Exploring the impact of innovation in promoting sustainable tourism development:

The role of key stakeholders on the Top of the South Aquaculture and Seafood Trail in Nelson/Marlborough, New Zealand

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Abstract: *Contemporary tourism planning recognises that an integrated and sustainable development approach includes the participation of local communities and residents. Community level innovation and leadership is also important in creating and implementing new ideas as part of the development process.*

The purpose of this study was to evaluate stakeholder perspectives regarding community capacity to link tourism and aquaculture opportunities in the Nelson/Marlborough Region on the South Island of New Zealand.

In 2005 the Marine Farming Association developed and published the "Top of the South Aquaculture and Seafood Trail" as a brochure for tourists to promote a positive image of aquaculture in the region. The Trail integrates local tourism providers, restaurants, accommodations, seafood retail, as well as harvesting and processing businesses (mussel farms) as part of a themed driving route. There is a strong economic dependence on aquaculture and tourism in the region with both industries generating a combined $402 million annually in the Nelson Region alone.

In conducting the research, 22 local stakeholders were interviewed regarding their perceptions about strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities associated with the Trail as part of a mixed method, case study approach.

The results demonstrated that tourism in the region was well developed, that there were weaknesses in networking and collaboration, that there were gaps between perceptions of the aquaculture and tourism industries and that the role of the university has been important in building community capacity for research and strategic planning linked to the trail.

Key words: *Collaboration, innovation, peripheral regions, sustainable development, case study approach, mixed methods*

Introduction

Tourism continues to be important to economic sustainability in New Zealand. In 2007 the Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) estimated total tourism expenditures at $20.1 billion with 56% from domestic and 44% from international sources (Ministry of Tourism, 2009). Domestic tourism in the year ending December 2008 (the same year of this study) included 28.3 million day trips and 15.1 million overnight trips. The forecast to 2014 for international visitor arrivals is an increase by 3.3% annually (Ministry of Tourism, 2009).

In many cases tourism is used by governments as a key tool for regional development (Forstner, 2004). Since the primary tourism resource is the community, sustainable tourism development is dependent on balancing the social, economic and environmental components of the community (Richards & Hall, 2000). Also, many rural areas use the development of tourism as a means to address issues of depopulation, agricultural decline and resource depletion and to promote economic diversification (Butler, Hall, & Jenkins, 1998).

Collaborative capacity is dependent on involvement of stakeholders representing all sectors in a community. Although there is no universal definition of stakeholder (Timur & Getz, 2008), Mitchell et al. (1997) identifies power and legitimacy as attributes that are essential elements of a stakeholder typology. Therefore, legitimate stakeholders can include the businesses/industries that are impacted by decision-making, as well as the government agencies, private consultants, planners and leaders.In rural areas the tourism industry is dominated by local small and medium enterprises (Stuart, Pearce, & Weaver, 2005). In addition to the businesses, the private, public, and non-profit sectors play an active role and are responsible for contributing to the well-being of the community, especially in peripheral destinations (Aarsaether, 2005).

New global "best practice" indicates that more planning, increasing local control, sustainable development, the application of new technologies and market segmentation have positive effects of the destination's development in long-term (Milne, 1995; Poon, 1994). However, locals are often excluded from many decisions because they are seen as lacking the knowledge and skills to participate in tourism (Moscardo, 2006). Community controlled tourism requires stakeholders to have sufficient understanding and knowledge about the aspects of tourism to contribute positively to its sustainable development (Okech, 2006). Furthermore, networking among businesses provides positive opportunities through economies of scale, education and training, access to marketing expertise, advanced technology and economic advantages (Morrison, 1998).

Innovation in the form of new ideas often leads to changes in production, service development, and supply at peripheral destinations (Aarsaether, 2005). These changes result in direct and indirect benefits essential to integrated, sustainable forms of tourism and the adoption of the innovation by locals (Everett M. Rodgers, 2003).

This paper analyzes stakeholder perceptions about a specific innovation (an aquaculture and seafood tourism trail) to understand the potential for innovations in planning and development linking the tourism and aquaculture sectors in the Nelson/Marlborough region of New Zealand.

The Case Site: Nelson/Marlborough

In 2005, the Marine Farming Association (MFA) produced a brochure to promote and market the "Top of the South Aquaculture and Seafood Trail" (Figure 1) in the Nelson/Marlborough region (Tasman Bay, Golden Bay and Marlborough Sounds), which is New Zealand's most important salmon and mussel farming area (The New Zealand Seafood Industry Council Ltd., 2009).

The Trail covers two out of 30 Regional Tourism Organization (RTO) areas-Latitude Nelson and Destination Marlborough. In 2008 these RTO's had 5.63m domestic and international visitor nights and 3.03m total domestic and international visits (Ministry of Tourism, 2008a; Ministry of Tourism, 2008b).

On a 350km route from Kaikoura to Takaka, the Trail links 21 businesses that are associated with the seafood or aquaculture industry including restaurants, accommodations, mussel farms, and fresh seafood suppliers. The main rationale for the Trail was to give locals and tourists a better understanding of the value of aquaculture to the region. This was a response to conflict over the use of coastal space generated from the simultaneous expansion of tourism and aquaculture.

Approximately 80% of New Zealand's marine products are grown in the Trail area (MFA-Marine Farming Association, 2005). These products, Greenshell™ Mussels, King salmon and Pacific Oysters, are the greatest contributors to the growth of the aquaculture production in New Zealand (Marlborough Regional Development Trust, 2004; New Zealand Aquaculture Council, 2006). While several coastal commercial fisheries have declined, the scallop fishery is still significant to the region. With tremendous growth since 1970, aquaculture is now Marlborough's second largest industry (Aquaculture.govt.nz, 2006). Multiple processors and seafood export and marketing companies are important employers in the region.

Aquaculture-related ecotourism is promoted by a number of countries (FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Department, 2007). The concept of the MFA's Aquaculture and Seafood Trail was modeled on the basis of Australia's very successful Seafood and Aquaculture Trail developed by the Tourism Eyre Peninsula (TEP) in 2001. The MFA realized the possibilities of the further development of the Trail and thus forged a link between seafood and tourism through the present research.
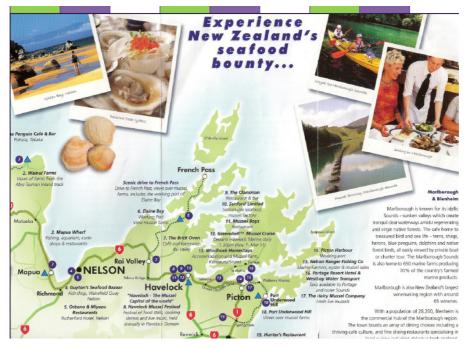

Figure 1: The Marine Farming Association's Top of the South Aquaculture and Seafood Trail

Methods

The research involved a mixed methods approach combining literature review, observations at the case site, in-person interviews and a paper survey. The target population was key stakeholders that are representatives of non-profit associations, regional tourism organisations, regional district councils (land and coastal planning) development agencies, and consultants.

These types of stakeholders were selected either because they are 1) alliances of local businesses and represent partnerships that are defined as *'regular, cross-sectoral interactions between parties based on at least some agreed rules or norms, intended to address a common issue or to achieve a specific policy or goals'* (Bramwell & Lane, 2000, p.2) because they have potential to influence cross-sectoral interactions (Bramwell & Lane, 2000). Local Maori organizations were also included because of their significant involvement in commercial and aboriginal fisheries and tourism industries in the region. A list of 29 stakeholders was identified, and 22 of those contacted agreed to participate in one-hour, in-person, semi-structured interviews. Interviews occurred in the participant's place of work or a location near their workplace (e.g. restaurant). Questions focused on strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities associated with the Trail. Following the interview, participants were asked to complete a 15 minute survey regarding perceptions about tourism and aquaculture.

This paper focuses on initial survey findings relevant to community capacity to link tourism and aquaculture opportunities through innovation.

Results

Nineteen of the 22 interviewees completed the survey. The respondents represent a variety of stakeholders who influence the development of tourism and/or aquaculture in the study area. More than 80% of the respondents are between 41 and 70 years old, the remaining 20% are between 21 and 40, and the youngest participant was born in 1975. A majority of respondents (80%) has a university or graduate degree and nearly 45% have held their job for 0 to 5 years. Less than 40% have lived less than 10 years in the community. Overall the participants are older, well educated, and are long-term residents in the community.

Table 1 summarizes the responses to 43 statements that were rated by the participants on a likert scale (1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree). Survey items are grouped according to themes relevant to tourism and aquaculture in the region.

Table 1. Perceptions of Tourism and Seafood in the Survey Region: Summary of Likert Scale Items

Item	N	Mean*	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
					%		
GENERAL IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM							
Tourism is important to my region and community	19	1.11	89.5	10.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Tourism is well-developed in my region/community	18	1.83	31.6	52.6	5.3	5.3	0.0
Tourism has grown in my region in the last five years	18	1.50	57.9	26.3	10.5	0.0	0.0
RESIDENT ATTITUDES							
Residents are supportive of the tourism industry	19	2.11	15.8	63.2	15.8	5.3	0.0
Residents attitudes towards tourists are positive	19	2.05	15.8	63.2	21.1	0.0	0.0
Residents are supportive of the aquaculture industry	19	2.95	0.0	10.5	84.2	5.3	0.0
Residents are supportive of the commercial fishing industry	19	3.05	5.3	5.3	68.4	21.1	0.0
ECONOMIC ISSUES							
Local businesses are benefitting economically from tourism	19	1.47	63.2	31.6	0.0	5.3	0.0
The majority of businesses in my region are small and medium sized	19	1.63	47.4	42.1	10.5	0.0	0.0
There are many new attractions/activities for visitors in the last 5 years	19	2.58	5.3	42.1	42.1	10.5	0.0
Tourism is a locally controlled industry in my region	19	2.26	15.8	47.4	31.6	5.3	0.0
Our region is networking with other economic sectors to promote tourism	18	2.33	21.1	31.6	31.6	10.5	0.0
There are conflicts between tourism and other economic sectors	19	2.84	5.3	42.1	21.1	26.3	5.3

Item	N	Mean*	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
					%		
ENVIRONMENT							
The tourism industry in my region is environmentally sustainable or 'green'	19	2.42	5.3	47.4	47.4	0.0	0.0
Most tourism businesses are certified as part of quality assurance programs	17	2.76	5.3	26.3	42.1	15.8	0.0
The majority of tourism businesses have an environmental policy	17	2.88	0.0	26.3	47.4	15.8	0.0
There are negative environmental impacts from tourism in my region	19	2.74	0.0	42.1	42.1	15.8	0.0
SEASONALITY							
Tourism is a seasonal industry in my region	19	1.74	47.4	36.8	10.5	5.3	0.0
Our destination is trying to expand tourism services in the less popular seasons	19	1.89	42.1	31.6	21.1	5.3	0.0
CUSTOMER SERVICE							
The region offers quality customer service	17	2.47	15.8	42.1	10.5	15.8	5.3
The individuals employed in the hospitality (restaurant/hotel) sector are well-trained	17	2.76	0.0	47.4	21.1	15.8	5.3
There is a shortage of people to work in the tourism industry in our region	17	2.29	15.8	47.4	15.8	5.3	5.3
The business associations/development agencies are supportive of tourism	17	1.94	21.1	52.6	15.8	0.0	0.0

Item	N	Mean*	%				
			Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
MARKETING							
There is a clear marketing brand for our region	18	2.39	26.3	26.3	21.1	21.1	0.0
The marketing efforts for our region are well-coordinated	17	2.47	21.1	21.1	31.6	15.8	0.0
The website for our region is beneficial to my business	16	2.75	15.8	15.8	26.3	26.3	0.0
PLANNING							
Our region is maximizing the use of technology in promoting tourism	16	2.69	10.5	21.1	36.8	15.8	0.0
The region offers quality customer service	17	2.47	15.8	42.1	10.5	15.8	5.3
Our region has integrated cultural offerings festivals/events/music/storytelling) into our tourism product	18	2.11	21.1	47.4	21.1	5.3	0.0
Our region has a strategic plan for tourism	17	2.18	31.6	15.8	36.8	5.3	0.0
Over the past five years more tourism businesses are collaborating on product development and marketing efforts	18	2.28	21.1	31.6	36.8	5.3	0.0
There is a need for better coordination in the tourism industry in my region	16	2.50	5.3	42.1	31.6	0.0	5.3
Our region receives technical and financial support from universities on tourism and industry trends	16	3.00	0.0	21.1	47.4	10.5	5.3
ACCESS							
There is good access for visitors TO our region	19	2.00	21.1	63.2	10.5	5.3	0.0
There is good access (roads, airports, trains) for visitors IN our region	19	2.26	5.3	68.4	21.1	5.3	0.0
Our region has a good public transport service for visitors	19	3.89	0.0	10.5	15.8	47.4	26.3

Item	N	Mean*	Strongly Agree	Agree	% Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT							
Marine-based resources are important to tourism in our region	18	1.72	36.8	47.4	10.5	0.0	0.0
Seafood is an important local product for visitors to our region	19	1.95	31.6	47.4	15.8	5.3	0.0
Our region offers educational and experiential programs for visitors	17	2.76	5.3	21.1	57.9	0.0	5.3
Our region has done a good job using local products and services for tourism	18	2.39	21.1	26.3	36.8	10.5	0.0
LOCAL PARTICIPATION							
I feel as though I have a say in how tourism is developing in my region	18	2.33	31.6	15.8	31.6	15.8	0.0

*Scale: 1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither agree or disagree, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree)

Responses confirm that tourism is important to the region, however there are perceived weaknesses in collaboration, networking and marketing. A majority (85.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed/ agreed that "tourism is well-developed in my region/community", and all strongly agreed/agreed that "tourism is important to my region and community". Although 88.9% strongly agree and agree that tourism has grown in the last five years, more than 1/3 of the stakeholders (42.1%) are not sure about or disagree (10.5%) with the region having developed new attractions during the last five years.

However, approximately half of the respondents felt that not only is there a need for better coordination in the tourism industry, but that also the region needs better networking with other economic sectors to promote tourism. In addition only 42.2% strongly agreed/agreed that "the marketing efforts for our region are well-coordinated", suggesting that the Trail may provide an opportunity to strengthen regional marketing efforts.

Also, initial qualitative analysis of the 22 interviews by research team members independently coding the interview texts identified 14 emerging themes in regards to the further development of the Trail that are consistent with overall survey results (table 2).

Table 2. Summary of emergent themes from stakeholder interviews

• Concept relevance	• Awareness of brochure	• Economic benefits
• Industry	• Cooperation	• Marketing
• Destination image	• Resource Conflicts	• Access
• Attitudes	• Outreach/Education	• Marine resource use management
• Economic development	• Ecology / Geology	

In general, initial interview findings suggested positive support for the continuation of a seafood trail and the role of the trail as a driver for cooperation between seafood and tourism industries in the region. However, survey results demonstrate a probable gap between perceptions of the seafood and tourism industries. For example, less than 11% of respondents believe residents are supportive of the aquaculture or commercial fishing industry, while 79% believe residents are supportive of the tourism industry. Even so, 79% of respondents believe seafood is an important local product for visitors to the region.

Only 21.1% feel their region has received adequate technical and financial support on tourism and industry trends in the past. For this reason, participation of the New Zealand Tourism Research Institute (based at the Auckland University of Technology) in research and planning for the Trail can help facilitate stronger local support and cooperative networks.

Conclusion

The analysis shows that there is potential for the MFA's Aquaculture and Seafood Trail to become an important regional networking innovation. However the perceptions about the link of aquaculture, commercial fishing and tourism indicate important gaps that should be addressed and the demand by domestic and international tourists for seafood opportunities has yet to be evaluated.

While stakeholders support the product idea in general, they perceive weaknesses in networking, coordination and marketing. Respondents' understanding of these issues demonstrates the importance of their role in building support for collaboration and networking for regional tourism development.

Survey results also demonstrate a probable conflict in the community between perceptions of the seafood and tourism industries. The Aquaculture and Seafood Trail has the potential to stimulate stronger cooperation between tourism and aquaculture and foster more sustainable forms of tourism development in the region by setting a positive example that will inspire interest and community support. Participants in the trail can also serve in a leadership role in supporting collaborative efforts.

A positive outcome of the research is that the community representatives are receptive to continued participation of the university in research and strategic planning for the Trail. This is another component that is helpful to build local capacity through strengthened links between tourism and aquaculture, which in turn will foster more sustainable forms of tourism development in the region.

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