SEARCHING FOR SUSTAINABILITY: A DIFFICULT COURSE, AN UNCERTAIN OUTCOME

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Abstract: There is no question that there is growing concern within the global tourism industry about its sustainability. Increasingly, scientists, managers, legislators, citizens and tourism planners examine, debate, and confront the concept of sustainability. Our discussions of sustainable tourism are stymied, primarily because sustainability represents a wicked problem where technology may play only a small role in resolution. Sustainable tourism is also a value judgment, and has not, in the tourism literature, been rigorously critiqued. The search for sustainability encompasses questions of temporal and spatial scale, what should be sustained and implementation. Often, sustainability in the tourism context is addressed by calling for establishing carrying capacities and limits on tourist numbers. Such requests overlook the vast amount of research and planning experience showing that limits do not work effectively. Pluralities typify much of the sustainability rhetoric in tourism, and concepts are rarely examined critically. Sustainability is intrinsically an integrative concept, but discussion about it is hampered because biologists, economists, community development specialists and tourism planners have not engaged in the interactive processes needed to identify and develop effective strategies. Achieving sustainability can occur only within the context of understanding global trends and is often hampered by large scale demographic and economic changes, which are out of the control of local planners. A successful search for sustainability will involve learning and adaptive management, public participation, understanding tradeoffs among generations, appropriate human-environment management frameworks, and the application of new ethical principles.

Keywords: sustainability, tourism industry, knowledge, institutions

Introduction

With 567 million international arrivals and an uncountable number of shorter recreation oriented trips, travel and tourism has become a major power in the global economy. With more people in the world dependent on travel and tourism for employment than any other economic sector, the industry has grown to a size that few could have imagined even a short decade ago. Any industry achieving this size within such a short period of time is confronted with a number of essential, but complex, questions, issues and challenges. With so much at stake, the persistence of the travel and tourism industry is the most fundamental question confronting it today.

In coastal and marine environments, building an industry that will endure must be particularly problematic, as it is in the more sensitive terrestrial settings. The sun, sea and sand that provide so many of us with the relaxation, escape, and adventure that are so important to our quality of life enclose an ecologically diverse and sensitive interface that can be quickly despoiled. This sensitivity, coupled with the institutional complexity of coastal and marine settings, suggests that the inventory of issues and challenges of tourism today provide decision-makers, the public and scientists alike an almost endless number of tasks crossing many intellectual, social, and environmental domains.

The recent growth of the tourism industry has occurred within a larger context of rapid social change. Both the pace and qualitative nature of change has accelerated to an almost dizzying rate, pushing the future closer to the present, and shortening the temporal distance between human actions and their consequences. These changes affect not only what tourism produces people demand, but the consequences and values people consider important when assessing tourism as an economic development tool.

There are two relevant effects of these changes that influence questions dealing with the endurance of the tourism industry. First, there is increased debate about the purposes of economic development. Gone are the days of widespread agreement about these objectives; we no longer accept the goal of jobs for the sake of jobs. Economic development is viewed now as more of a tool to achieve other ends, such as enhancing the quality of life of a community, protecting the local natural and cultural heritage, and addressing other issues such as child nutrition, human health, and education, as well as building economic opportunity.

Second, scientific efforts have lead to an interesting situation: greater knowledge about the environment has resulted in increased, rather than decreased, uncertainty about the ecological effects of human activity (Dovers and Handmer, 1993). To paraphrase the early American conservationist John Muir, everything is linked to everything else. Our increased uncertainty comes from the fact that we now appreciate the number, diversity and complexity of these linkages and from a greater sense of humility about the limitations of our knowledge of natural processes. In combination, the two situations imply that old ways of planning, and consequently, the questions that were asked, may no longer be appropriate for coastal and marine tourism development.

Sustainability, sustainable development and sustainable tourism have emerged as the paradigms through which these questions are being asked and how, we hope, they will be resolved. While the three terms imply similar meanings, I want provide some differentiation among them for the sake of clarity in this presentation. Sustainability is a
particular condition in which economic opportunity, quality of life and our natural and cultural heritage are maintained indefinitely. Sustainable development is a complex web of strategies or pathways taken to reach this condition. Consequently, we see attempts to develop sustainable agriculture, sustainable forestry and sustainable fisheries as means of implementing sustainable development principles on a sector by sector basis. Sustainable tourism constitutes one of these pathways, and represents what some might term a sort of "kinder and gentler" form of recreational development and products.

Sustainability is an issue because (1) we recognize the enormous impact of human activity on the environment and (2) we care about the future (Pearce, 1993). At this conference, sustainable tourism is being addressed in order to discuss the environmental consequences of tourism development and how to manage them. And, since coastal and marine tourism is highly dependent on natural environmental qualities, impacts are an issue if we wish to achieve sustainability. Thus, the principal theme of this presentation is that the search for sustainability will be a difficult one because we are confronted with, guiding fictions and promising expectations, fundamental choices and troublesome dilemmas, social traps and wicked problems. Given these considerations, the outcome of the search is uncertain. In this presentation, I wish to briefly outline some of these choices, traps, and fictions so that we may more effectively guide the search for sustainability.

Guiding Fictions and Promising Expectations

In the debate over sustainability and sustainable tourism, there is much discussion about definitions. Some have argued that without specific definitions, the concepts provide little guidance or direction. However, maintaining a level of ambiguity, may serve useful social functions in the sense of organizing discourse around a problem or issue over which there is substantial social agreement. Such concepts are termed "guiding fictions" because when it comes to specifics, agreement and consensus give way to dissent and opposition constructively (Shumay, 1987). Sustainability may serve the useful function of a "guiding fiction," because as long as it remains vague everyone can agree that it is a goal and discussion can proceed. However, this value breaks down when attempts to make the concept more specific occur, resulting in conflict and debate. The challenge to sustainability advocates is to develop processes that will minimize the polarization that often accompanies conflict.

Another guiding fiction is that the impacts of tourism are a function of the number of tourists. This conclusion dominates much of the sustainable tourism/ecotourism literature suggesting that a primary method of reducing impacts is a reduction in visitor numbers to within the "carrying capacity" of a local natural or social system (Manning, 1996; WTO, 1992; Butler, 1991). It is relatively easy to see how many people have come to this conclusion, given the biological training of many scientists and planners in nature oriented tourism destinations and the large number of visitors such areas attract. While carrying capacity may be useful as a way of identifying visitor management problems (a conclusion which is questionable—see Lindberg and others, in press), attempts to identify carrying capacities at specific sites have generally failed. Reducing visitor numbers carries an initial appeal to many, but such reductions may have little influence over the total amount of impact, and frankly, may be politically problematic when whole economies depend on continuing levels of visitation. Impacts, social and biophysical, result from many other factors, principally behavior, which suggests that models of tourism management be based on determining desired resource or social conditions and developing actions to achieve those goals.

As we search for sustainability through sustainable tourism policies, we build expectations about the future. These promising expectations suggest increasing real incomes, protection of biodiversity, communities that are viable and resilient, development that is sensitive to its environmental consequences, and a tourism industry that is scaled to the capability of the environment. These are promising expectations, but because of the fundamental choices and troublesome dilemmas which confront sustainable tourism, attaining these expectations and connecting the promise with the possible is uncertain.

Fundamental Choices and Troublesome Dilemmas

The goal of sustainability carries an almost universal appeal, but operational details, objectives or actions suggested by its advocates are more controversial. While Dixon and Fallon (1989) note that much of the discussion about sustainability involves "how to pursue the goal and how to measure progress toward it" a fundamental choice concerns what will be sustained, a decision critical to a sustainable tourism policy. While the alternatives may be clear, the choice about what should be sustained is not a scientific decision but an ethical one. As an ethical decision, debate about the appropriateness must occur within a social/political context.

These choices and dilemmas involve a number of potential questions: does tourism sustain the industry, the economy, a local community, the resource base, local custom and culture, or the capacity of communities to adapt to change? Can ecotourism be sustainable? Can mass tourism be sustainable? Are there conditions under which it may be
acceptable for tourism to be unsustainable in the long run? Does the concept of sustainable tourism refer to a particular kind of tourism or does it refer to a particular way of developing and managing all kinds of tourism activities?

Gale and Cordray (1994) attempted to identify potential answers to the question of what should be sustained in the context of natural resource sustainability. They identified initially eight, and then later nine possible answers. These answers are shown in Table 1. They suggest that we ask certain questions such as what is to be sustained? Why? How will sustainability be measured? What are the politics? Another question is for whom? Where does sustainable tourism fit in this picture?

Table 1. Types of sustainability (Adapted from Gale and Cordray, 1994).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is sustained</th>
<th>Why sustain it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yield of high valued products</td>
<td>Economic efficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social systems (communities, etc.)</td>
<td>Lifestyle values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse human benefits</td>
<td>Human rights to resource abundance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globally unique ecological systems</td>
<td>Global human-ecosystem interdependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globally important high valued products</td>
<td>Human need for products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General types of ecosystems</td>
<td>Commitment to ecosystem diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecosystem integrity</td>
<td>Commitment to ecosystem autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecosystem diversity</td>
<td>Insure against ecological disaster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undisturbed ecosystems</td>
<td>Respect rights inherent in natural ecosystems</td>
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The Brundtland Commission (WCED, 1987) defined sustainable development as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” In a very real sense, this means that the current generation leaves a stock of capital equal to or larger than the present level. But what type of capital? Costanza and Daly (1992) identify three types of capital: (1) natural capital, which consists of the goods and services provided by the environment; (2) manufactured capital, involving transformations of environmental goods and services into human systems of production; and (3) human capital, including knowledge, skills, wisdom, leadership and culture.

Therefore, a second fundamental choice involves beliefs about the substitutability of these forms of capital, i.e., can manufactured capital substitute for natural capital? Costanza and Daly (1992) provide a rationale for assuming that forms of capital are not substitutable, arguing for example that if “human-made capital were a perfect substitute for natural capital, then natural capital would also be a perfect substitute for human capital” and concluding that if this was so there would be “no reason to develop human-made capital. Human capital is a complement to natural capital, not a substitute.”

The condition under which all forms of capital must be bequeathed to the future in amounts equal to or above their current stock is termed hard sustainability. If one assumes that there is substitutability among forms of capital, but the total amount must be equal to or larger than available to the present generation, then this is known as soft sustainability. Again, this condition would require choices about rates of substitutability among forms of capital. Since coastal and marine tourism directly depend on the presence of natural capital, much of it in a relatively unmodified form, it would seem unlikely that other forms of capital can substitute for it. Yet, coastal and marine tourism activities enhance the potential of increasing the stock of human capital through informing the public of the ecosystem goods and services provided by marine systems.

A third fundamental choice derives from the conclusion that we care about the future. As Pigram (1990) notes, important concerns about both the uncertainty of environmental degradation resulting from tourism development and the potential irreversibility of these impacts influence our debates about sustainable tourism. While these are necessary conditions for expressing concern about sustainable tourism, they are not sufficient. We must also care about the future. However, current mechanisms for considering the future, in terms of streams of revenue, value the future less than the present. The normal way in which the present generation values benefits lying in the future is through the use of discount rates. However, any positive discount rate will always place less value on benefits occurring in the future than the present and results in a situation where people may give too little weight to the future (Costanza and Daly, 1992), a situation we know to be unacceptable to many when they consider the options and conditions that may be available for their children.

The implication of all this is that there are questions about the appropriate discount rate; since there are big differences in total present value among discount rates, choosing the appropriate discount rate becomes a fundamental choice. The choices involve what criteria should be used to select the appropriate discount rate. More fundamentally, if the future is valued as much as the present, is there an appropriate discount rate?
If we define sustainability as resulting in an indefinite maintenance of certain desired conditions, then achieving this goal represents a redistribution of power, political and economic, toward the future, because present generations will have to maintain options for future generations. However, existing decision making institutions and the ways in which the future is valued in those institutions discount the future as noted above. As a result, there are fundamental choices to be made over who will represent the future and how it will be represented. One way is through the public sector because government provides goods and services at larger time scales than individuals acting alone and provides services, such as stability, that only governments can provide. However, governments are composed of individuals whose time scales for decisions are largely governed by election periods. Thus, there tends to be a mismatch between decision scales and scales of biological significance (Lee, 1993). People, of course, have voluntarily given certain powers to governments, and if dissatisfied enough, will recover that power. Thus, in the long-run, decision scales in the public sector can be changed.

Social Traps and Wicked Problems

Many issues associated with sustainable tourism contain the characteristics of a social trap. A social trap occurs whenever “road signs” or cues to appropriate behavior in the short run lead to a situation that is detrimental in the long-run or inconsistent with the needs of the larger social system (Costanza, 1987; Platt, 1973). Principles of sustainable tourism involve the host community, satisfy visitors, protecting the resource may be one type of social trap. Colin Hunter (1992) makes this point when he criticizes the sustainable tourism development paradigm as parochial, unwittingly focusing efforts on too narrow a pathway: “the dominant tourism-centric paradigm encourages and/or causes an inherent and inappropriate limitation of the remit [scope] of sustainable tourism, and that an alternative extra-parochial paradigm is a more suitable conceptual vehicle” for sustainable tourism policy. Hunter’s point is that our efforts to develop sustainable tourism in the short run may ignore other important dimensions of sustainable development and that we can inadvertently negatively impact other sectors in the long run.

The debate over sustainability and sustainable tourism occurs largely in a public sector setting. In conducting this debate, we frequently rely on government to set policy because government provides a longer temporal scale for decisions. We may follow this reliance on government because in the short run policy is something we can influence. However, investments in facilities are customarily made by the private sector. Thus, there tends to be a gap between sectors: while a local community can discuss and adopt sustainable tourism as a formal socially developed policy, the policy may not influence investments decisions made by private firms. While regulations, taxes and incentives may help address this gap, new mechanisms may be needed to address this trap.

Wicked problems are ones for which technology cannot provide a correct solution; there are just more or less useful answers (Allen and Gould, 1986). Applying more information, technical expertise, knowledge, or resources will not result in a better solution. Many wicked problems lie in the economic sector and are influenced by a number of variables. Wicked problems include issues dealing with (1) common ownership of resource stocks; (2) the discount rate employed in valuing present and future flows of income; and (3) the effect of uncertainty on management strategies and consumption patterns (Clark, 1991). Among the variables influencing these wicked problems are scale, knowledge and institutions.

Surely, one of the most fundamental tasks of sustainable tourism policy is to develop some means of assessing progress toward achieving our goals. Measurement provides us with the necessary feedback to correct actions and ensure that we are on the pathway to sustainability. The scale at which sustainability is measured is an important, though often neglected component of sustainability discussions. Lee (1993a) notes that mismatches between human and biological scales leads to unsustainable resource uses. There are at least four types of scale that are relevant development of sustainable tourism policies. First, there is the question of appropriate temporal scale: over what period of time do we judge the sustainability of an industry, community or ecosystem? There may be conflict over tourism activities that aim for intergenerational equity and management directed toward intragenerational equity (Dovers and Handmer, 1993). Dixon and Fallon (1989) state that “the shorter the time horizon [in resource decisions], the less likely any pattern of resource use will be sustainable over long periods of time” and they ask “How far into the future should we worry about?” Mismatches between temporal scales leads to one generation bearing the costs of another generation’s benefits.

A second type of scale is spatial: over what spatial scale is sustainability measured? Mismatches between spatial scales can lead to some people, communities or ecosystems bearing the costs without associated benefits. Can sustainable tourism in one locality come at the expense of sustainability for another community, as Colin Hunter (1992) argues? Multiple spatial scales are involved in sustainability decisions: Could sustainable tourism development at the local scale lead to unsustainable tourism patterns at the regional scale? Focusing sustainable tourism efforts solely at the local level may lead into another type of wicked problem: policies and their
implementation may be doing well, but in a globalized economy decisions made distant from the community may affect the achievement of a sustainability goals.

People interact over varying social organizational scales, such as families, neighborhoods, communities and so on. Addressing the social organizational scale helps us understand for whom sustainable tourism is being developed. Lee (1993a) argues that a fourth scale mismatch occurs, what he terms a functional scale mismatch. Functional mismatches occur because natural systems, such as marine environments, are complex, but human actions and institutions are necessarily specialized. Achieving a specialized goal, such as tourism development may conflict functionally with the sustainability of a particular ecosystem.

Institutions have enormous influence over the ability to develop sustainable tourism. Institutions developed in the western United States to deal with resource management were derived primarily in an era based on a resource utilization philosophy. The instrumental philosophy governing resource management in this era resulted in highly specialized institutions designed to enhance efficiency of use of individual resource commodities. Many institutions lack the flexibility to address new problems and new challenges. They are not particularly well designed for sustaining over long periods of time entire ecosystems or communities. A second issue with respect to tourism concerns the institutional orientation of many tourism development agencies, particularly in the United States. Many state level agencies are solely concerned with promotion of tourism, do little to assess negative social and environmental impacts, and rarely monitor the outcomes of their promotional programs, such as effects on employment, quality of life and protection of the natural and cultural heritage.

Compounding this barrier is the preference among scientists for excluding informal ways of knowing. The argument goes that only through formal, scientifically defensible research can we learn about the natural world. There are obviously other ways of knowing that are more culturally and experientially based that have validity for sustainable tourism decisions.

Achieving sustainability promises a better world, but the search is strewn with significant, complex and socially problematic questions making the outcome of the search uncertain. Yet, conducting the search, whether we achieve sustainability or not, yields important benefits. The fact that we are conducting the search means we are asking questions that are desirable in the long run to ask, that we create a better understanding among ourselves as to how the world operates, and as John Dixon and Louise Fallon suggest, we might prevent some truly unacceptable projects from occurring.

Connecting the promise and the possible provides a series of challenges as we discuss coastal and marine tourism over the next few days. Sustainability and sustainable tourism provides a useful and potentially productive framework as we engage in our wide-ranging discussions and debates about tourism in marine and coastal environments. We should challenge ourselves to consider questions of scale and institutions, the scope of sustainable tourism and how it is linked to more general goals of sustainability; we should ask what is it that we wish to sustain, and how we will arrive at responses to that question; we should contest the appropriateness of carrying capacity as a framework for managing visitors and in its stead examine statements of desired conditions. Addressing these concerns provides us with an outstanding opportunity to advance our ability to achieve sustainable tourism.

Knowledge is an important variable because science has as a fundamental goal reduction of uncertainty. Yet, there are significant questions about the ability of science in assisting sustainability because (1) science is hampered by the lack of replicates and controls; (2) the biophysical world is extremely complex; and (3) large amounts of natural variability tend to mask effects of exploitation. As noted earlier, science has tended to increase uncertainty not reduce it. Not only is our knowledge of the natural world limited, the scientific paradigm of natural resources management has tended to exclude the political and cultural dimensions from discussions of ecosystem management and sustainability. For example, Grumbine (1994) finds no research function concerning sustainability of ecosystems for social scientists. While this barrier can be overcome, additional biophysical research may be viewed only as a necessary, but not sufficient condition for achieving sustainability.

References


SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH COASTAL AND MARINE TOURISM: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

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Abstract Coastal communities typically utilize a diversity of marine and terrestrial resource systems. This diversity provides coastal communities a greater degree of stability than is common among most resource dependent communities. Tourism development can play a positive role in coastal communities through creation of additional economic niches, generating income and employment opportunities through non-extractive activities. However, such development also can lead to social disintegration and economic poverty. The central concern revolves around the issue of who benefits from tourism development. In practice, this distributional question will be determined in large part by the locus of control over investment and participation in the tourism industry, whether there are resource use conflicts between the community and the industry, and how these conflicts are resolved. An alternative development scenario is presented that is oriented around community development and local control. Coastal and marine tourism can be developed in an ecologically sustainable and social just basis. Policies which maximize local participation and respect traditional resource use rights are central to achieving such goals.

Keywords: community development, local control, sustainable tourism

Introduction

Tourism affects both the visitor and the host community. Communities that rely on tourism as their economic base are in many ways quite similar to communities that are dependent upon logging, fishing, agriculture or any other natural resource system (Bailey and Pomeroy, 1996). In each case, economic fortunes are determined by external forces beyond control of the local community (Miller, 1991). These forces may include changing technologies and consumer preferences, resource depletion, war and civil unrest, and policy changes affecting exchange rates and international trade. The rapidly growing literature on resource dependent communities has much to tell us about communities that hitch their fortunes to tourism development or any other single industry (Friedenburg, 1992; Peluso, Humphrey and Fortmann, 1994).

The purpose of this paper is to identify both positive and negative tendencies associated with development of coastal tourism from the perspective of the host community. Both the existing literature and my own experience in coastal Southeast Asia and North America provide ample opportunity for identifying negative impacts. But there also are positive examples where coastal tourism has contributed to more stable local economies through diversification of employment and investment opportunities. I will draw on the literature of community development to develop a conceptual framework that can be used in evaluating social impacts of tourism development.

Coastal Ecosystems

Tourism emerged over the past fifty years as a major industry in both industrialized and non-industrialized nations (McCook, 1996). Coastal ecosystems present unique and highly attractive opportunities for tourists, offering a wide range of activities such as recreational fishing and boating, swimming and sunbathing, and a variety of shore-based activities like golf which compliment activities of a more aquatic nature. Indeed, a key ingredient behind the phenomenal success of coastal tourism stems from this ability to provide both terrestrial and aquatic recreational opportunities to tourists during a single trip. Private sector investors and government agencies alike have promoted development of the tourism industry in the coastal zone. Despite rapid development of the coastal zone for tourism in many parts of the world, there remain opportunities for further development. However, the social and environmental costs of future development may prove to be quite steep and we need to think carefully as we look to the future.

The attractiveness of coastal ecosystems is not restricted to tourists. One estimate indicates that 60% of the world’s population lives within 60 km of the ocean (Miller, 1991). Part of the reason for such concentration of population in the coastal zone is the relative abundance and highly productive mix of resources that are available to people and other living things in coastal ecosystems (Bailey and Pomeroy, 1996). Fishing and maritime trade have served as the economic bases of coastal communities throughout history. More recently, offshore oil and minerals, tourism, and industrial development have supported the heavy concentration of human populations along the coastal zone. The growth of human populations in the coastal zone has imposed significant environmental costs in the form of organic and inorganic pollution, and conversion of natural habitats for urban development. At the same time, marine fisheries resources are heavily exploited, and in many cases over exploited (McGoodwin, 1990). Mangrove forests and other coastal ecosystems also are being converted to shrimp ponds at an increasingly destructive pace (Bailey and Skladany, 1991). In short, coastal ecosystems around the world face enormous pressure from existing human populations.
The environmental implications of coastal tourism need to be understood in this light. On the one hand, environmental devastation is bad for business because tourists are drawn to clear water, clean beaches, pure air, and fresh fish. Accordingly, we can expect development of coastal tourism to occur in areas that are relatively unspoiled. How long conditions remain this way is an important concern. The record clearly indicates that tourism development can contribute to environmental degradation. Silting caused by construction, pollution from inadequate sewage treatment, and saline intrusion into coastal aquifers are some of the more serious problems reflected in the literature on environmental impacts of tourism development in the coastal zone (Awosika and Ibe, 1993; Thomas, 1991; Wong, 1993).

Development of coastal tourism also can have a positive impact on coastal ecosystems by providing a non-extractive economic base to coastal communities. Protecting a coral reef for the enjoyment of tourists may provide a better livelihood than could be gained through heavy fishing or collecting of coral and fish for sale in the aquarium trade (Sudara, 1991; Vogt, 1996; White and Dobias, 1991). Moreover, tourism can lead to creation of new economic niches for coastal residents, reducing pressure on coastal resources as local labor and capital shift away from extractive pursuits such as fishing and charcoal production, and towards pursuits that are geared to maintaining the kind of coastal ecosystem that draws visitors.

Community as Context

There are several units of analysis (e.g., individual, class, community, society) that can be used when assessing the social impacts of any form of development. For reasons discussed here, this paper will focus on community. The term community is a perfectly good common word that has been stretched and tugged in a variety of directions in the hands of academicians that its meaning has lost shape. There are those who define community purely by reason of a shared identity and set of common values drawing people together as golfers, loggers, swimmers, or fishers (e.g., Carroll and Lee, 1990). Those whose lives are wrapped up in such activities feel strong bonds to others of like minds, even though they may live many miles apart. Similarly, there are those who would define community purely by patterns of regular interaction, even if such interaction is restricted to cyberspace. For most of us, however, the notion of community is linked to a particular place of residence. This said, nobody would claim that the simple act of sharing a common space with others is enough to make a community. For 'community' to exist as a social reality, we would normally expect to find people who identify with and who may feel a sense of pride in the place they live, who may share a common set of values (e.g., support of public education), and who regularly interact with other members of the community (Wilkinson, 1986). Often such interactions are of central importance to the daily lives of community residents. Such interactions include the group of kids who grow up and go to school together, congregations at places of worship, people who work together, and residents in a community who wrestle in the local political arena over important decisions of the day.

I do not want to romanticize the concept of community as a place where everyone loves their neighbor and lives in harmony. But I do want to make the point that much of our lives (and those of most people living in the coastal zone) are lived in particular communities. Further, many people in the world know little beyond their immediate community, which is the center of their universe. In some parts of the world, the community includes the land and the spirits of the ancestors buried there (Richter, 1991). Even where this is not the case, the social bonds which hold members of a community together often represent the closest thing that people have to a social welfare net: a group of neighbors and kin who can be called upon in time of need. Understanding the importance of community vitality, we are better prepared to understand why threats to the continued integrity of communities can lead to serious social and political problems.

Some Adverse Impacts of Coastal and Marine Tourism

Just as coastal and marine tourism can have either positive or negative ecosystem effects, so too can development of tourism have either positive or negative social effects. If we are going to promote socially sound development of a tourism industry, we need to know something about the social setting within which such development takes place.

There are both ethical and practical reasons why such understanding is important. Ethically, we should be concerned that tourism development does not lead to social disruption or the unwilling displacement of existing residents for the benefit of non-residents. We need to be aware of the possible negative effects of tourism development so that these can be mitigated. Such a stance is akin to the Hippocratic oath taken by medical doctors: “First do no harm.” In practical terms, ethical treatment of those affected by tourism development may lead to reduced tension and strife, which might escalate into active and even violent opposition. The failure to treat people with socially acceptable standards of fairness can lead to increased political and security costs and make the tourist experience an uncomfortable one for many visitors.

Unfortunately, the literature is full of examples of communities that have been adversely affected by tourism. A breakdown of community solidarity can be brought
about, for example, by loss of control over local resources. Large scale capital-intensive tourism development necessarily draws on financial resources well beyond the capacity of most coastal communities in the world. Dependency on outside sources of capital not only results in repatriation rather than local reinvestment of profits but also typically will result in outsiders being recruited for managerial and skilled employee positions. Where significant investment is made, the tourism industry may press for zoning controls or other restrictions which limit the ability of local residents to participate, further reducing local benefits. Coastal and marine tourism may result in direct harm to local interests in the event of resource use conflict between local residents and the tourism industry (e.g., restrictions on fishing, damage by tourists to coral reefs, etc.). Coastal tourism is a high stakes industry, and developers are able to offer attractive prices to gain control of coastal land. Some members of a community may benefit from sale or lease agreements, but others in the community may suffer a loss of employment opportunities as a result of the transfer of control away from the community. Even though tourism development may generate employment, much of that employment goes to outsiders rather than local residents.

The loss of local control to outsiders can have a variety of manifestations. Development of marinas for luxury yachts has displaced local commercial fishers from limited dock space in many coastal communities in the United States. In Biloxi, Mississippi, the casino industry produced a similar displacement of fishers from docks located on what is now extremely valuable beach front property (personal observation). Increases in property values result in higher tax assessments for local residents, not all of whom are in a position to benefit from the economic boom associated with tourist development. Residents on fixed incomes may be forced to sell their property and move away. Newcomers moving into the area to find employment in the tourism industry provide a ready market and exert upward pressure on property values and the cost of living generally. Local merchants may benefit from increased sales, but may also face competition by new businesses attracted into the area. Other residents, particularly those at the economic margin of poverty, may find the rising costs a serious burden. Thus, as Miller and Ditton (1986) observe, there will be winners and losers in coastal tourist development.

Growth of coastal tourism can have negative local effects through generating increased strain on local infrastructure, requiring additional investments in roads, bridges, waste management (solid waste and sewer), and public safety. In some cases, tourist resort developments have been approved with lengthy tax holidays, resulting in the transfer of these costs to local residents (Richter, 1991). Similarly, Richardson (1986) notes that the costs of coastal restoration to promote tourism in Galveston, Texas, were borne largely by the poor.

Coastal tourism may also represent a source of social disruption through the introduction of new behavioral styles. McGoodwin (1986) movingly describes the impact of tourism on a small coastal community in Mexico an all-weather road made the community accessible to the outside world. Wealthy outsiders, especially foreigners, provided local youth with an alternative vision of the world that was in stark variance with local cultural norms (e.g., unmarried cohabitating couples). More seriously, the advent of tourism led to a withering of social organizations that had sponsored religious festivals, a central means of expressing internal solidarity. These local festivals were replaced by festivals oriented towards tourists and secular entertainment. Many local residents, unable to afford the price of admission to these festivals, became bystanders in their own community. As described by McGoodwin, tourism led to anomie (loss of identity and cultural moorings) and social disruption. He points out that such disruption is predictable when extremes in wealth and vast cultural differences separate hosts and guests. Minerbi (1991:486) describes Hawai'i’s tourism industry as being “alien and disruptive to island ways, needs and resources.” Minerbi goes on to say that the industry breeds “resentment, alienation and opposition in segments of the local community” (1991:486).

We must recognize that coastal and marine tourism is a major industry which powerful actors (e.g., national and transnational corporations and governments) often seek to control. The result often is displacement, alienation and anger. White and Dobias (1991:456) point out that in coastal Thailand local efforts to protect coral reefs around Samui Island led to increased tourism, which in turn brought in outside investment, and that this has “tended to remove control and benefits from island residents.” A similar pattern of outside investors coming to dominate the local tourist economy of coastal areas in Malaysia and Indonesia has been documented. Wong (1993) reports (and personal observations confirm) that on the Malaysian island of Penang, local residents in Batu Ferringhi and Teluk Bahang had established a small-scale cottage industry catering to budget tourists wanting to enjoy the fine area beaches. Accommodations were simple and inexpensive, but they provided important incomes to people in those communities. Coffee shops and restaurants also benefited from the local tourist industry. By the late 1960s, however, large hotel chains began to invest in these areas and zoning ordinances were passed that made it more difficult for locals to provide lodging to their traditional clientele. In the meantime, sedimentation from construction and later inadequately treated sewage from the large new hotels led to serious problems of water pollution, spoiling the local beaches until a central sewer system was constructed. Hussey (1989) reports on a similar pattern of outside
investment at Kuta Beach on Bali, where I first stayed in 1970 when it was nothing more than a fishing village. By the late 1970s, Kuta had been discovered, land values escalated, and outside investors began to move into the area. While local residents remained involved in the local economy, and those fortunate enough to own land may have benefited from this tourist boom, locals have not been able to direct the pace or direction of development or capture most of the benefits of growth. In the meantime, problems associated with crime and prostitution have become serious local concerns.

Coastal Tourism and Community Development

The concept of community development can serve as a framework for promoting tourism development that benefits local residents on a sustainable basis. The process of defining community development has been likened to eating jello with a fork—possible, but not something one wants to spend a lot of time doing. A long series of definitions are provided by Christian and Robinson (1989), and these boil down to general agreement that community development is about change, that such change should be for the better, and that such improvements should be widely shared by members of the community. Sustainability is implicit in this definition, it being hard to imagine 'change for the better' involving degradation of a community's stock of social, economic or natural capital in a way that limits opportunities for future generations.

Community development may have a strong economic component, but this may not always be the case (Summers, 1986). Strengthening public education or broadening a community's leadership base may be the central focus of a community development effort. Such efforts strengthen a community's ability to take further steps to improve local conditions or to adapt to changing circumstances. Community development also implies that the benefits of change need to be distributed in a way that is seen to be fair. In agreement with Galston and Baehler (1995), I would push this aspect of the definition further to stipulate that changes which adversely affect those members of a community who by reasons of age, illness, or poverty are most vulnerable to harm would not, by my definition, represent community development.

Just as there are many examples of tourism being disruptive, so too we can find examples of tourism leading to strengthened communities. Sofield (1991) reports that tourism does not always result in social disruption. He notes that residents of Pentecost Island in Vanuatu resisted efforts by outside tour operators to commercialize a religious ceremony. Instead, they organized a local council to direct tourism development, using their ceremony as a key drawing card, limiting the number of tourists and ensuring the authenticity of both the tourist experience and the religious ceremony. On Bali, local government officials were able to use tourism-led development as a mechanism for strengthening local culture (Picard, 1995).

The coastal zone offers unique opportunities for community development based on tourism. As noted above, coastal ecosystems are under increasingly intense pressure and tourism offers an opportunity to utilize local resources in a non-extractive manner, creating new niches that diversify local economies. Fishing boats can become tour boats, ferrying people to reefs or isolated beaches. Whire and Dobias (1991) point out that fishermen in Thailand and the Philippines have been successful in attracting tourists to coral reefs, creating incentives to eliminate destructive fishing practices, including the use of poisons and explosives. Their point is echoed by Sudara (1991) and Vogt (1996) in other case studies from Thailand, and by Wilcox (1991) in his discussion of marine tourism in the Caribbean. Tourism provides an opportunity for coastal residents to benefit from ecosystem management, providing alternate opportunities for investment of capital and labor, markets for new handicraft production, and new markets for more established local products like fresh seafood.

To many in the industry, tourism is first and foremost an economic activity, where the primary value is financial. Tourism is big business and it should not surprise us that those who invest significant capital in an industry seek to promote certain patterns of tourism development. In the U.S. and other industrialized nations, the initiative behind tourism development rests with major private sector investors, who are able to identify opportunities and market their products. In non-industrialized or newly industrializing nations, tourism represents a major economic enterprise that generates foreign exchange, and development of the industry is more likely to be affected by conscious promotional efforts and strategic planning efforts. In both industrialized and non-industrialized settings, economic and political forces can be combined in such a way that local concerns, much less community control, is unlikely.

But this need not be the case. Communities can organize themselves to promote and regulate tourism development, regulate conflicts between resource users, and determine what types of development they prefer. If outside investors want to gain access to business opportunities, the local community can establish requirements that local residents be given employment opportunities, and that local businesses be chosen to supply goods and services. Not only will this strengthen the local economy, but by using local labor and suppliers the amount of "leakage" from the local economy will be reduced.
A Policy Framework for Community Development Based on Coastal Tourism

I am not so naive to believe that developments such as Waikiki won’t be developed for mass market tourism. Nor do I seriously expect major investors in the industry to base their investment decisions on the needs of communities where they locate. I do think it is reasonable for governments and trade organizations to adopt policies which promote diversity, including small-scale tourism controlled by residents of coastal communities. There is room in the tourist industry for the large resort development as well as smaller scale developments that can contribute to the sustainability of local communities and ecosystems. Locally initiated development is likely to begin small in scale and remain so, placing relatively little stress on local ecosystem and social systems. Promotion of local development will lead to more diffused patterns of ‘consumption’ which are more likely to be sustainable in ecological terms.

Neither do I want to promote tourism development as a panacea for social and economic problems in coastal communities. Most jobs associated with tourism in the U.S. and other industrialized nations tend to be low paying jobs with limited benefits. Galton and Baechler (1995) report that unemployment rates rose steadily in tourism dependent areas, and that unemployment among women was a particularly serious problem. Moreover, like other economies based on natural resource systems, tourism is often a seasonal industry. In short, we should not promote coastal tourism as a magic bullet, but rather as part of a more comprehensive strategy of community development.

Most coastal cities have tourist promotion offices but smaller towns and rural areas, the types of places that are most likely to experience growth of coastal tourism in the years to come, generally do not have comparable organizational resources to promote what they have to offer. State and county governments in the United States, along with universities and regional development offices, can play a role in assisting communities identify and capitalize on local opportunities. In countries where local governments play a less significant role in planning, national or provincial governments need to consider a development strategy based on a more diversified tourism industry.

Tourism development needs to be geared to the scale of the society in which it takes place. Development of the tourism industry around Miami or Honolulu is likely to be capital intensive, while such development in rural Newfoundland, Canada, or the Samoan Islands should be scaled to the much smaller host communities. Tourism development in these smaller settings needs to be geared towards the needs of local residents for economic diversification and supplemental incomes. Development strategies which transfer local control over a community’s resource base to outsiders may generate economic growth but not community development. Efforts to promote locally-based tourism development require local participation, and this process takes time. Bringing together diverse interests within coastal communities to discuss and plan for local development also has many advantages in terms of sustainability and minimizing resource conflicts. Rarely are local interests considered when efforts are made to develop coastal tourism (Miller and Ditton, 1986; Hickman and Cocklin, 1992). The result is often social disruption, environmental degradation, and conflict. There are alternative paths that can be taken if the political will exists to keep them open.

References


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