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Tourism Policy and Planning in Michigan: Why Adding Sustainability is Important

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Abstract

The tourism industry relies on the exploitation of resources, the environment, and often communities and cultures as well. Whereas Michigan's tourism industry is likely to continue growing into the foreseeable future, industry stakeholders must work to guarantee the viability of tourism as the industry grows. This research includes a compilation of policy, planning, and strategy recommendations to incorporate sustainability into the Michigan tourism industry. Specifically, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the triple bottom line are identified as ideal frameworks through which tourism planning and policy should flow. Suggestions for first steps include adopting an industry-standard definition of sustainability, a national rating system to benchmark stakeholder organizations and businesses, and the use of certification bodies to verify sustainable practices. Research and theories are drawn from think tanks and experts in tourism policy and planning, ecotourism, and sustainability. The resulting recommendations include: endorsing the SDGs and the triple bottom line as a framework by which to develop a sustainable tourism industry; administering stakeholder and community engagement throughout the processes of creating and implementing a sustainable tourism plan; considering sustainable tourism models and strategies; and conducting regular evaluation and assessment of the statewide plan and the impacts of the industry. The creation of a plan with these recommendations will appropriately address the problems of exploitation, growth, and development resulting from tourism in Michigan.

Keywords: sustainability, tourism, policy, planning

Introduction

Tourism is growing in Michigan, accounting for more than 224,00 jobs in the state and \$2.7 billion in state and local government revenue in 2017, according to the Michigan Economic Development Corporation (MEDC) (January 10, 2019). The industry has grown by \$7.3 billion in visitor

spending and supported more than 24,000 additional jobs from 2011- 2017 (Nicholls, n.d.). Tourism directly supports several other Michigan industries, including lodging, recreation, and food and beverage (i.e. restaurants, farms, bars, etc.), as well as small businesses. Additionally, since 2010, the number of tourist visitors in Michigan grew from nearly 100 million to nearly 115 million per year (MEDC, 2014). According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), “tourism is also one of the most dynamic and fastest growing economic sectors globally... in 2016, the sector’s overall global contribution to GDP was around 10% and is foreseen to rise by 3.9% annually to reach 11.4% of GDP in 2027” (2017). Tourism is undoubtedly a primary source of economic development, both globally and in Michigan. However, it is of the utmost importance that policymakers and stakeholders evaluate and ensure the sustainability of tourism in all aspects, including environmentally and socially, as the industry continues to grow.

Sustainability is defined as “the idea that goods and services should be produced in ways that do not use resources that cannot be replaced and that do not damage the environment” by the Cambridge Dictionary (Sustainability, n.d.). This general concept of sustainability can benefit both businesses and governments, because sustainable practices improve the likelihood that goods and services can be maintained over time, by definition. Sustainability also offers a range of financial benefits to organizations, as with the decision to construct LEED-certified buildings, for example, which have energy costs that are “on average 30 percent lower...than nongreen buildings” (Christopher & Jelier, n.d., p. 313). However, sustainability considered solely through the economic lens, as is the case with the private sector by and large, is not a comprehensive approach to management. Rather, the triple bottom line recommends that industry expand its traditional bottom-line of profitability to also include environmental and social dimensions, or the “triple bottom line” (TBL) in order to create a more “sustainable” business (Elkington, 1997). This has begun to happen on a large scale. Businesses and organizations have begun to apply the concept of sustainability and the TBL to all practices and to performance evaluation. Applying the triple bottom line to the tourism industry is part of the genesis of a movement to apply sustainability broadly to global human activities.

Sustainable development is a concept now embraced globally and pursued by businesses and governments alike for a multitude of reasons.

The United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the Agenda) was created by states across the globe who commit to advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in global partnership. Ultimately, the Agenda and the SDGs were the result of a new global perspective on the interconnectedness between and among human health, poverty, inequality, climate change, the changing condition of the natural environment, and industrial activities. Rather than industries and states acting in silos to advance their agendas, the Agenda serves to redefine the roles and reframe the policies of industries and states alike. In today's global economy, industries and states can no longer ignore responsibility in pursuit of their agendas: this is the idea behind sustainable development. The SDGs serve as an appropriate tool to guide planning, policy-making, and performance evaluation to ensure responsible, sustainable development on all scales.

The U.S. Partnership for the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development argue, “sustainable development involves simultaneously creating flourishing ecosystems, vibrant communities, stronger economies, and improving the quality of life for all in the present without compromising the quality of life for future generations” (as cited in Christopher & Jelier, n.d., p. 309). Sustainable tourism seeks to do the same by embracing the principles of sustainable development through its growth. Tourism's impact on Michigan's natural, cultural, agricultural, and built resources must, therefore, be measured in a sustainability assessment process to determine the effect on ecosystems and quality of life (Nicholls, n.d.). A sustainability assessment of the tourism industry requires that stakeholders ask, what are the unaccounted costs and negative externalities associated with tourism in Michigan?

For example, Michigan's natural resources include an abundance of fresh water from the Great Lakes, vast forests, and even farm land, which is found “in excess of 10 million acres - or 27 percent of the total land area” (Beeler, 2012, p.11). These resources, among others, help to drive tourism and must be sustainably managed so they continue to be available for future generations. As Nicholls says in the 2012-2017 Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan, “maintaining access to these resources, while simultaneously preserving their integrity, is critical to their long-term sustainability and integral to conserving the quality of life that makes Michigan a great place to live and a premier travel destination” (N.d., p. 9). Measuring and managing tourism's impact and embracing sustainable development are

essential both to continued access to resources and to ensuring the growth of the Michigan tourism industry into the future. What this paper seeks to define are the policy, planning, and development strategies that must be in place in order to achieve sustainable tourism in Michigan.

Literature Review

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have released a publication titled *Tourism and the Sustainable Development Goals – Journey to 2030, Highlights* (2017) that outlines a roadmap to advance sustainable tourism through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The publication culminates with specific recommendations for tourism policy, the tourism private sector, the financing of tourism, and for the international development community and global tourism stakeholders. One of the most globally recognized definitions of sustainable tourism comes from the UNWTO and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and is defined as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities” (UNWTO & UNEP, 2005). According to this definition sustainable tourism happens only when stakeholders and policymakers incorporate a triple bottom line sustainability approach to managing the tourism industry collaboratively. Additionally, according to the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.) definition of sustainability, tourism goods and services should be produced in ways that do not use resources that cannot be replaced and that do not damage the environment. MEDC’s report on the economic impacts of tourism in Michigan reflects how the industry generally already has an understanding of the economic pillar of the triple bottom line. What is generally missing is the more holistic perspective that considers sustainable development, specifically the SDGs as well as the triple bottom line, or social and environmental impacts in addition to traditional economic impacts of the industry. Both the TBL perspective on the tourism industry and the acknowledgement of the SDGs are also missing from the current 2012-2017 Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan (Nicholls, n.d.).

Martha Honey, Ph.D. describes the array of principles and considerations that set ecotourism apart from other types of tourism. Honey (2008) “properly” defines ecotourism as “travel to fragile, pristine,

and usually protected areas that strives to be low impact and (often) small scale. It helps educate the traveler, provides funding for conservation, directly benefits the economic development and empowerment of local communities, and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights” (p. 33). She then provides context and examples through cases from around the world that apply ecotourism and assesses their efficacy. Patterson (2007) assesses how ecotourism is defined and considers how other terms, such as “responsible,” “sustainable,” or “nature” tourism, also are used. Patterson cites the definition developed by the International Ecotourism Society, which states, “Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas which conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people” (2007, p. 1). Patterson presents a host of resources for beginning “nature and culture- based tourism operators.” Many of these resources are geared toward establishing a successful and profitable business. However, Patterson incorporates a planning process for tourism businesses, which includes a procedure outlining how businesses can plan to minimize their impact on the social, cultural, and physical domains. Patterson’s *The Business of Ecotourism* is meant to serve as a manual for anyone looking to create and build a successful ecotourism business. Combining definitions of ecotourism by Honey and Patterson drives forth an important point missed by the understanding sustainable tourism alone: conservation, perhaps achieved through funding and education policies, can advance the environmental pillar to the triple bottom line approach to sustainable tourism. Lansing and De Vries (2007) advocate for an industry-wide awareness and acceptance of industry definitions, which could help to bring tourism industry stakeholders to a greater collective understanding of where the industry is and where it should be headed.

Ellenburg and Seddon (2010) argue that investing in rigorous research is vital to understanding and responsibly managing the cumulative effects of human disturbance to the environment that happen with tourism. Specifically, Ellenburg and Seddon (2010) suggest long-term population studies are an essential component to this research, because without it “the loss of the next generation of any given species will only be detected years later once the aged colony starts to decline” (p. 258). By waiting to act on species decline only after it happens and without longitudinal population tracking, it “may be too late.” Traditionally, tourism does not consider this approach to monitoring its impact. Ecotourism on the other hand, as

defined and understood by various people and entities outlined in this research, does consider an approach to travel and tourism that strives to minimize impacts with low-impact use and small scale operations. Myers and Scarinci (2014) prescribe sustainable lodging best practices for lodging businesses to reduce or eliminate negative environmental externalities from lodging, which is a practice entirely aligned with minimizing impact. There are already some tourism industry practices in use by stakeholders that are seeking to minimize impacts and reduce or eliminate negative externalities.

Allen, Edgell, Smith, and Swanson (2008) focus on the idea that tourism should be sustainable - that is, managing tourism sustainably achieves "...quality growth in a manner that does not deplete the natural and built environments and preserves the culture, history, and heritage of the local community" (p. 183). These authors focus on crafting not only quality policy, but also effective planning steps to ensure tourism is sustainable. The authors suggest a systematic planning process and a policy strategy based on the UNWTO definition of sustainable tourism. According to Popp and McCole (2014) this could be accomplished in part by mapping tourist movement and itineraries, and then planning according to demand. Allen, et. al. emphasize realistically how the multidisciplinary nature of tourism may create a greater challenge for those working to attain industry-wide sustainability. For example, Alofami et al. (2010) describe the importance of involving communities and stakeholders in both the planning process and setting the standards of the industry's activities, which, like mapping tourist activities and movement, requires additional time than traditional, non-sustainable tourism policy creation and planning processes.

Blakely and Leigh (2017) advocate for an array of locality development strategies through the lens of the local community. Whereas Spring Wine Tours (n.d.) offer inaccessible, unaffordable private tours of wineries in Michigan's Leelanau Peninsula, Blakely and Leigh (2017) argue that a Business Improvement District (BID) could increase accessibility and affordability. Funds from the BID could be used to improve public transportation in the peninsulas, thereby increasing accessibility and affordability and bringing more business to the wineries. Elkington (1997) emphasizes the importance of using an array of tools, which could include locality development strategies such as BIDs, to achieve collaborative policy and planning. Elkington theorizes that sustainability and the triple bottom line will become values that drive the market in the 21st century, which the global economy has seen come into fruition.

He argues that this market revolution requires new forms of accounting, auditing, reporting, and benchmarking. Moreover, part of being a sustainable corporation or organization of any kind requires the ability to prove it. According to Elkington, transparency can be achieved and sustainability can be guaranteed through a combination of tools, including stakeholder engagement, cross-sector collaboration, policy, planning, impact assessments for each pillar of the triple bottom line, auditing, reporting, and benchmarking.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) released a fact sheet publication describing tourism as “an important driving force for inclusive socio-economic development, economic diversification, and enterprise and job creation” (2017). The fact sheet shows how the economic impact of tourism is predicted only to burgeon over the coming decades. Tourism is also described as “a major source of employment, particularly for women and young people...” (ILO, 2017). The fact sheet highlights the importance of the tourism industry in achieving many of the UN’s SDGs, such as the empowerment and education of women and girls everywhere. Focusing on the tourism industry’s positive outcomes in realizing the UN’s SDGs will help organizations and corporations understand the collective impacts that the tourism industry has on each pillar of the triple bottom line. Lansing and De Vries (2007) argue for the establishment of a national rating system for tourism-focused businesses and organizations. The SDGs could be used with the creation of metrics to implement a national rating system, allow businesses and organizations to benchmark themselves against one another, and improve transparency.

Measuring the value of nature’s assets is a difficult feat that some argue is not possible. However, in *Ecotourism and Sustainable Development: New Perspectives and Studies*, Seba (2012) urges leaders to do just that. The debate about valuing nature is especially contentious between the realms of science and politics. From a scientific perspective, the importance of protecting ecosystems is stressed, while from a political standpoint the economic importance of natural resources and development is essential. Finding a way to marry both perspectives is key to creating an appropriate framework for sustainable tourism and development. Rahmatian and Voeks (2004) embrace Honey’s (1999) definition of ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people.” This definition includes a balance of preserving the environment, maintaining the livelihood of the people, and boosting

the economy around the area attracting ecotourists. Similar to the first presented definition of sustainable development, it considers the triple bottom line (TBL) of sustainability: profits, planet, and people (Christopher & Jelier, n.d.). Without the planet, there are no people and certainly no profit. Corporations and governments are beginning to recognize that preserving the environment *allows* for the livelihood of people and the growth of the economy. Reaching a cross-sector understanding of nature's value can help all stakeholders understand the true cost of tourism's impact on the natural environment and how this affects the society and the economy.

Tourism management can involve complicated decisions, such as whether to continue using certain areas for traditional tourism and development, or whether to create new areas for sustainable tourism and protection from development. Rahmatian and Voeks (2004) argue that determining the value of the land, as well as the economic value that the range of ecosystem goods and services can offer when land is undeveloped or developed, are critical factors in making what are basically political decisions. Rahmatian and Voeks go as far as to attempt an economic assessment of the world's ecosystem services to humanity by attributing an annual value to global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at the biome level (2004, p. 12-16). Beeler (2012) determines land value in terms of what quantity and percentage of Michigan land is used for farming, which bolsters the Michigan economy and indirectly supports the tourism industry. Beeler's research considers the economic value of farming, juxtaposed with the threat of unabated development encroaching on farmland Michigan, as one way to determine value for that land as well as what the economy and tourism industry could lose if farmland continues to be developed. However, it will be a challenge to determine how to value farmland, developed land, and undeveloped land in a way that all stakeholders can support. A cost-benefit calculation can be a useful valuation tool to those involved in planning and decision-making for land use. However, it can be difficult to ascertain an economic whole value of nature, in which all benefits that nature provides are measured, versus an economic value of the considered area once it is developed. Mulgan (2010) similarly describes the challenge and importance of measuring social value across sectors. Using social and environmental value metrics are key to assessing the total impact of the tourism industry.

ecotourism. This method considers Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Human Development Index (HDI), and Life Expectancy at birth, for example. These measures provide planners and decision-makers with quantitative data to build an understanding of (eco)tourism's potential value in an area. Moreover, Brophy (2012) discusses positive results that can be expected from various types of (eco)tourism that land development does not provide. These include reduction of resource consumption, environmental contaminants and CO₂ emissions, solid waste management, and the conservation of biodiversity, to name a few. According to Brophy, while tourism is a great producer of economic wealth in the world, planners must also consider tourism's environmental and social impacts.

Application of Theory

Creating a Sustainable Tourism Plan for Michigan

Establish a Foundation for the Plan

The UN SDGs can easily serve as a framework for a Michigan sustainable tourism plan. By embracing these goals, the MEDC can establish a foundation that will strategically guide the tourism industry toward sustainability. At the same time, the SDGs are not enough to guarantee that the tourism industry heads in a more sustainable direction. Additional policies must be identified in the planning process that will propel the industry toward sustainability. Various techniques, using the UN SDGs as a guideline, can advance specific aspects of sustainability in the tourism industry. Multiple tools used together create a holistic statewide approach to sustainable tourism management that consider environmental, social, and economic impacts and outcomes.

Create Metrics

Rahmatian and Voeks' (2004) valuation of ecosystem goods and services and cost-benefit analysis of land combined with Brophy's (2015) measurement of economic and health indicators and Mulgan's (2010) social value metrics can inform sustainable development strategies for the tourism industry in Michigan. Ellenburg and Seddon's (2010) long-term population studies are also an essential component to initial and ongoing assessments, serving as another measure of tourism's impacts on the natural environment. Stakeholders involved in tourism policy development and planning could use these four tactics to consider tourism's potential or real environmental and social impacts, which fit into "a TBL sustainability lens analysis," and "...view systemic problems with a holistic systems-oriented analytical approach" (Christopher & Jelier, n.d., p. 311-12). These approaches could be used to develop a complete assessment of the natural and built environment in the present condition, as well as in future potential conditions where tourism is projected or planned to grow. Most stakeholders already have a satisfactory understanding of the economic impacts and outcomes of tourism, so these approaches focus on lifting the understanding of environmental and social impacts and outcomes to an equal level to that of the existing understanding of economics. By providing metrics for assessing the land (Rahmatian and Voeks), species populations (Ellenburg and Seddon), economic and human health indicators (Brophy), and social value (Mulgan) sustainable tourism can be verified through a triple bottom line approach. Presently, this approach is missing in the 2012-2017 Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan.

Use an Array of Tools

Additionally, Elkington (1997) argues for the use of an array of tools to carefully and strategically prioritize the direction of an industry looking to reach a sustainable state. The metrics described above are tools that can be used in this process. Additionally, Elkington advocates for the use of a sustainability audit by financial markets, managers, employees, customers, environmentalists, and other stakeholders to drive market driving transparency. This idea can be applied by the various stakeholders in the tourism industry to satisfy both the market need for transparency to prove the sustainability of the industry, as well as help to satisfy the need to

assess and benchmark the impacts and outcomes of the industry through the triple bottom line and SDGs. However, more time must be allotted to the process of developing a Michigan sustainable tourism plan. Engaging all stakeholders in tourism management and policy decisions, as well as anticipating and adapting to market forces, creates additional layers within the policy and planning processes.

Capture Trends with Data. Recall the statistics in the introduction of this paper that describe the tourism industry's direct benefits to the economy, including employment, federal, state, and local government revenue, and the support of other industries and small businesses. Having the ability to track, manage, and analyze data provides the industry an opportunity to convey and comprehend large-scale impacts. Perhaps the most important direct economic impacts of tourism are the multitudes of employment opportunities it provides in Michigan. The MEDC's *Economic Impact of Travel in Michigan* (2014) describes how tourism impacts various sectors by providing jobs. For example, nearly 90 percent of food and beverage employment, more than 90 percent of recreation employment, and nearly 100 percent of lodging employment is directly supported by travel spending (MEDC, 2014). Also according to this report, the unemployment rate in Michigan was 7.3 percent in 2014, but would have nearly doubled to 13.3 percent without these "tourism jobs." Even more importantly, perhaps, is the fact that the data throughout the report shows tourism's overall impact growing each year. Tracking the economic impact of the tourism industry in Michigan indicates the economic sustainability of the industry going forward. Measuring economic impact, as well as social and environmental impacts, requires sound data management over time so that trends can be discovered. Planning for training or hiring data management and analysis experts among stakeholders should be part of a Michigan sustainable tourism plan as well.

Inhibit Unabated Development

Indirectly and directly related to tourism's growth, land development is also growing. From 1987-97, Michigan lost more than 440,000 acres to development, and the Michigan Land Resource Project estimates that land will be developed by 178 percent by the year 2040 (Beeler, 2012). As this trend persists Michigan's undeveloped land is threatened and much of it

is sold for development. The Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) program is one initiative that has encountered success preventing both the development of land and the loss of farmland in Michigan. Kent County and the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy have established a PDR program to preserve and protect choice farmland from development. With the loss of farmland, much more is at stake: the interdependent food, agriculture, and tourism industries are threatened as farmland and undeveloped land continue to face unabated development.

Employ Careful and Strategic Management of Assets and Resources

It is critical, therefore, to respond to the increasing pressures to develop land that Michigan's food, agriculture, and tourism industries depend upon. Careful prioritization and strategic management of the state's assets and natural resources will help stakeholders to secure the existence of these industries into the foreseeable future. Christopher & Jelier (n.d.) stress the importance of a TBL sustainability lens analysis, which allows problems to be addressed through a holistic framework, considers systemic issues, and how best to respond. Such an analysis is important to incorporate into a Michigan sustainable tourism plan, because it considers all issues that affect the tourism industry, both directly and indirectly. A holistic approach to analyzing issues that put pressure on Michigan's industries, assets, and natural resources leaves less room for guessing as action plans are developed and improves the probability of success for Michigan's sustainable tourism plan.

Consider Locality Development Strategies. Various locality development strategy options, as found in Blakely and Leigh's (2017) *Planning Local and Economic Development*, could further advance sustainable development by improving the built environment as the tourism industry grows. These include zoning regulations, business improvement districts, and community services, which consider preferences of local community members. Zoning regulations could be utilized to "place facilities where demand exists rather than where planners think they ought to be" (Blakely & Leigh, 2017, p. 264). Smart growth of the tourism industry can happen if planning efforts become more careful and strategic by using an array of tools such as these locality development options. Moreover, using these development alternatives would likely improve both the success and

sustainability of tourism in Michigan by advancing smart infrastructure development that considers the patterns of tourism and its impacts. Traditional economic development planning seeks to bring jobs (businesses) to existing populations. Sustainable economic development for the tourism industry should understand and track tourism impacts, carefully and strategically prioritize growth, and respond to demands and trends through a strategy such as zoning regulations.

Curb Costs by Tapping into Community Resources. Community services could also be developed further to enhance tourist localities in ways that focus on preserving and respecting the local culture while curbing costs. Offering services such as summer youth projects, maintaining museums and art galleries, and leasing government space for information centers can help communities to both reduce costs of such services and enhance the community (Blakely & Leigh, 2017). Costs can be additionally curbed in more creative ways: for example, a visitor center can offer a tourism publication that raises funds through advertising for local merchants within the publication (Blakely & Leigh, 2017). These creative combinations of services and ideas would contribute to a more holistic, sustainable approach to tourism. Blakely and Leigh (2017) argue that local government officials have a responsibility to offer services while reducing costs through “alternative mixes of public and private resources, combined with incentives” to achieve sustainable development objectives (p. 272). This approach aligns with the creation of a Michigan sustainable tourism plan that uses the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the triple bottom line as a framework.

Consider Sustainable Tourism Models

Local - Establish Public Transit for Northern Michigan Wineries

Business improvement districts (BIDs) also have great potential to help enhance a tourist locality and respond to the demands and trends of the tourism industry. For example, wineries along the Leelanau Peninsula Wine Trail and the Old Mission Peninsula could benefit from coming together to create a BID in either peninsula. The funds raised through the BID could come from grants or taxes from the businesses within the BID (Blakely & Leigh, 2017). Funds could then be used to improve public transportation in

the peninsulas, making traveling each peninsula's trail much more accessible and bringing more business to the wineries. Presently, there are private companies who offer tourist transport to various wineries along the trail. However, it can be expensive to use these private transportation businesses in addition to touring and supporting the wineries. For example, one company charges \$49 for one person and \$99 per couple for transportation to several wineries along the Leelanau Peninsula Wine Trail over the span of a few hours (Spring Wine Tours, n.d.). Once established, public transportation is more affordable to individuals than private transportation, and improves accessibility. Public transit also offers options for marketing both inside and outside transit vehicles. BIDs are a way that the community can be consulted, development goes where it is needed rather than where it is least costly, infrastructure can be improved, accessibility can be guaranteed, and marketing can be developed through a new network of public transportation, helping to advance the sustainability of tourism in Michigan. It is important to remember that BIDs are one strategy option and should be part of a much larger, much more comprehensive Michigan sustainable tourism plan.

International - Costa Rican National Park Concessions

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (n.d.) outline a case study about tourism best practices, including the use of concessions, in Costa Rican National Parks. USAID advocates for best practices that contribute to the financial sustainability of the parks, responsible management of the environment, and increase socioeconomic benefits to local communities (n.d.). Tourism concession programs were established in the 1990's and are an example of a tourism best practice being used in Costa Rica (USAID, n.d.). Concessions are essentially a competitively bid leases for protected land to local small businesses that provide tourism services, such as "entrance fee collection, tour guides, groundskeepers, security guards, food and beverage, and souvenir stands" (USAID, n.d., p.47). The concessionaires (local businesses running the concessions services) "pay a percentage of their gross profits to a fund that finances capital improvements for the parks and training and equipment for staff" (USAID, n.d., p. 47). This case study could be applied to further improve the financial sustainability of Michigan's parks. The case study

also suggested establishing a national tourism plan, limits of acceptable use, and protected area management plans, which would further align the tourism industry with the SDGs.

Consider Establishing Limits of Acceptable Use. Establishing limits of acceptable use could aid the holistic, sustainable management of land and resources so that tourism enhances, not denigrates, the natural environment. These limits would establish “the maximum level of visitor use an area can sustain without sacrificing visitor experience or ecological, aesthetic, or natural resource values,” which would be especially important over time as the ecotourism industry grows (USAID, n.d., p. 47). While it would be difficult to establish limits of acceptable use to all natural land used for tourism, it would be worthwhile to assess all land and work establish limits of acceptable use where the health or quality of the land is suffering as a result of tourism activities. This would help to protect the viability of the tourism industry into the future. Additionally, creating a protected area management plan based upon social and ecological field assessments could aid planners in the identification of sites to be avoided as well as those to be developed (USAID, n.d.). Details of this plan could include designating areas specifically to be used for research, visitor facilities, or lodging, as well as establishing limits of acceptable use for designated areas. As the food, agriculture, tourism, and other industries continue to grow in Michigan and demand land for development, there will be less and less land available. The best practices in this case study can assist tourism stakeholders in the smart management of land and resources through sustainable development to guarantee the viability of tourism as the industry grows.

Educate, Involve, and Inform Communities and Stakeholders.

In another case study from Nigeria, Alofami et al. (2010) discuss the importance of involving the local community and encouraging participation when planning for tourism. Similarly, Allen, et al. (2008) highlight the critical importance of stakeholder inclusion and engagement in the tourism planning and policy development processes. Communities and stakeholders should not be overlooked in the planning process and, instead, can have a part in setting the standards of the industry’s operations (Alofami et al., 2010). Communities and stakeholders can also help to determine the social and environmental value of places that are used for tourism. Through

community education, engagement, and participation tourism plans can consider the needs and desires of those living in areas where tourism is concentrated.

Utilize Sustainable Certification Bodies

Sustainable (green) lodging best management practices (BMP) are another important holistic consideration of ecotourism. Myers and Scarinci (2014) outline industry best practices among twelve third-party US green lodging certification bodies. Reducing or eliminating negative environmental externalities associated with lodging operations (including energy and water usage, waste generation, and the emission of greenhouse gases that result from energy use and contribute directly to air quality degradation and climate change) is essentially the definition of green lodging (Myers & Scarinci, 2014). While this is the goal of each certification body, understanding of sustainable lodging BMP is hampered across the industry because the certification bodies and their criteria are disparate (Myers & Scarinci, 2014). Thus, Myers and Scarinci (2014) suggest integrating information from the websites of the various green lodging certification bodies with lodging property information to be fed back directly to organizations, informing their BMP across disparate certification bodies. This should be done in Michigan through organization to minimize negative externalities associated with the massive use of lodging tourism requires. Another important consideration is the idea of “greenwashing,” which questions whether corporate sustainability initiatives are justified, or whether they are simply a clever marketing scheme. Greenwashing could be investigated and refuted by certification bodies not only in lodging businesses, but across organizations and stakeholders within the tourism industry.

Create an Operational Definition of Sustainability and a National Rating System.

De Vries and Lansing (2007) argue for a more balanced view on sustainable tourism. This can be achieved by creating both an industry-accepted, operational definition of sustainable tourism and a national rating system, which would function to improve the clarity of the concept of sustainable tourism, the practical applicability of it in the industry, and

enhance transparency in corporate sustainability initiatives. Establishing industry standard definitions and a national rating system as best practices prior to creating a Michigan sustainable tourism plan can ensure all parties understand the concept of sustainable tourism and how it will be measured before the plan is implemented.

Implementation

Endorse an Industry-Standard Definition of Sustainability, a National Tourism Rating System, and Certification Bodies

Planners should first work with government and stakeholders to endorse an agreed upon definition of sustainable tourism and a national sustainable tourism rating system for businesses and organizations that provide tourism activities. This necessitates the implementation of a sustainable tourism certification body(ies) for businesses both directly and indirectly involved in the tourism industry. Planners should also bring government and stakeholders together to discuss locality development, and whether and how tourism activities could fund social projects. While the community should be included throughout the tourism planning process, it is especially important at this step in the action plan because these strategies would directly affect those living in areas of tourism.

Assess the Industry

The next step in a Michigan tourism plan should include a current assessment of the tourism industry. This assessment should begin by mapping tourist movement, which can help planners understand tourists' itineraries (McCole & Popp, 2014). Planners should conduct a cost-benefit analysis to understand developed versus undeveloped value of all undeveloped land. This will help planners when deciding whether to develop land for food, agriculture, or tourism industries. Then, planners should research and adopt an economic, health, and environmental indicator tracking system to be used over time with input from appropriate stakeholders, which will establish a baseline for the tourism industry from which to track impacts from the TBL approach at regular intervals.

Identify Strategy Options

A sustainable tourism plan for Michigan should use cost-benefit analysis of land, track economic and health indicators, track species populations, and use social value metrics over time to assess the tourism industry both realistically and holistically. Many other strategies exist and some were identified in case studies and best practices above, which can help in the planning process. These strategies include: three locality development strategies (zoning regulations, business improvement districts, and community services), concessions program(s), tourism plan(s), limits of acceptable use, protected area management plans, community participation, green lodging best management practices, sustainable certification bodies, a national operational definition of sustainable tourism, and a national ecotourism rating system. Incorporating each of these strategies and best practices into a statewide plan is part of making tourism sustainable in Michigan. The implementation of the plan, as well as regular assessment of impact and whether SDGs and triple bottom line are being met, are equally important to creating the systemic changes needed to push the industry into a state of sustainability.

Collaborate Across Sectors

Planners and government officials should work closely with park administrators and officials, appropriate environmental agencies, and other stakeholders to consider protected area management plans, limits of acceptable use, and concessions programs. Also, any hotel and other lodging businesses in the area should congregate to discuss and learn about green lodging best management practices to save on often exorbitant costs associated with lodging operations, including energy usage, water usage, waste generation, and air quality degradation. These collaborative approaches would further support the triple bottom line approach to a sustainable plan. Whether and how these strategies are used may take considerable time to determine and enact, because they would have to be approved, funded, and then implemented correspondingly. Thus, it would be important to emphasize that while it is important each of these steps in the action plan be reached, the steps may not necessarily proceed in this order or be carried out into projects.

The implementation of these considerations into a Michigan sustainable tourism plan would involve a cohort of stakeholders, from planners to various levels of government to local businesses and community members. Once particular steps in the plan are either approved or not, the appropriate entity(ies) would carry out agreed upon element(s). Much of the work would fall into the responsibility of planners and relevant government officials, such as city council members, who may have to vote to approve projects. Public-private partnerships would be especially important to implement a statewide sustainable tourism plan, because it requires cooperation across all sectors to carry it out fully.

Create a Plan for Evaluation

Finally, through a TBL approach, planners should also regularly evaluate the economic, environmental, and social outcomes and impacts that this sustainable tourism plan. Governmental entities and think tanks often release annual public reports that provide updates on progress and consider outcomes and impacts, so a yearly assessment and report should suffice. Metrics will likely need to be tracked monthly, or on some other more frequent basis as data is available. Economically speaking, tourism should be bringing business, job, and income growth into localities, especially by employing the local community first. However, it should do so without detracting from environmental or social progress. Community economic development is important in ensuring that tourism brings social progress, not strictly economic progress for businesses. Government would be responsible for confirming that the Michigan sustainable tourism plan accomplishes some of the community economic development objectives outlined by Blakely and Leigh (2017), including: “generating employment for particular segments of a disadvantaged community, capturing local or neighborhood spending to build local wealth...and promoting democratic management and local ownership and control of enterprises” (p. 370).

Community economic development could happen in the form of LEED-ND, or LEED for Neighborhood Development. This system seeks to avoid gentrification, jobs-housing imbalance, and limit traffic and carbon emissions while promoting building locations and designs in neighborhoods that create jobs and services accessible by foot or public transit (Blakely & Leigh, 2017). The U.S. Green Building Council states that the system is evaluated by how well it promotes “socially equitable and engaging

communities by enabling residents from a wide range of economic levels, household sizes, and age groups to live in a community” (as cited in Blakely & Leigh, 2017, p. 383). LEED-ND is specifically a way to evaluate the social progress of a sustainable tourism plan. Economic and environmental impacts of should be further evaluated by monitoring whether and how much green lodging best management practices have cut consumption and costs of energy, water, and waste. For example, the more LEED-certified or green buildings, the greater energy conservation and savings, and the better it is for economic and environmental aspects of the ecotourism development plan (Christopher & Jelier, n.d.).

Conclusion

Economic growth from tourism happens as a result of the development and exploitation of the natural and built environments. Thus, it is important to consider how the tourism industry can become sustainable socially, environmentally, and economically. The research gathered here urges industry stakeholders to come together using a holistic approach to propel the tourism industry into sustainability through a triple bottom line lens. The MEDC, through the Michigan Travel Commission, first developed the Michigan Tourism Strategic Plan in 2007. The most recent plan, the Michigan Travel Strategic Plan 2011-2017, “is a blueprint for identifying and taking action on the critical issues to be addressed by the travel industry to grow travel and tourism and improve the quality of life of Michigan residents and visitors alike” (MEDC, January 10, 2019). This plan identifies important elements to promote, maintain, and develop the growth of the Michigan tourism industry through three focus areas: Collaboration and Marketing, Destination Development, and Public Policy and Funding. There are a total of 11 goals and 18 tactics to reach those goals.

However, there is great need for the Michigan Travel Strategic Plan to utilize a holistic approach and consider sustainability in each aspect and phase of the planning process. Neither growth nor development can continue unabated in any industry due to limited resources within localities, states, and nations. Sustainable tourism and development are answers to addressing the problem of exploitation in tourism through the creation of a plan built from a triple bottom line approach. Evaluation must include not only the progress of economic development, but also environmental and

social impacts of the tourism industry. A holistic approach to a tourism plan for Michigan may take more time and may even be more financially burdensome than the current Michigan Travel Strategic plan.

Yet, research strongly suggests that almost any up-front cost is well worth funding if it can bear the sustainable growth and development of tourism, improved quality of life for community members residing within tourism localities, and tremendous resource savings in the long-run. While some may argue against the existence of a “right” or “wrong” way in economic development so long as the economy is growing, this research suggest that there is a “right” way- the one that is best for all stakeholders. Policymakers and stakeholders have an obligation to future generations to consider the total costs, including environmental and social, of the tourism industry in any statewide tourism plan. A tourism plan for the state of Michigan must assess and confirm over time that tourism is not causing undue or irreversible damage to Michigan’s complex web of economic, environmental, and social systems. Investing time and funds into a holistic approach may be the only way to keep both the tourism industry, and the state of Michigan itself, viable.

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About the Author

Sarah Chatterley was born and raised in pure Michigan, and is proud to call this gorgeous state home. While attending Michigan State University for a BA in English literature, Sarah met her spouse Lucan. Together they moved to Grand Rapids in 2015, and they both fell in love with West Michigan. Since that time Sarah graduated from Grand Valley State University with an MPA, with a focus on urban & regional planning. She and Lucan are proud parents to their two young daughters, Indrah and Raeya.



Professionally, Sarah has worked hard to bring social equity and sustainability to the forefront for local governments, organizations (including GVSU), and her community. While at GVSU, she served as a board member for the International City/County Management Association, worked as a graduate assistant for the Sustainable Agriculture Project, helped with research for the Office of Sustainability Practices, and received the Logie Fellowship with the City of Grand Rapids.

Most recently, Sarah launched her campaign and is running for Kent County Commissioner in District 8 (Wyoming). Sarah has also served on the Planning Commission for the City of Wyoming since October 2019, as a way to use her skills and passions to contribute to the smart and sustainable growth of her city.

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