CREATE A GOOD FIT: A COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM PLANNING MODEL

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Abstract: Communities are rarely at the helm of the tourism planning and development that affects them. This paper describes a Community-Based Tourism Planning (CBTP) Process Model and case study. This places otherwise common strategic planning and community development principles into a tourism planning approach. This provides a comprehensive framework for steering tourism planning toward becoming a beneficial and lasting fit with other aspects of community and area well-being. This CBTP approach relies on initial and ongoing assessment of stakeholder experiences, concerns, hopes, fears, and dreams to guide tourism-related decisions.

A community assessment case study in the Kyuquot Sound area, a remote coastal tourism setting on Vancouver Island, British Columbia, demonstrates the potential of using tourism planning as a stimulus for other aspects of community communication, organisation, and development. The depth of community-generated insights depicts an otherwise untapped local expertise about their tourism situation. This case study assessment reveals that the Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal residents, tourism operators, and other stakeholders share many tourism-related perspectives that were otherwise not being discussed or acted upon. This is a powerful example of how local stakeholder wisdom can correspond closely with general principles of ecotourism and sustainable tourism development. This suggests significant latent benefits of shifting toward tourism decisions that are more community-based instead of only market- or expert-driven.

This CBTP approach can be particularly relevant for areas facing difficult transitions from dwindling or collapsed resource-based economies. It can provide a social and perceptual inventory that complements more accepted biophysical, supply, or demand inventories used in tourism and resource planning. Tourism planning can then better inform and influence other socio-cultural, resource use, and economic decision processes. With more explicit local guidance, tourism development can better avoid typical “host-guest” conflicts and stereotypes, and can stimulate more clear stewardship of tourism resources. This increases the ability of all stakeholders to guide a better fitting, longer lasting, and less depleting tourism industry in concert with local needs, desires, abilities, and capacity.

Keywords: planning, community assessment, community development, integration, new models/old concepts

Introduction: The Concept

This paper highlights findings and insights from a community assessment case study\(^1\) and associated Community-Based Tourism Planning (CBTP) Process Model (Figure 1).\(^2\) The CBTP Model proposes that tourism planning should build from an awareness of community values and organisational needs to guide more locally-appropriate tourism development that fits with other community needs, initiatives, and opportunities. This brings otherwise established strategic planning and community development principles to tourism planning practices so that stakeholders (residents, operators, government) can together guide a more sustainable and consistent tourism industry for communities, not at the expense of communities and local ecosystems.

In planning and development theory and practice, local citizen and stakeholder input are increasingly stressed as necessary elements for accepted and effective decisions which balance economic, social, cultural,
and environmental factors (Hutchison, 1998; Friedman, 1987; Verhelst, 1987). Similarly, there is a growing and more genuine appreciation of the need for increased community involvement in tourism planning (van Harssel, 1994; Prentice, 1993: 218; Boo, 1990: 48; Murphy, 1985) to help preserve and maintain unique, special, or valued local features and tourism attractions. Such planning can better prepare a community to “adapt to the unexpected, create the desirable, and avoid the undesirable . . . [and] promotes the opportunity for improving the total community rather than improving one part of the community at the expense of other parts” (van Harssel, 1994: 208). This does not suggest that every tourism decision must be made on a community-wide consensus basis. Instead, direction can come from a set of periodically refreshed guidelines or principles generated by the many stakeholders.

In corporations and institutions, values and visions are commonly clarified at the outset of strategic planning processes and form the basis of short- and long-term decisions and actions. A similar approach can be used as the basis for tourism planning. This acknowledges that “Community demands for active participation in the setting of the tourism agenda and its priorities for tourism development and management cannot be ignored” (Inskeep, 1991: xi). Though more time-consuming than a top-down approach to planning and development, when a community guides their own development, “the results are often longer lasting and more effective over the long-term” (Reid, Fuller, Haywood, and Bryden, 1993: 71, Inskeep, 1991: 27). Making and pursuing conscientious and co-operative choices for community development requires patience and perseverance from all stakeholders.

Independent operator initiatives, government promotion, and market responses to tourist demands commonly drive tourism development. As a result, tourism planning, development, and marketing typically focus on tourist trends and desires, thereby insufficiently identifying, upholding, or pursuing the aspirations of affected communities or local residents in a “destination area” (Reid et al., 1993).

This paper first describes the Community-Based Tourism Planning Process Model (Figure 1), then provides a brief profile of the case study context, process, and outcomes. Of significant note are the potential Guiding Elements for Tourism Planning (Figure 2) that were generated by—and for—the case study area stakeholders. These Guiding Elements are summarised before further discussing the relevance and practical considerations of applying the CBTP Process Model elsewhere.

CBTP Process Model

Some assert that, “All travel is linked with communities no matter how urban or remote the purpose may be. This inescapable fact can be a blessing or a curse depending upon how well a community accepts its tourism role and maintains a balance between traveller and resident development and management” (Gunn, 1988: 241). Rather than “accepting their role”, CBTP promotes that the community should define their own—and the tourism industry’s—role. To accomplish this, a community needs to create opportunities for stepping back from tourism marketing and product development pressures. Then, stakeholders can evaluate their tourism experiences and local values while setting a direction for their own tourism development in partnership with other significant stakeholders. This community-based approach is fundamentally linked with a “belief in human potential for favorable growth” (Biddle and Biddle, 1965: 58) which relies on community members having a positive view and understanding of their own potential (van Willigen, 1986: 97; Freire, 1968).

CBTP relies on an initial and periodic community assessment process (Phase 1, Figure 1) that harnesses the experience, expertise,
Figure 1. Community-Based Tourism Planning Process Model (adapted from Pinel 1998a)
desires, and support of local residents together with tourism operators and other stakeholders (government, organisations, and industry). Such assessment can generate an inventory of perceptions about tourism-related changes (experiences, concerns, hopes, fears, and dreams). This “social or perceptual inventory” can complement other tourism resource inventories (infrastructure, services, attractions, biophysical features, and cultural features) for making more informed and accountable decisions while building organisation and infrastructure capacity.

Careful thought and discussion about “what matters to us”, “what we can offer”, and “how we want tourism to affect our home/community/area” can help to chart a clear course with guiding principles for local tourism planning and development. This process is invaluable when rural, remote, and First Nations communities are involved—where there are often close communities, shared lands, common resources, and sensitive cultural heritage. Similarly, in more populated destinations, insightful guidance and collaboration can emerge from an assessment process within the many layers or sectors of the community, i.e., “the many communities” affected.

Community-based tourism planning is about: 1) introducing more “strategic” and “future” thinking or visioning to tourism development; 2) relying on residents and community leaders as their own “experts” about community needs and desirable tourism influences; and 3) providing opportunities to clarify community strengths, challenges, obstacles, and opportunities for social, economic, and ecological well-being. CBTP encourages and facilitates reflection about how a “destination” is also a “home” (for residents, flora, and fauna). Tourists are more likely to appreciate and return if they feel a “good fit” between aspects of “destination” and “home” rather than experiencing tourism as a source of tension or negative impacts.

This CBTP Process Model emphasises the need for catalysts from events or individuals to initiate an assessment process, and to keep the process going through tasks that stimulate co-operation, trust, tourism awareness, and links with the broader community development context. The actual “little steps” will vary by community and depend on previous experiences from working or planning together. The success or failure of reducing negative tourism impacts on communities and ecosystems clearly depends on how relationships are valued—relationships between people, and between people and their ecosystems.

Case Study Background

The Kyuquot Sound area on the Northwest coast of Vancouver Island is one of the island’s last remote coastal tourism destinations, and has one of the most isolated communities of its size. By most accounts, tourism activity is slowly increasing here, but has not yet seriously influenced local planning and development in the community and surrounding wilderness and protected areas. During Kyuquot’s two month peak tourism season in 1997 (July and August), the four sportfishing lodges, three B& Bs, and one sea kayaking and marine tour company were operating at about 60% of their combined capacity of about 90 clients/day. There is currently no monitoring of recreational tourist numbers, however, a rough estimate is that commercial tourism accounts for approximately one sixth of visitors to the area. Though not promoted as such, the many provincial protected areas (Parks and Ecological Reserves) adjacent to Kyuquot Sound are undoubtedly tourism draws. Tourism is creeping northward on Vancouver Island and the people of Kyuquot are only beginning to more carefully consider its implications and opportunities.

In the peak of the summer, there are an estimated 300 seasonal and full-time residents. About two thirds of this population are from the Ka’yu’k’t’h’ (Kyuquot) and
Che:k'tleset'h (Checleset) First Nation. This is the northernmost band of the Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council (NTC) which spans most of Vancouver Island’s west coast. Kyuquot’s past is generally described as that of a small and remote commercial fishing village that has survived several boom and bust cycles in the whaling and fishing industries during the last 80 years (current generations). As in many coastal regions of BC, most local residents are struggling with an almost collapsed local economy that has relied on fishing and forestry. Recently, a report through the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) ranked Kyuquot as the hardest hit of all coastal communities affected by changes in the commercial salmon fishery (Gislason, 1999).

The case study community assessment relied on local and non-local stakeholders as the experts for describing Kyuquot’s own tourism planning situation and organizational needs. Formal and informal interviews and focus group discussions brought together experiences, observations, and insights from over 80 of Kyuquot’s tourism stakeholders. Each of these outputs provides a valuable reference for ongoing tourism-related discussions, organisation, and planning, or for later evaluating the path and successes of tourism planning and development efforts.

Some less-tangible community assessment outputs included:

- Encouraging stakeholder awareness about tourism implications and possibilities.
- Identifying shared community and stakeholder interests not otherwise being discussed.
- Demonstrating the collective community wisdom and potential of combining stakeholder input, experience, and expertise.
- Stimulating constructive and co-operative discussions.
- Clarifying relationships and needs.
- Prompting links with other local issues, decisions, and initiatives.

Each of these less-tangible outputs adds to the momentum necessary for stakeholders to begin having a more community-based influence on how tourism affects their lives and the area.

Several stakeholders felt that tourism-related decisions and initiatives could become opportunities for the community to begin addressing chronic economic, social, and cultural challenges. Some of these same stakeholders worried that continued hazardous tourism growth could add to economic, social, and cultural conflicts, including lingering tensions between the Native and non-Native local residents. Regardless, awareness is increasing about how tourism is beginning to influence other aspects of community and area well-being.

Guiding Elements for Tourism Planning

The most significant assessment outputs were the potential “Guiding Elements” for Kyuquot’s tourism planning (Figure 2) which came from themes identified through stakeholder comments. With some further
| Inclusive Cooperation | 1. Using tourism planning to “pull together” local residents; |
| | 2. Including broad stakeholder input; |
| | 3. Clarifying co-operative stakeholder roles sooner rather than later; |
| | 4. Preparing children/youth with values & skills for tourism and community stewardship; |
| | 5. Creating a more unified local voice for external relations and communication; |
| Understanding & Shaping Implications and Expectations | 6. Better understanding the implications, potential, demands, and expectations of tourism; |
| | 7. Working toward a consistent tourism season by satisfying those who come; |
| | 8. Ensuring the safety of tourists and locals; |
| | 9. Communicating clear community messages to tourists; |
| | 10. Encouraging friendly and respectful attitudes between residents and tourists; |
| | 11. Setting local land and marine stewardship examples by residents; |
| | 12. Working to reduce socio-cultural stereotypes; |
| | 13. Shaping appropriate tourist expectations to match local realities; |
| | 14. Respecting resident and tourist privacy while also influencing tourism activities and behaviours. |
| Local Maintenance & Enhancement | 15. Maintaining the ability to keep living and working in the area; |
| | 16. Managing for gradual growth that matches local capacity; |
| | 17. Showing pride in the area and in cultural backgrounds; |
| | 18. Protecting the wilderness and waters as primary resources for all local economies; |
| | 19. Protecting the mystique, freedom, and other features attractive to locals and tourists alike; and |
| | 20. Treating all local resources as a complete system. |

**Figure 2. Summary of Potential Guiding Elements for Kyuquot’s Tourism Planning**

(Condensed from Pinel 1998a)

discussion, refinement, and community ratiﬁcation, these can serve as the foundation principles for tourism-related decisions in Kyuquot. These are a starting point for providing more clear and consistent community messages to tourists, tourism operators, government agencies, politicians, and others who inﬂuence how tourism affects the community and area.

This helps to demonstrate the comprehensive collective wisdom that can be tapped through a community assessment rather than suggesting or imposing a prescribed list of tourism principles. These stakeholder-generated Guiding Elements offer more depth and local meaning than what could otherwise be suggested to the community with concepts of eco- or sustainable tourism.

One resident astutely commented that it is much easier to simply make a 20º shift in tourism development directions now, than having to eventually make a 90º shift to change and repair undesired impacts from tourism. This pinpoints the purpose and advantage of identifying guiding elements early in tourism planning. Another resident reﬂected that, “You have to feel good about your home before you can invite others to it.” This is at the heart of community-based tourism planning. Not surprisingly, there are important ways in which all tourism stakeholders can work to support Kyuquot as a healthy home and place to visit.

**Other Community Assessment Observations**

Some stakeholders indicated that several native and non-native residents increasingly avoid or resent tourists who appear to take the community, fishing, and favourite local places for granted. A few residents described their observation that some tourists see the village like an incidental “backdrop for their experience,” and not as a living
community with real people. Others have had tourists stare at them as though studying “a real Native” like a “monkey in a cage”. One youth explained that, “it seems that when we try to approach some of them [tourists], they act ignorant, like they’re higher than us and richer. We know that they are [richer] if they can afford to travel, but they sure don’t have to bring this to our attention....” These types of encounters and experiences can quickly shatter local confidence, respect, and hospitality in resident-visitor relationships. One Native resident insightfully added that, if local residents increasingly withdraw from contacts with tourists, this will unfortunately only add to the potential for conflicts and stereotyping in both directions, and may subsequently increase tensions within the community.

Many described essential links between the “visitor experience” and the “local community experience” whereby each affects the other. As such, Kyuquot’s remoteness, quaint village, local services, sportfishing, secluded beaches, and protected areas are linked to the collective “stakeholder experience” of residents and tourists alike. One tourism operator described hopes that tourists can become more knowledgeable, educated, and inspired from the area and from local people—that tourism can catalyze more meaningful understandings and respect for coastal ecology, remote and rural communities, and Native people.

The Relevance of CBTP

Throughout the research, there was almost a universal stakeholder concern about—and desire to move away from—the status quo of continuing with haphazard, market-driven, and externally imposed tourism development. Co-operative, inclusive, and community-based tourism planning can be approached as casually or intensively as suits the local context. For Kyuquot, many of the tourism planning “task suggestions” focused on education and training, initiating community co-operation, discussing tourism implications, clarifying community expectations and messages, and stimulating local pride and stewardship. Given the stakeholder awareness of both desired and negative tourism impacts, there is ample reason to believe that these same stakeholders can prioritise ways of working together to address tourism concerns, and to refine and follow some guiding elements for their own tourism future.

Though few case study interviewees specifically mentioned “sustainability”, many of the resultant “Guiding Elements” (Figure 2) describe an interest in balancing tourism development to “meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987: 8). During this community assessment, Kyuquot’s tourism stakeholders clearly demonstrated their awareness of:

- The “functional interdependencies ...of recreation, conservation, and tourism” (Gunn, 1988: 15) and other resource uses.
- The importance of resident satisfaction for visitor satisfaction (Reid et al., 1993: 24).
- The need to “balance the commercial imperatives of tourism with the cultural integrity of the community” (Masterton, 1994: 23).

In tourism planning, issues of sustainability are often linked with other resource and protected area management efforts, especially where protected areas attract visitors. In Kyuquot, many residents have felt alienated from local protected area management. Policies and activities that have emphasized land or marine areas as everyone’s resource, playground, or treasure (the “public good” and “provincial interests”) typically overlook the greatest potential stewardship asset—the local residents. All residents aren’t necessarily “connected with the land” or setting stellar examples of treating their home area with care; but if not included in the planning and management, they feel even less of an obligation or need to be stewards. The community assessment iden-
tified the need for tourism and protected area management strategies formed through partnerships between local residents and government agencies. Otherwise, the “tragedy of the commons” remains a tragedy of approaching it as the commons. If tourism and protected area policies are drafted with nobody’s home in mind, then nobody in that home is likely to respect, welcome or embrace those policies. Similarly, Kyuquot residents will be reluctant to respect tourists who don’t acknowledge that they are visitors or guests to somebody’s home area.

It remains to be seen whether the community assessment will stimulate further community-based tourism planning in the Kyuquot area. Nothing more may happen without significant increases in tourism-related pressures and conflicts or without further initiatives from key stakeholders. Nevertheless, stakeholder feedback has been positive about the community assessment contributions to clarifying tourism-related issues and relationships.

### Applying the CBTP Process Model

The CBTP Process Model (Figure 1) makes the following three assumptions:

- That local capacity building and organisational development can be most effectively guided using the knowledge and insights of stakeholders.
- That most stakeholders can look beyond their immediate circumstance.
- That with community values identified, most stakeholders will move together toward acknowledged desires that respect local area and community well-being.

As noted earlier, these assumptions relate to community development and strategic planning principles. The facilitated community assessment case study has shown that the first and second of the above assumptions are realistic, and that the third may be a reasonable expectation. Only time and examples of CBTP initiatives elsewhere will provide more insights about the value of this Process Model and validity of its assumptions.

A CBTP approach doesn’t ignore or preclude more market-conscious tourism planning and development, but first establishes a common framework for shaping a locally appropriate tourism industry. In the CBTP Process Model, the three major feedback loops (for community assessment, with community development, and for refining the tourism products and services) allow for tourism development to be guided and massaged by community, area, and market-conscious inputs. Subsequent assessments could be done after every tourism season, once a year, or at two- or three-year intervals—the frequency would depend on the intensity of tourism pressures, other shifts in the local planning context, and stakeholder satisfaction. The specific community approach taken will vary by population size, cultural context, local need, tourism intensity, seasonality, and previous tourism planning efforts. Nevertheless, the CBTP concepts and framework can remain the same.

Along the planning path, it is the recipe of individuals—their talents, skills, experience, limitations, commitment, time, patience, and perseverance—which ultimately determines the success of any community-based process. Stakeholder alienation, turnover, attrition, and burnout can leave a well founded process stalled or unable to progress along an accountable decision path. Personality dynamics and seemingly unrelated personal demands and agendas can block, accelerate, or accentuate positive planning outcomes. With every tourism season and cycle of growth or decline, the roles, influence, and relationships of tourism stakeholders change (Reisinger, 1994; Smith, 1977). Accordingly, community-based tourism planning can be pursued as a flexible and responsive process instead of as the quest for a rigid plan.
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Notes:

1. The case study was conducted in the Kyuquot Sound area on the Northwest coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia. This applied research was for a Masters thesis about community-based tourism planning (1997/98), and as volunteer consulting to advance stakeholder understanding and discussion about tourism planning and development implications in the Kyuquot Sound area. The thesis findings (Pinel 1998a) and the subsequent condensed working report (Pinel 1998b) have since been used for other resource, tourism, community, and parks planning reports (e.g., Clover Point Cartographics 1998, Comox-Strathcona Regional District 1999, Synergy 1998). The findings will be referred to for guidance during forthcoming economic diversification efforts in Kyuquot and the region.

2. The macro approach used for this research was partially inspired by the “Tourism Planning Community Development Model” developed by Reid, Fuller, Haywood, and Bryden (1993) but not yet applied or tested in a tourism planning process. This thesis research deconstructed the Reid et. al. model, then reconstructed it as the “Community-Based Tourism Planning Process Model” (Pinel 1998a) using many insights and experiences from the community assessment case study in the Kyuquot area.

3. Protected areas in the Kyuquot area include: 1) Brooks-Nasparti Provincial Park (approx. 51 631 ha), 2) Big Bunsby Provincial Park (approx. 639 ha), 3) Checleset Bay Ecological Reserve (approx. 34 650 ha), 4) Rugged Point Provincial Marine Park, 5) Tahsish-Kwois Provincial Park (approx. 10 829 ha; includes Tahsish River Ecological Reserve), 6) Dixie Cove Provincial Park (approx. 156 ha), 7) Clanninick Creek Ecological Reserve (37 ha), and 8) Artlish Caves Provincial Park (234 ha).

4. Most of the field research occurred between March and May 1997. Approximately six weeks were spent conducting over 75 interviews and meetings in the Kyuquot area or where non-local stakeholders or officials were located (Campbell River, Courtenay, Parksville, Vancouver, Victoria). A draft of the interim findings and analysis was prepared and distributed to approximately 50 stakeholders/research participants for feedback and was used as a discussion reference during two focus group sessions in the community (approx. 20 participants, many of whom had previously been interviewed). Additional and unexpected research contributions came from grade 11/12 students who discussed one of the focus group questions as a class exercise, and who wrote commentaries about parts of the interim findings. Primary data (interviews, focus groups, researcher observations) was supplemented with secondary references (reports, previous theses, etc.) relevant to tourism planning and development in Kyuquot.

5. In many respects, the Kyuquot area is a microcosm of the issues and challenges facing rural, remote, and coastal communities throughout the province and country.

References


