

ABSTRACT

The Ocean and Our Culture: A Characterisation of the Cultural Benefits and Values Derived from the Marine Environment in Barbados using a Cultural Ecosystems Approach

Clish Ambre Gittens

The Barbados marine environment provides many material and non-material benefits to those who live and work on the island and contributes towards Barbadian culture. The Cultural Ecosystem Services (CES) approach provides an analytical framework to distinguish the aesthetic, spiritual, psychological, and other non-tangible benefits that humans receive from interacting with an ecosystem. By utilizing an adapted CES approach, the thesis examined how the marine environment has influenced the cultural ecosystems benefits of persons using the coastal areas of Silver Sands, Six Men's, and Batts Rock in Barbados.

The study used a mixed-method approach which included surveys, semi-structured interviews, participant observation and a document review. Cultural ecosystem (CE) benefits of experience and identity were found in the study locations of Six Men's and Batts Rock. In contrast, capabilities acted as a conduit in enabling experiences and shaping identity in Silver Sands. Competing interests within the coastal zone environment alter the CE benefits people receive, and physical changes impact benefits such as a sense of belonging and rootedness. Also, at the policy level, there is a need for greater institutional cooperation among public agencies for CE benefits to contribute to a more balanced and sustainable approach to resource management.

The research contributes to the existing literature in the following ways. First, it extends the discourse on Barbadian culture to include the human-nature relationship, identifying the non-material benefits that communities receive within the marine environment using an adapted CES framework. Secondly, it introduces the concept of competing interests within the CES framework to assess how cultural ecosystem benefits interact when confronted with changes to the environmental space. Thirdly, it examines how cultural dimensions of ecosystem services are incorporated into decision making for the sustainable use of the marine environment in the Caribbean small island context.

Keywords: Cultural ecosystem services (CES); cultural values; non-material benefits; marine environment; coastal communities; Small Island Developing States.