

A Galapagos identity

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The literature describing the social situation in Galapagos often mentions that to achieve lasting conservation of the islands requires the commitment of the inhabitants. This commitment comes from a strong sense of island "identity" and a lifestyle that is consistent with the ecological importance and fragility of the archipelago. Such an identity and lifestyle would include respect for the unique ecological value of the islands, for efforts to preserve their physical isolation, and for the environmental laws and regulations of Galapagos.

This article explores the following question: Do Galapagos residents with a greater appreciation for or emotional attachment to the archipelago (aka "Galapagos Identity") also show a greater acceptance of environmental restrictions associated with living in the province? We begin with a brief review of how we approached the concept of Galapagos identity through a public opinion survey carried out in June 2006 and March 2008 (Table 1) and focus groups¹ involving inhabitants on each of the three most populated islands of the archipelago. We then present a statistical analysis to show the relationship between Galapagos identity and the acceptance of environmental restrictions associated with living in Galapagos.

Table 1. Public opinion surveys carried out in Galápagos.

	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2006	2008
Survey month	July	October	September	January	November 2000	June	March
Total No. Surveys	377	427	582	553	573	442	487
Isabela	102	109	160	150	151	102	104
San Cristóbal	147	158	209	203	213	147	185
Santa Cruz	128	160	213	200	209	193	198
Standard Error	±5.2	±4.8	±4.1	±4.3	±4.2	±4.7	±4.5

Sources: Falconí (2002: 53); Barber and Ospina (2006), and Opinion Survey of March 2008.

¹ A focus group is a type of collective interview, generally with a group of people with relatively homogeneous social characteristics. The four focus groups that were used in this study had five to nine people; the length of the interviews ranged from two to three hours.

Association with a Galapagos identity

A practical way to describe "Galapagos identity"² is to ask residents to attach a value to qualities describing Galapagueños (defined as natives or those who have lived in the islands for an extended period of time) and then compare the values with those they assign to Ecuadorians in general.³ Those qualities for which a higher value is given to Galapagos residents would be more closely associated with a Galapagos identity. The result of this exercise is that for almost all of the qualities

listed, respondents gave a higher average value to Galapagueños than to the rest of Ecuadorians. One exception was in response to qualities related to "laziness vs. industriousness," where there were no statistically significant differences (Table 2). Those qualities most closely associated with Galapagueños include "tranquility," "love for the islands," "caring for the islands," and "honesty." Survey participants appear to agree with the idea that Galapagueños have a greater inclination to care for the environment.

Table 2. Values associated with Galapagueños versus other Ecuadorians (2008 survey).*

NEGATIVE - POSITIVE	2006 (June)		2008 (March)	
	Ecuadorians	Galapagueños	Ecuadorians	Galapagueños
Closed - Open	3.72	3.93	3.63	3.89
Selfish - Generous	3.24	3.70	3.48	3.71
Lazy - Industrious	3.79	3.58	3.55	3.53
Aggressive - Tranquil	3.07	3.62	3.29	3.80
Hypocritical - Sincere	3.25	3.35	3.06	3.29
Irresponsible - Responsible	3.44	3.43	3.35	3.54
No concern for the islands - Love for the islands	3.39	3.86	3.51	4.05
Don't care for the environment - Care for the environment	3.32	3.65	3.23	3.83
Unfriendly - Friendly	3.67	3.94	3.77	4.09
Corrupt - Honest	2.61	3.22	2.79	3.33
Conflictive - Not conflictive	2.77	3.07	2.92	3.32
Disagreeable - Genial	3.48	3.60	3.33	3.66
AVERAGE	3.31	3.58	3.33	3.67

Sources: Opinion Surveys of June 2006 and March 2008, carried out in Galapagos.

*Note: Data weighted according to the population of each island; the higher the value, the more positive the opinion.

The surveys and focus groups both indicated that Galapagueños have a strong affinity with life in the islands and consider themselves to possess more positive values than their compatriots on the mainland. However, to develop a better understanding of local opinion related to characteristics associated with Galapagos identity, the survey included a series of additional questions (Table 3).

Although almost 75% of the people interviewed expressed a desire to live in Galapagos all of their lives and 45% think that Galapagueños should enjoy more rights than others, about 60% think there is too much selfishness in Galapagos, and 79% think that they cannot confide in others due to gossip (Table 3). This reveals that while most residents value living in Galapagos, they may have a

2 No standard definition of "Galapagos identity" exists. In this study, it is defined as the combination of attributes that are associated with being a Galapagueño.

3 Survey participants were asked to respond to the following question: "On this sheet you will see a series of positive and negative characteristics. On each line, you must mark with an 'X' the space that you think most appropriate." (...) "We understand "Galapagueño" to mean both natives and those who have lived in the islands for a long time..." The same approach was used to obtain their opinions about other Ecuadorians.

negative view of social interactions among Galapagueños. Although not stated in the survey, reasons for valuing “living in Galapagos” are apparently related to values

such as tranquility, the beauty of the surroundings, and certain favorable conditions of comfort and employment.

Table 3. Percent agreement or disagreement with phrases that value coexistence in Galapagos, March 2008.

PHRASE	Disagree strongly	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Agree strongly
Here in Galapagos everyone thinks only of themselves and no one is concerned for others.	3.1	26.9	14.8	47.0	8.2
I want to live in Galapagos all of my life.	0.8	12.5	11.3	41.2	32.4
Here people gossip, so you cannot trust them.	0.5	9.6	10.2	51.6	27.3
Galapagueños should have more rights than others.	5.0	32.4	15.6	37.6	8.0
In Galapagos one must learn to defend oneself against the selfishness of neighbors.	4.6	20.0	13.8	53.3	7.6

Note: Data weighted according to the population of each island.

Galapagos identity and acceptance of environmental restrictions

While living in Galapagos carries with it many advantages, it also requires accepting a variety of environmental restrictions. Having established some of the values associated with a Galapagos identity and the strong attachment of Galapagos residents to the islands, we can begin to examine the relationship between the strength of association with this identity and the acceptance of the environmental restrictions that are necessary to protect the insular ecosystems and to determine to what extent people are willing to accept both personal and social sacrifices for the betterment of Galapagos.

Our study is based on several assumptions. First we assume that those Galapagueños who believe there are more positive qualities among residents of the archipelago and those who express a more positive view of social interactions among Galapagueños have a greater association with the “Galapagos identity.” Another assumption is that Galapagos identity is also associated with time spent living in the islands. Our qualitative analysis confirms what has been revealed in previous studies: that there is a generalized belief in Galapagos that those who live more time in the islands have a greater attachment to the archipelago and have the right

to enjoy certain privileges.

On the basis of these assumptions, we examined Galapagos identity according to three distinct criteria: (i) level of association with the Galapagos identity in comparison with continental Ecuadorians; (ii) appraisal of social interactions among Galapagos residents; and (iii) time living in the province.

In a number of areas, those who most value the qualities of the Galapagos identity are not those with the greatest acceptance of environmental restrictions (Table 4). For example, this group tends to believe that the problem of introduced species has been exaggerated, that the government is more interested in Galapagos wildlife than in human beings, and that there should not be an established limit to the number of tourists. There is also a greater percentage among this group who think that environmental protection is only a “pretext” for various environmental restrictions. On the other hand, this group is less inclined to believe that the Special Law for Galapagos harms residents or that they should be able to import produce and other products without restrictions (Tables 4 and 5). They are also more strongly opposed to immigration and accept restrictions for their own families. However, a comparison among the three groups reveals relatively small differences.

Table 4. Survey results (% subgroup in agreement) based on Criteria 1 - level of association with the Galapagos identity.

PHRASE	Level of association with the Galapagos identity*		
	Low	Medium	High
Immigration increases unemployment levels	76.3	72.0	79.4
Shark fishing should be allowed	9.5	17.7	12.1
Bringing all types of fruits and vegetables from the continent should be allowed because they are cheaper	59.6	60.7	53.7
Closed fishing seasons are beneficial to fishermen	60.7	69.1	59.0
Immigration increases delinquency levels	77.8	82.9	82.1
Eliminating animals that live in the street is fine	83.8	82.6	81.5
The more people that live in the islands, the greater the environmental damage	82.8	80.3	88.6
The government is more interested in the wildlife in Galapagos than in human beings	48.5	54.8	59.5
The Special Law for Galapagos is harmful to residents and Galapagueños	35.0	24.6	22.9
The problem of introduced species is exaggerated	52.9	54.9	57.7
Harvesting native timber should be allowed	16.8	14.3	9.0
If my relatives want to come and live in Galapagos, they should be able to do so since this is also their country	40.0	44.2	35.4
There must be a limit to the number of tourists	32.6	31.8	27.8
In Galapagos all is prohibited on the grounds of protecting the environment	70.8	72.9	79.1
The Special Law for Galapagos is good for conservation of nature	72.7	73.0	82.7
The protected areas of Galapagos are too large	57.5	67.5	56.9
I would be willing to pay more for water to finance treatment for pollutants	52.9	50.6	55.2

Source: Opinion Survey of March 2008.

Note: Data weighted according to population of each island.

* "Low" refers to the subgroup of survey respondents who rated the average qualities of Galapagueños lower than those of continental Ecuadorians; "High" refers to the subgroup that rated Galapagueños above continental Ecuadorians.

Table 5. Survey results (% subgroup in agreement) based on Criteria 2 - extent to which residents positively value social interactions in Galapagos.

PHRASE	Level of positive appraisal of social interactions in Galapagos*		
	Low	Medium	High
Immigration increases unemployment levels	74.1	78.7	75.5
Shark fishing should be allowed	10.4	13.1	15.4
Bringing all types of fruits and vegetables from the continent should be allowed because they are cheaper	59.5	65.3	47.2
Closed fishing seasons are beneficial to fishermen	55.1	62.3	72.3
Immigration increases delinquency levels	76.6	83.2	82.6
Eliminating animals that live in the street is fine	82.1	85.0	80.4
The more people that live in the islands, the greater the environmental damage	81.9	85.3	84.9
The government is more interested in the wildlife in Galapagos than in human beings	51.5	53.5	58.2
The Special Law for Galapagos is harmful to residents and Galapagueños	32.7	26.5	23.2
The problem of introduced species is exaggerated	53.2	63.4	47.6
Harvesting native timber should be allowed	6.9	15.1	18.8
If my relatives want to come and live in Galapagos, they should be able to do so since this is also their country	38.4	39.0	42.7
There must be a limit to the number of tourists	29.0	25.1	39.5
In Galapagos all is prohibited on the grounds of protecting the environment	77.8	77.3	66.9
The Special Law for Galapagos is good for conservation of nature	70.8	83.2	74.0
The protected areas of Galapagos are too large	60.4	59.9	60.9
I would be willing to pay more for water to finance treatment for pollutants	50.4	49.5	59.8

Source: Opinion Survey of March 2008

Note: Data weighted according to population of each island.

* "Low" refers to the subgroup of survey respondents who consider that social interactions in Galapagos are noted for selfishness and gossip and who do not enjoy them; "High" refers to the subgroup that values the social interactions in Galapagos.

Those Galapagueños who view social interactions in Galapagos positively appear to be slightly higher in their acceptance of environmental restrictions, with three exceptions: there is less acceptance of the prohibition of shark fishing, restrictions on harvesting timber, and limits to immigration by family members (their responses to immigration were similar to those who had lived longer in Galapagos). In practically all other areas, this group supports environmental restrictions including a limit on the number of tourists, quarantine restrictions, and a higher fee for water to finance water treatment, and they do not share the opinion that the Special Law for Galapagos harms residents. In general, the opinions of those considered to have a high appraisal of Galapagos identity based on their opinion of social interactions differed greatly from those who rated the Galapagos identity above continental Ecuadorians.

As was the case with the previous two criteria, it is not always true that the residents who have lived longer in Galapagos

are more likely to accept environmental restrictions (Table 6). Those who were born in the islands tend to have a more unfavorable opinion of restrictions in almost all cases. Although they are more likely to accept closures of specific fisheries, they are also more likely to believe that shark fishing should be permitted. Although they tend to agree with restrictions on the importation of fruits and vegetables, they are also more likely to believe that the problem of introduced species has been exaggerated. Although they tend to oppose immigration, they believe that their own relatives should be able to come to the islands without restrictions. More members of this group believe that they should be able to harvest native timber and that the protected areas in the province are too large. One notable difference between recent immigrants and natives is their attitude towards tourism. Among natives, 41% believe that there should be a limit to the number of tourists, while only 23% of recent immigrants agree with this view.

Table 6. Survey results (% subgroup in agreement) based on Criteria 3: time lived in Galapagos.

PHRASE	Time in Galapagos*		
	Less	More	Born in GPS
Immigration increases unemployment levels	73.7	79.3	71.0
Shark fishing should be allowed	3.6	13.2	21.3
Bringing all types of fruits and vegetables from the continent should be allowed because they are cheaper	62.5	57.2	54.9
Closed fishing seasons are beneficial to fishermen	52.9	61.9	74.6
Immigration increases delinquency levels	76.5	82.5	80.6
Eliminating animals that live in the street is fine	76.4	85.2	82.5
The more people that live in the islands, the greater the environmental damage	78.6	85.4	86.1
The government is more interested in the wildlife in Galapagos than in human beings	51.6	54.0	57.1
The Special Law for Galapagos is harmful to residents and Galapagueños	27.5	28.1	26.7
The problem of introduced species is exaggerated	48.7	57.5	56.2
Harvesting native timber should be allowed	11.9	12.3	17.7
If my relatives want to come and live in Galapagos, they should be able to do so since this is also their country	36.5	40.0	40.2
There must be a limit to the number of tourists	22.6	29.7	41.4
In Galapagos all is prohibited on the grounds of protecting the environment	77.4	73.6	73.2
The Special Law for Galapagos is good for conservation of nature	68.6	78.9	77.1
The protected areas of Galapagos are too large	56.8	60.7	63.0
I would be willing to pay more for water to finance treatment for pollutants	52.3	52.9	53.4

Source: Opinion Survey of March 2008

Note: Data weighted according to population of each island.

* "Less" refers to the subgroup of survey respondents who have lived in Galapagos for less than one third of their life; "More" refers to the subgroup that has lived in Galapagos more than one third of their life.



Photograph: Alejandra Badillo

Conclusions

The general conclusion of this study is that greater attachment to a Galapagos identity—regardless of which of the three criteria is used—is not clearly associated with a greater acceptance of environmental restrictions associated with life in Galapagos. Of the three, time living in the islands appears to have the greatest effect. Even so, the most significant differences are apparent in views towards fishing and tourism (closed fishing seasons, shark fishing, and limiting the number of tourists). It is possible that the differences are not based on the time living in Galapagos but on other variables, such as island of residence, socioeconomic level, and profession.

To date the studies of Galapagos identity have been based exclusively on qualitative research. The questions asked in the surveys of June 2006 and March 2008 permit a new type of quantitative approximation that may complement previous analyses. It is possible to perform statisti-

cal tests, create profiles of attitudes regarding Galapagos identity, and study these profiles according to income, socioeconomic activity, level of community involvement, and educational level. The study also points to the need to analyze in greater detail the relationship between time living in the islands and appraisal of social interactions, as these variables may be interrelated.