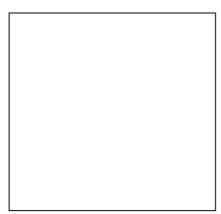
Sustainable Tourism Planning:

An Analysis of Queensland Local Tourism Destinations



A thesis submitted for the

Degree

of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Queensland 2006

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Statement of Originality

The work contained in this thesis is original and my own work. Material in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written except where due reference is made.

Signed _____

Date_____

Acknowledgements

There are a number of people who have been instrumental in assisting, enabling, or politely tolerating the completion of this thesis- many of those I would like to acknowledge would fall into multiple categories.

Firstly I would like to thank my supervisors, Professor Chris Cooper and Dr Lee-Jaye Slaughter for their invaluable support, guidance and expertise. Most importantly I must acknowledge their unwavering encouragement- thank you to you both. I would also like to thank my TALM colleagues, particularly Dr Michelle Whitford who patiently discussed various aspects of the thesis at various times over the various years.

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support of the many local governments in Queensland who provided assistance with the data collection. Particular thanks must be extended to those who participated in interviews and so generously devoted their time to this study.

Special thanks must go to those on the home front who unfortunately have to put up with many of the 'cons' of a doctoral thesis. Firstly I would like to thank my husband James Hunter- it's done! I know the experience would have been far more difficult without your constant support and encouragement so I thank you. I would also like to thank my family- Pete, Mary, Bec and Grandad. Special thanks to my Mum and Dad- I have you to thank for getting me so far but I think 21 years of study is probably enough now! To our lovely Ma and Pa- hope you can see the final result from your star...

List of Publications

Publications by the Candidate relevant to the Thesis

The following research has been published prior to the submission of this thesis in journals and refereed conference proceedings. Relevant portions of published articles, which support and/or are directly related to the findings of this study, have been incorporated into the thesis.

Journal Articles

Ruhanen, L. 2004, 'Strategic planning for local tourism destinations: An analysis of tourism plans', *Tourism and Hospitality Planning and Development*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 239-254.

Cooper, C. & Ruhanen, L. 2004, 'Enhancing destination competitiveness through the use of a strategic visioning approach to tourism planning', *Journal of Tourism and Development*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 27-34.

Book Chapters

Ruhanen, L. & Cooper, C. 2005, 'The use of strategic visioning to enhance local tourism planning in periphery communities', in C. Ryan, S. Page & M. Aicken (eds), *Taking Tourism to the Limits: Issues, Concepts and Managerial Perspectives*, pp. 53-63, Elsevier, Oxford.

Fully Refereed Conference Proceedings

Ruhanen, L. 2005, 'Achieving key dimensions of sustainability: Strategic visioning as a tourism destination planning tool', *Proceedings of the* 3rd *Tourism Industry and Education Symposium*, Jyvaskyla, Finland.

Ruhanen, L. 2005, 'Sustainable tourism destination planning: Is the concept being put into practice?', *Proceedings of the* 3rd *Tourism Industry and Education Symposium*, Jyvaskyla, Finland.

Ruhanen, L. 2005, 'Can the strategic visioning planning approach contribute towards tourism destination competitiveness?', *Proceedings of the Theoretical Advances in Tourism Economics Conference*, Evora, Portugal.

Ruhanen, L. 2005, 'Sustainable tourism planning: A content analysis of local tourism plans', *Proceedings of the Council of Australian University Tourism and Hospitality Educators Conference*, Alice Springs, Australia.

Ruhanen, L. 2004, 'Implementing a strategic visioning approach to destination planning as a means of enhancing stakeholder collaboration', *Proceedings of the Tourism State of the Art II Conference*, Glasgow, Scotland.

Abstract

Tourism has had a profound impact upon destinations worldwide, and although this impact has been positive for many destinations, there are numerous examples where tourism has adversely impacted upon the environment and social fabric of the destination community. The negative impacts of tourism have being attributed, among other things, to inadequate or non-existent planning frameworks for tourism development. As such, tourism planning is considered vital to offset some of the negative impacts that tourism can have on the destination community. While several different approaches have been advocated over the years, tourism planning based on the philosophies of sustainability has emerged as one of the most comprehensive approaches. Two concepts are acknowledged as contributing to sustainable tourism development: enhanced levels of multiple stakeholder participation in the tourism planning process and a strategic orientation towards tourism planning (Simpson, 2001).

Therefore the purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which sustainable development principles, strategic planning and stakeholder participation, are integrated into the planning practices of local tourism destinations. The concept of sustainable development and its application to the tourism sector has received considerable attention within academia and has become a focus of the policy agenda at all levels of government. The wealth of literature on the topic would suggest that tourism destinations have embraced the sustainable approach to tourism planning, however some authors have disagreed, noting that sustainability principles are not put into practice due to the fact that economic motivations are given priority over social and ecological issues (Getz, 1986; Hall, 1998). Further, academics have been criticized for their preoccupation with defining and debating the definitional aspects of sustainable tourism at the expense of considering the practical aspects, particularly the development of tools for implementing the concept in practice (Garrod & Fyall, 1998). As Simpson (2001, p.4) noted,

"Whilst the concepts of stakeholder participation and strategic orientation are widely endorsed as valuable contributors to sustainable development, there have been no previous attempts to gauge the extent to which such considerations play their part in real world tourism planning processes".

This study sought to examine the transference of sustainable tourism theory to practice by investigating the extent to which the sustainable tourism planning philosophy is utilised in the planning practices of local tourism destinations in Queensland. In order to address this issue, three research objectives were developed and investigated through a two-stage qualitative data collection process. Despite claims that more destinations are adopting sustainable, strategic perspectives towards tourism development (Ritchie & Crouch, 2000); it was found that sustainability is not the underlying approach to local tourism destination planning in Queensland as evidenced by an over emphasis on economic concerns, short-term planning horizons and the exclusion of key stakeholder groups from the process. However some of the reasons for these problems were uncovered in the research where it was found that the sustainability concept and its application to tourism planning practice is not well understood and particular stakeholder groups, namely the local government, have considerable influence over the planning process.

To address these issues a conceptual framework of the strategic visioning approach to tourism planning was developed. The framework is proposed as a possible means for ensuring sustainability philosophies including strategic planning and stakeholder participation are incorporated into the tourism planning process. The applicability of the framework, identified in both the literature and confirmed by stakeholder respondents, was considered in light of the challenges identified in the research of incorporating sustainability principles into a local tourism destination planning process.

Key Words: Sustainable development, strategic tourism planning, stakeholder participation, strategic visioning.

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