were not always continuous and not more than one hour, which were planned around the availability of participants. There were various topics intended to initiate the *talanoa* sessions, conducted in both English and Sāmoan, and carried out on Apolima Island and in sector participants' workplaces. The analysis of these data involved coding themes that evolved

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<sup>2</sup> Chief

<sup>3</sup> Young untitled man

<sup>4</sup> Young woman

<sup>5</sup> Woman married into the family/community

<sup>6</sup> Traditional decision making where all parties are entitled to an opinion; this talanoa is usually for serious matters like conflict resolution.

(Fossey et al. 2002) through reflexive writing, transcribing/translating and document analysis. This thematic analysis produced themes that form the main headings within the findings section below.

### **Apolima Island—A Periphery of a Periphery**

Apolima Island is West of the main island Upolu, closest to the big island of Savaii. It is the least inhabited of the four inhabited islands with 94 residents in 14 households (Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics [SBS] 2011) and quite difficult to access but with the skill of the *alia*<sup>7</sup> boat navigators, the trip is 30–40 minutes. Figure 1 captures the passage between Apolima-uta/Apolima Fou<sup>8</sup> (on Upolu Island) and Apolima Island, where most residents of Apolima Island have migrated and settled. In the previous census, 432 people were residents of this village (SBS 2011) and it is the common understanding that urban drift in the search for job opportunities has contributed to this migration from Apolima Island. However, it is also believed that as the village grew in size, the island became too small to live on. Also, cyclones in the early 1990s destroyed the island’s infrastructure including its primary school and health clinic facility, which also contributed to the move for many to Upolu.

There is a limited literature on Apolima Island mainly because the island has been difficult to access by researchers. There is limited geographical, flora and fauna research (Freifeld et al. 2001; Richmond and Roy 1989) but some local environmental and sustainable development research provides some information about the island. For example, Apolima Island became the first successful site for solar power installation and use in Sāmoa, as a result of ongoing Government collaboration and research with international bodies including the UNDP (Government of Sāmoa, UNDP, Electric Power Corporation and Organisation for Sustainable Energy (Denmark) 2007). Figure 2 provides an imagery account of entering the island from its only point of entrance, which is an extraordinary experience because it is such a narrow reef opening. Before the efficiency of *alia* boats, navigators used to count seven waves before attempting to enter.

**Figure 1: Locating Apolima Island**



(Source: Google Maps 2015; (Inset map) <https://cdn.vectorstock.com>)

A traditional Sāmoan community setting and daily life is evident on the island (refer to Figure 3). For example, when guests arrive and stay at a resident’s house, the whole village helps to host the

guests by providing food, *talanoa* and to show them around. The two main sources of income are employment of men on small fishing boats by business people on the main island, and the fine mats woven by the women. Children attend school on the main island, returning only for the weekend. While the men leave for employment, the women, young infants, older folk and the youth left responsible for the plantation and everyday sustenance of the family, remain on the island.

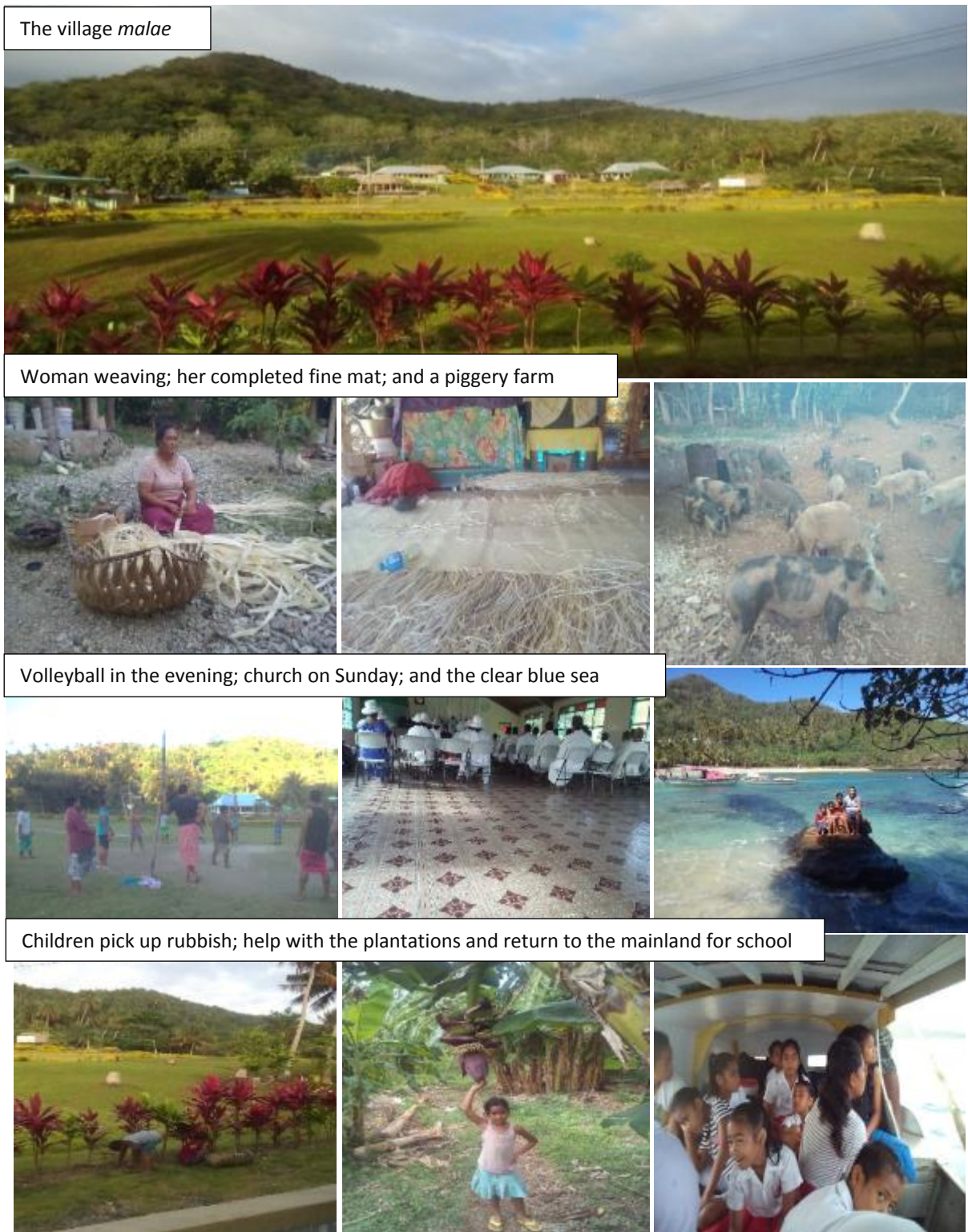
Community activities occupy the residents, and this includes church choir, village clean-up days, house improvement inspections, organised village games at the end of the week, and fishing expeditions for the village and so forth. The traditional authority is the village mayor/representative, who ensures harmony within the community and lobbies for opportunities to improve the community's welfare. A recent success has been the donation of water tanks for all households on Apolima Island.

**Figure 2: Entering Apolima Island**



(Source: Author; Google maps)

Figure 3: Life on Apolima Island



(Source: Author)

Sāmoa's Internal Affairs Division (IAD) in the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSO) is the official gateway to villages. IAD manage the various committees of village representatives and organises projects with the help of these representatives, and communicate Government policies and/or events to the villages. The IAD village profile of Apolima



Island in 2013 did not identify the establishment of any tourism facilities or activities. However, it indicates that there are eleven vegetable gardens, three cattle farms, ten piggery farms and eleven poultry farms occupying customary land, and that families owned fishing tools and share five alia boats. This data confirms the predominance of subsistence living on the island. Residents purchase their other household goods from the main island. In terms of development projects, the IAD Apolima Island profile notes a few of these projects, including community economic development projects in sewing and fishing since 2012, led by the Small Business Enterprise Centre (SBEC) and funded by the Development Bank of Sāmoa (DBS). Another project proposed the inclusion of Apolima Island as a natural heritage site, a project in progress, led by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and funded by UNESCO. Apolima Island has been identified as a key marine biodiversity area by the MNRE. Protection is an ongoing environment and social development project that is funded by the Government and steered by the MNRE. With assistance from UNDP, South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission, Government of Sāmoa, Government of Denmark and Asian Development Bank, the Electric Power Corporation (EPC) leads the wind energy project where Apolima Island is the pilot site. On the village level, the Apolima village council (includes matai from Apolima Island and Apolima Fou) administer and fund a community based watershed management project. These projects, both planned and established, speak to the application of a sustainable development approach on Apolima Island, highlighting the island's capacity for sustainable community managed projects and collectively contributing to an environment in which sustainable forms of tourism may be apposite.

### **Apolima Island: Potential for Community Based Sustainable Tourism Development?**

Analysis of the interviews with key community and industry stakeholders provide an insight into the potential for community based sustainable tourism development on Apolima Island. The findings are presented under five themes, drawn from the thematic analysis of *talanoa* and also discussed with reference to relative tourism sector documents. The themes present a narrative that begins with a broad statement of the local view on sustainability in relation to development. This provides a basis for discussing the importance of sector-community collaboration in sustainable development. The focus then shifts to the community and their perspectives on development in general, and later their response to tourism developments on Apolima Island. Finally this narrative addresses the potential barriers to development on Apolima.

#### ***Understanding of Sustainability***

The community's understanding of sustainability is in relation to 'developments' that can be managed by the community and are within their means on the island. A community interviewee says "...we cannot afford to put effort into developments that crash in two months". There is an insistence that whatever developments occur at this level, they have to be viable and durable so to not waste resources. It was also observed that this understanding is a result of community engagement programmes administered by government organisations, and guided by documents such as the Village Sustainable Development Plans (VSDPs) and the Community Profiles amongst others. As a tourism sector interviewee articulates;

*The whole idea is for the community to identify their assets and their understanding of these assets, and how they would like these assets to develop further, so that it is sustainable for them. In that way, they*

*own the project, they own the plan, and they lead the implementation. We hope to have VSDPs for all communities, to add to the Community Profiles that we have of each village.*

The tourism sector participants seemed well informed of the sustainability concept, obviously enabled by their line of work and their delivery requirements according to the Strategy for the Development of Sāmoa 2012–2019 (SDS), which emphasizes developing opportunities that provide a ‘Quality Life for All’ by boosting productivity through sustainable developments. Their informed understanding and the direction of their work, relates to the proposal by Graci and Dodds (2010) that sustainable tourism development should provide a quality of life for all through forward thinking, community involvement and relative policies and strategic implementation. This requires the use of indicators such as sustainable tourism development indicators (Miller and Twining-Ward 2005) which pull together the three pillars of sustainability (Liburd and Edwards 2010). It is important to note that these indicators should reflect the context of the locality (Twining-Ward and Butler 2004), which the community sector strives to achieve with the developments that it initiates. These indicators must be applied should developments occur on Apolima Island, to monitor progress in alignment with other tourism sector developments occurring throughout the other islands of Sāmoa. It is indicated in these findings that sustainable tourism development is desired as expressed through *talanoa* as developments that the community can manage and are within the means known to them. Furthermore, this desire is also reflected in the direction of ongoing community engagement programmes. This interest is particularly important for island periphery destinations as Graci and Dodds (2010) point out, because rapid unmonitored tourism growth has brought negative economic, social and ecological impacts.

### ***Stakeholder Consultation, Collaboration and Communication***

The fa’asāmoa has always been an important part of a Sāmoan’s life, especially in the village. Consultation, collaboration and communication of decisions lead to the improvement of villages, and it is a pathway that is employed and recognised by the tourism sector to be effective and recognised in the overall development strategies of Sāmoa. This implies forward thinking and vision on the sector’s part, and identifies the need to effectively communicate with the community affected. It also affirms that communities are like ecosystems (Jamal and Getz 1995) where their components depend and respond to one another, and decision making shifts from the top-down scale to a more decentralised bottom-up manner (King et al. 2000). A *talanoa* participant explains that: “Each ministry specialises and understands its own area and so when we work together, we are drawing the best from each other to achieve our targets and push the development of Sāmoa.”

In this perspective, community involvement in sustainable development is not a new concept in Sāmoa, but a ‘label’ for a usual practice. A practice that is readily achieved between ‘neighbours’ such as Manono Island and Apolima Island, who share the wandering tourist, as explained by an Apolima Island interviewee, “My friend and owner of the Manono Island resort contacts me when he has visitors who want to come to Apolima. They transport the visitors over, and the visitors either stay for a few hours, or for a night or two, and then we take them back to Manono or Savaii”. It is a practice that is strengthened by ideas or projects that the ministries and organisations import from the main island and overseas, along with capacity building opportunities and funding to implement projects. This emphasizes that communities should have a voice in the developments that affect them, especially in tourism development (Tosun and Timothy 2003). Even though some community representatives do not participate in interactions such as workshops and training, these are still

established channels of interaction, available for those who can attend and most used these channels of interaction and depended upon them for community-government-sector interaction. However, the element of non-participation presents a potential weakness in the authorities' community engagement strategy. On this note, the fa'asāmoa can play an important role when utilized thoroughly, as one interviewee states "We make the decision as matai, and then we encourage our families and work together to make it happen, it's the system of our forefathers and it is a system that works for us today."

### **Potential Developments on Apolima Island**

Through *talanoa*, participants presented a wide variety of potential developments on Apolima Island, reflecting on the outlined development pathway in documents such as the SDS and the STSP. In these sessions, tourism sector participants displayed a wide understanding of the development pathway of Sāmoa, and their perceptions on possible developments for Apolima Island reflected this understanding. The reoccurring perception from this group was, that should Apolima Island community engage in tourism development, they must align with the national strategy for development (SDS). This is the expectation for all village community developments in Sāmoa, drawn out of the Community Engagement Framework (Internal Affairs Division, 2014). In relation to this, a facilitator of community projects explains that the aim is, "...to teach people how to sustain themselves and their community, without introducing extreme lifestyle changes. So far communities accept these projects because they provide other means that ensure a good life, taking away the thinking that only a job in Apia can provide a good life."

The community participants demonstrated a positive perspective on development, tempered with a desire that any developments must be useful and practical. It is evident that the residents view tourism as one potential development, but there were more "urgent" developments according to a community interviewee;

*Yes that (tourism development) would be great! But I think before we get there, there are a lot of other developments that we need assistance with. Like a seawall, a more stable wharf so that people can jump off the boat on to dry land, and a boat to operate just for the tourists.*

Other developments identified included a medical clinic and a school. Participants' priorities seemed to be more on infrastructural development, as they felt that this can enable subsequent developments such as tourism to flourish. Reflecting on the resident participants' responses and behaviour during *talanoa*, they portrayed a confidence in their remoteness and security in their community life, with or without tourism. In this sense, tourism is not a development that residents feel they needed to engage in at this stage because their livelihood does not depend on it. Therefore their main concern seemed to be more about developments that protect their community, for example, the construction of a seawall to prevent coastal erosion and a medical clinic to help maintain a healthy population on the island.

### **Tourism on Apolima Island**

The general impression from participants is that there is support for sustainable tourism development. The major concern of participants however, was about having 'proper' tourism facilities and accommodation.

*Palagi do come to our island, usually from Manono Island. They pop in around to our house, talk with us and we have the chance to practice speaking English. They usually walk up to the lighthouse, see the*

*spring and just mingle with us. There have been talks to establish beach falea to accommodate them, but I don't know what happened to those talks.*

While the resident participants also recognize that tourism can be economically beneficial as another source of income, tourism development is not seen as a development priority, but a potential development that if it serendipitously happens, it must benefit the community. Participants were more excited about the social benefit of tourism such as the opportunity to display their pride in their island and to 'practice' their English speaking skills, which are features of success in sustainable tourism development according to Graci and Dodds (2010). The Sāmoan-ness that was observed on Apolima Island during the data collection fieldwork is definitely significant. The hospitality shown was also non-obligatory but a normal response, which one of the islanders explained "It is our way to show that little Apolima has a big heart, and when visitors return to their homes, they will only have great things to say about Apolima." The residents were in control of the interactions that took place on the island because they were in their own space and in their normal routine of social life. Hosting visitors was not an extreme activity that would obligate them to change their lifestyle.

These findings on residents' attitudes towards tourism confirm that Apolima Island is situated in the exploration stage of Butler's (1980) TALC model. Visitors make their own travel arrangements to get there, they explore the new place and the locals host them in their homes. The hosts are friendly and positive to having visitors regardless of their purpose or type because it gives them the opportunity to share their culture and everyday existence of which they are proud. It is necessary to stress that participants feel that visitors at this stage do not have a major cultural and economic impact on the community.

From the perspective of tourism sector participants, while excited about the possibilities of tourism on Apolima Island, they share the perception with residents that tourism is not a priority development, but if it happens, it must happen as a sustainable form of development. This is expressed by one representative, "We duly support Apolima Island as a tourism operation area especially because it is not located on the (main)island, and ideal for the adventure seekers and backpackers because of the experience of getting there and just with what is available there." The overall response from the sector indicate concerns surrounding the sustainability of natural and cultural resources for tourism, which alludes to the environmental and cultural impact of tourism discussed by in terms of carrying capacity by a number of researchers (Graci and Dodds 2010; Mowforth and Munt 2008). The sector is cautious of tourism development but it is also optimistic given neighbouring Manono Island's success with tourism activities. While there are important differences between the islands, the overall attitude is that tourism development must capture and sustain what Apolima Island has to offer.

### **Barriers to Development**

The barriers to tourism were mostly identified by participants from the tourism sector, demonstrating their awareness of the repercussions of poor development planning, especially on an island such as Apolima. The majority of the barriers identified were infrastructural barriers that can potentially impede development—including tourism development. As one of the *talanoa* participants from the tourism sector highlighted, Apolima Island is difficult to access, which poses as a risk factor that may deter some visitors but at the same time, appeal to others such as adventure seeking tourists. This concern is related to a lack of transport providers (boats) with whom the sector

could collaborate to construct a timetable of transfers. This gave rise to the concern of the security of tourists travelling over through the Apolima Strait which is regarded as one of Sāmoa's roughest channels. Safety, however, is an important component of tourist satisfaction in Sāmoa (STA 2014a) and thus it is a prevailing concern of the sector to maintain a positive view of Sāmoa. Inquiring further on this, the sector representatives were cautious and referred to the need for risk management even though they acknowledged that there haven't been any recorded mishaps in this channel. In contrast, the residents, however, did not raise the issue of safety. In fact, they were quite casual in their *talanoa* about travelling to and from Apolima Island, noting that it has always been safe for them because of their skilled boat navigators who were born and raised on the island, and therefore, knew the conditions well.

Another key challenge identified by participants that could impede development is the poor current water supply and waste management infrastructure available on the island. Participants believed that this issue is crucial to consider, along with the need to anticipate the pressure that development and increased number of visitors may bring. At this stage, the residents have received water tanks for each household, but the concern raised by one of the tourism sector participants is the impact of droughts such as that arising from the recent El Nino event which has strained the water supply, especially on remote islands. That participant suggests the possibility of enhanced rain water harvesting to counter water scarcity issues. From an environmental perspective, some participants also raised the need to consider waste management parallel to development growth. One tourism sector participant feared that "Increased number of visitors and [growth of] the community will eventually exhaust the existing septic tanks; what will happen then is a major marine environment issue."

In contrast to the raft of issues identified by tourism sector participants, through *talanoa* the residents' generally expressed a confidence and pride in the "little Apolima with the big heart". In the residents' positive attitude towards tourism there was no indication of any cultural taboos on developments. They did emphasize, however, that developments required the consensus of the community or *soālāupule*. Such a process takes time which again a key participant from the tourism sector identified as a challenge that can impede or even stop a development; "After identifying a site we proceed to establish it, but then we encounter customary land ownership issues and find ourselves as mediators in a tangle of ownership." Elaborating on this issue, this *talanoa* participant believed that it is important at this early 'pre-development' stage to determine who will be responsible for the site so that it can be maintained and developed according to Sāmoa's tourism objectives and principles. Participants also identified the challenges around the ongoing management of any tourism developments on the island. In particular, they were referring to the skills and capabilities necessary to operate developments on the island, such as beach fale accommodations, and the challenges of finding suitable skills and capabilities within a community of less-than-one hundred Apolima Islanders. Thus if tourism development does occur on Apolima Island, it is seen as important that the tourism sector matches such development with the capability and skills set of the residents by offering ongoing training and workshops. Apolima participants reiterated that there is also the need to continuously collaborate with the community to ensure that customary access is maintained, and in order so that any tourism development can proceed and be sustainably managed by the community.

## Conclusion

The community participants on Apolima Island held a positive attitude towards tourism development. While their perceptions may be limited to the visitor-host experiences they may have had to date, tourism is recognised not simply as another source of income but more for the social benefits that allow them to display pride in the Sāmoan way of life that they practice, which Graci and Dodds (2010) highlight as a feature of successful sustainable development. For the currently very limited number of visitors, there is a high level of interaction between with the community because there are currently no tourism specific facilities, fitting the description of tourism development in the Exploration-early-Involvement stage (Butler 1980) of minimum visitors, non-regularity of visits and hosted by the residents. Visitors are usually Sāmoan working people, and the *palagi*<sup>7</sup> visitor is only expected when they request to visit through Sāmoa Tourism Authority or Manono Island friend. At this stage of the TALC model, the economic and ecological impacts of tourism are low because visitor numbers and length of stay are usually short overnight stays, and interaction with the locals is the main activity. While the Apolima Island residents perceive social impacts to not be an issue with Sāmoan visitors, they may be naïve in terms of the potential impacts from domestic (cf. international) tourism. Studies elsewhere point to the substantial tourism impacts from large scale domestic tourism (Ghimire 2013).

It is noted that the Apolima Island community participants prefer developments that they themselves can manage because they value their existing lifestyle. Residents have a can-do attitude towards tourism if tourism developments are initiated, otherwise their priority lies with the development of physical and health related infrastructure. The common perspective is that these infrastructural developments lay the path for other developments for the community. For example, a seawall is an identified development priority which the community feels will not only preserve the island but minimise posed risks of climate change on islands. It is also evident that the community relies on the Government to initiate developments. This includes assisting them with finding sponsors and donors for community projects. Such dependence reflects the MIRAB economies of peripheral destinations (Gossling and Wall 2007) such as Sāmoa, and moreover Apolima Island as a 'periphery of a periphery'.

Sustainable tourism researchers emphasise the relationship between collaboration and sustainability (Liburd and Edwards 2010). The tourism sector participants in this study recognise the importance of collaboration, which can lead to joint decision making (Jamal and Getz, 1995; Sautter and Leisen, 1999) that benefits communities. On Apolima there is an overall confidence in the established forms of collaboration, that when effectively used, can lead to community managed tourism projects. Collaborations between the formal tourism sector led by the Sāmoa Tourism Authority with Apolima Island could, for example, help to establish safe and regular transport to the island, secure historical narratives, protect significant sites, create safe visitor activities, initiate the correct accommodation arrangements for the community to operate, and most importantly ensure a continued healthy visitor-host relationship.

However, the sector highlighted infrastructural barriers to sustainable tourism development, specifically accessibility, water supply and waste management and also questioned who will be responsible on the island to ensure that developments such as tourism are sustained. These barriers reflect conditions common to peripheral islands (Tosun and Timothy 2003) and highlight the

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<sup>7</sup> White person or foreigner.

importance of STD indicators (Miller and Twining-Ward 2005) that are context specific to the community (Twining-Ward and Butler 2004).

Furthermore, the sector also pointed to other potential sustainable developments that may be more viable for Apolima Island, such as a pilot site for renewable energy projects. Tosun and Timothy (2003) emphasise limitations that need to be considered in community projects, which Mowforth and Munt (2008) believe strengthen the bond and ownership of projects because of continuous collaborations. This reflects what the tourism sector aims for in community projects, encouraging communities to not only engage in project planning but to also lead in the implementation and management of projects. In this light, the tourism sector relies on the community to initiate the developments or at least indicate an interest that they can support and work with the community on such projects. However, it is apparent that both the sector and community wait on each other to initiate developments.

Overall, Apolima Island has practicable potential to participate in tourism activities, fitting with Sāmoa's national cultural and environmental tourism approach. The fa'asāmoa land ownership also ensures that ownership is local and the community benefits from developments. However, there appears to be a misunderstanding on who should initiate developments—the community, the government or the private tourism sector. Apolima Island has yet to be integrated into the Sāmoa tourism matrix but indications from this exploratory study are that the residents' positive attitude together with the government and tourism sector's support, can enhance the quality of life for the residents, while providing a quality visitor experience through its inclusion as a community based tourism experience within Sāmoa's tourism offering.

### **Research Implications and Ways Forward**

This explorative study contributes to our overall understanding of sustainable development, and particularly sustainable tourism development, and emphasises the value of community perceptions and community involvement in development planning, especially pre-development or 'exploration' phases (Butler 1980; Graci and Dodds 2010). The study articulates the need for collaboration between the tourism sector and the community, in order to achieve a truly community based form of tourism (Mowforth and Munt 2008). It provides a useful window into local perceptions of sustainable tourism and points to the intricate link between general development needs and specific tourism development needs in a 'chicken and egg' like manner.

A further contribution of this study comes from its focus on island tourism, specifically warm water islands in the South Pacific tourism. While Conlin and Baum (1995) and later Sharpley (2012) argue that island tourism is not a new phenomenon in academic research, this study acknowledges Carlsen and Butler's (2010) argument that there are various complexities in island tourism, and that these are worthy of research. Such complexities include peripherality which in the local context, Apolima Island aptly demonstrates, being a "periphery within a periphery" which poses further challenges not only in terms of development but also in terms of maintaining general community engagement. There are areas highlighted in this research that could be expanded into larger research projects.

This research did not investigate the relationship between renewable energy and tourism in Sāmoa. However, renewable energy is a growing interest in Sāmoa, along with increasing concern over limited resources in island countries. Also this topic was frequently mentioned during *talanoa*

sessions. In line with sustainable principles in tourism, it may be useful to investigate the context of renewable energy in Sāmoa, and how it can contribute to the tourism sector, affect the quality of visitor experience and the quality of life for the local community.

This study can be viewed as a case study of Sāmoa, featuring Apolima Island, and special interest in community involvement and sustainable tourism development. These parameters can be repeated with various other village communities around Sāmoa, profiling the villages, generating and expanding knowledge on tourism in Sāmoa. Furthermore these case studies can contribute to documents such as the Village Sustainable Development Plan (Internal Affairs Division [IAD] 2014).

Finally, this research has highlighted that *talanoa* is an effective research method especially in the local level. *Talanoa* encourages the use of the first language which articulates Sāmoan values and insights, providing a useful pool of contextualised information that can be adapted in various forms of development. Comparative studies between villages would be possible through *talanoa*, identifying potential community developments.

### Acknowledgement

We wish to thank the NZAid and Otago University, Department of Tourism for the Research Funds that enabled the research, which this article is extracted from. We also acknowledge and thank the invaluable contribution of Sāmoa Tourism Authority, MWCSO Internal Affairs Division and most of all, the residents of Apolima Island.

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