



Murdoch
UNIVERSITY

MURDOCH RESEARCH REPOSITORY

<http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au>

This is the author's final version of the work, as accepted for publication following peer review but without the publisher's layout or pagination.

Carson, D. and Macbeth, J. (2005) Regional tourism systems and the implications of innovative behaviour. In: Carson, D. and Macbeth, J., (eds.) Regional tourism cases. Innovation in regional tourism. Common Ground, Altona, Vic., pp. 137-142.

<http://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/3535>

It is posted here for your personal use. No further distribution is permitted.



PART 3

CONCLUSIONS

Chapter 15

Regional Tourism Systems and the Implications of Innovative Behaviour

Jim Macbeth and Dean Carson

Tourism is but one of many industries that might contribute to the economic, social, cultural and environmental health of a regional community. One of the aims of this book has been to present case studies of work in Australia and New Zealand that illustrate some core issues in the process of regional community development. Tourism is not inherently good or bad, useful or useless, appropriate or inappropriate for a region that is undergoing change but tourism is one potential activity that might contribute to the achievement of community objectives in economic, social and environmental dimensions. Implicit in the approach to case studies in this book is the belief that regional communities need to think about their readiness to undertake tourism development and that they should make decisions about what, if any, development is appropriate, feasible and of net benefit. Don't take tourism for granted; don't assume it will deliver the development objectives set for and by the community; don't assume it will just happen.

But, be sure that if the regional community approaches tourism, as with any development strategy, in an open, rational and critical manner then development decisions can be made that contribute to the well-being of the community and its overall health - implicit in this assertion is the need for thorough and thoughtful use of knowledge and the potential for innovation. Further, as a community begins an assessment and planning process, it is embarking on a journey that can itself contribute to community development but it is a process that takes time; there are no quick fixes.

Underlying the analysis in this book is a framework of innovation that includes 10 elements (see Chapter Three for details):

1. Economic competence.
2. A leading role of local government.
3. Institutional infrastructure.
4. Clustering of resources.
5. The existence of networks.
6. The presence of productive development blocks.
7. Entrepreneurial activity.
8. An effective critical mass of resources.

9. The production and distribution of knowledge.
10. The quality of SPCC, social, political and cultural capital.

These elements are not shown in a particular hierarchy nor are there necessarily one or two that are absolutely crucial to further development and innovation. As is demonstrated in the case studies, it is how these elements represent reality in the region and how they interact that will help determine sustainable tourism development approaches.

Issues in Doing Regional Case Studies

Readers of this book who live and/or work in regional contexts understand that tourism planning faces a number of difficulties that, while not unique to regions, are in many cases exacerbated by regional conditions. At this point, we simply want to highlight some of these issues as the general problems of regional and rural decline are well documented elsewhere.

- *Tourism data is a bit 'thin on the ground'*. Statistical information on many aspects of local and even regional Australia is not only hard to get but is often of dubious quality and accuracy. While Census data is comprehensive and invaluable in tourism planning, actual data on visitation, tourism and so-called tourism satellite business activities and tourism employment is almost non-existent in some areas.
- *Tourism is both a system itself but it is also part of wider systems of activity*. There are two aspects of this. First, tourism activity of any sort cannot be seen in isolation from other activities of the regional area. Tourism activities often take place in and amongst the day-to-day activities of residents and in many cases use the same infrastructure. The point to be made here is that planners cannot afford to see tourism in isolation from other aspects of the region, its non-tourism institutions, nor its residents.
- *Tourists or visitors?* There is often an attempt to separate the activities of visitors (usually day-trippers and/or those involved in business and other non-leisure activities) from tourists (who usually stay overnight and/or engage primarily in leisure pursuits) but this book assumes that the fact of visitation is more important for thinking about tourism development than making the distinction above. While there are certain planning and development directions (e.g. motel development) that require specific knowledge, it can be as important to pay attention to the drive-through traffic on the main highway, the sales representatives and government employees and the city day-trippers as those who are technically tourists and stay overnight.
- *Corporate memory*. This term is used here to refer generally to the knowledge stored about the region within both the minds and memory of people but also the archival records. In regions where there is a high turnover of people, whether in government jobs or the private sector, there can be a loss of corporate memory. But, where there is a stable and active community then the personal corporate memory of citizens will go a long way in tourism policy and planning for development.
- *Depressed?* Many regional areas in Australia, as in other developed countries, are economically depressed and, in fact, that is why many are turning to tourism as a development strategy. However, as important is that regional decline can also leave a community without the 'energy' to look for new alternatives or even to see the potential in alternatives; it is almost as if the psyche of the community is depressed. Doing regional tourism assessment, planning and development can help overcome this malaise when the community is involved. Another way to put this is that doing the sorts of work reported in these case studies can itself contribute to communities building up their resolve and their capacity for taking on development initiatives.

Lessons about the Tourism System

Chapter Two explored in some detail the nature of systems theory when applied to tourism and the systems relationship within which tourism is embedded. While tourism can itself be seen as

a system, it is a mistake to see the tourism system in isolation from other systems and, in particular, non-tourism infrastructure (government agencies; local parklands; local heritage society; etc). With that fundamental point in mind, there are some specific issues about tourism systems to keep in mind.

- *Tourism systems are open systems:* We say this not to be too pedantic but to state the obvious in order to reinforce the need to think about tourism this way – tourism is an open system. The implications are simple – tourism is not independent of other developments and events at the local, regional, state, national or global level. In tourism it is important to think local but it is just as important to think global. Your actions might be local but they do not occur in isolation. Obvious factors such as global warming, terrorism, taxes and local rainfall are all both local and global influences.
- *Systems are sets of complex relationships.* Not only is the tourism system itself complex but the relationship to other systems is complex. For example, the relationship between the tourism system and the transport system (roads, rail and air) is complex and absolutely central to tourism assessment, policy and planning at a regional level.
- *TGR to TDR.* Leiper's (1995) systems model of tourism outlined in Chapter Two shows a strong visual link between the traveller generating region, TGR and the tourist destination region, TDR. While this is an important concept, the implication that there is a direct and obvious relationship between the two regions should be used with caution in looking at regional tourism. The situation is more complex as the example of Woodburn (Chapter Fourteen) would suggest where Woodburn has almost no tourists, that is, very few people stay overnight. Woodburn is on a main highway and is not a destination in the classic sense of that term but is, in fact, part of the transit route in Leiper's model. Yet, at the same time, Woodburn embodies the policy and planning environments of a tourist destination region.
- *Control of infrastructure.* Anyone who lives and works in a regional area knows that the institutional infrastructure is not controlled within the region. In some cases, again such as Woodburn, even local government may be out of the hands of the region due to the size of the local authority. The power of outside agencies to foster or thwart tourism initiatives within a region is a factor to take into account.
- *Many actors.* In regional tourism there are often a few actors undertaking numerous roles, trying to fulfil the needs of different constituencies. A good example is the frequent local government situation where the Chamber of Commerce is also the main tourism lobby group, or Local Tourism Authority (LTA). This situation may be functional or it may be dysfunctional so the important thing is for those doing tourism assessment, policy and planning to be aware of these relationships.
- *The core tourism system.* The core tourism system of a region can be viewed in a number of ways. It is on the one hand a temporal system, defined by who is doing what and when and for how long, while on the other it can be defined as a spatial system and thus bounded by geographic or political boundaries. Depending on your analytical purpose, the core tourism system may be self-defined through the agency defining its boundaries for particular purposes. This latter point is reflected in Chapters Five and Nine where the region is self-defined by local government cooperation and in Chapter Two where the core tourism system(s) is defined by the researcher. In whatever way the core tourism system is defined and operationalised, for it to have substance and 'clout' it has to have a critical mass of tourism related activities, infrastructure or potential.

Innovation

The case studies in this book allow us to make a number of comments about innovation in the context of regional tourism assessment, planning and development.

- *Believe in the incremental.* In regional community development, even small changes can make a difference and accepting this premise reinforces the notion that incremental change is important to a region. This requires patience but also a strategic view of the way ahead, with tactical decisions informing the creation of these incremental changes. Chapter Eleven illustrates this process whereby one small grant to do one small research project has led to a number of small changes that in themselves are nothing, but add up to a potential shift in the availability of accommodation.
- *Disequilibrium isn't all bad!* In fact, disequilibrium can 'get things moving'. We make changes when our equilibrium is upset and, likewise, regions can make innovation work when the right amount of adversity spawns activity. But, this is a delicate balance as too much disequilibrium can also lead to inaction and often in such cases some form of outside assistance is needed to overcome this larger adversity. Many would argue, for example, that the structural disadvantages experienced by regional areas now are creating such disequilibrium that outside assistance, including new policy directions, is increasingly necessary.
- *Knowledge management.* It is common to say that 'knowledge is power' and, of course, it is true, provided that you know how to use the knowledge and you manage its creation, storage and use. Knowledge is not power if no one takes the time to figure out how to use it effectively in order to assist in the management of change. Of course, in talking about knowledge being power here we are not simply talking about the political power that goes with 'insider' knowledge, for example, that allows certain individuals and agencies to have unequal access to resources and control over agenda setting and decisions. We are also talking about the ability of a region to use knowledge to develop better solutions and to innovate. Knowledge management means, among other things, having effective systems of obtaining, recording, storing and retrieving information so that it can be put to use. It also requires that we understand the reliability and validity of the knowledge (or data), its weaknesses and the gaps when it is incomplete.
- *Institutional and physical infrastructure.* The control of infrastructure is a point argued incessantly as agencies, corporations, community groups and individuals all vie for some control over the infrastructure that limits or facilitates their ability to innovate. The control of infrastructure tends to weaken the lower down the political hierarchy we move, that is, local government has less control than state government and so on. The reality is thus that regional and local government ambitions for innovation in tourism planning and development are often tempered by a lack of resources and decision-making authority. Chapter Fourteen is a perfect example as the Road Traffic Authority (RTA) controls everything to do with the main street due to it being a major highway. The local authority can't so much as install a pedestrian crossing because it is against RTA policy.
- *The importance of local government.* Notwithstanding the discussion of a lack of control of infrastructure, local government is still one of the keys, if not the key, stakeholder in regional tourism assessment and planning. A number of the case studies illustrate the importance of local government in the way in which tourism has developed or is developing (or not) in the region. In some cases this means a number of local authorities have worked together for innovation while in other cases local government has taken up the challenge posed by work done by others.
- *SPCC – social, political and cultural capital.* The very nature of social capital, its cohesiveness, its sense of the 'in group', has to be tempered with a willingness to bring in new stakeholders and new knowledge. We have argued at length elsewhere (Macbeth, Carson and Northcote, in press) however, that tourism not only relies on strong SPCC to foster innovation but that tourism development appropriate to the region can itself foster and strengthen SPCC. We also argue that it will be synergies

between all levels of government, NGOs and business interests that will not only foster new SPCC but will also be able to foster innovation using existing social, political and cultural capital. Those living in regions are ultimately concerned to improve the vitality of their communities and tourism development is but one scenario that can contribute to that process. It is important to move beyond the rhetoric of ‘community’ as some concrete unified body in order to recognise the complexity and diversity of communities and their inherent potential for developing SPCC.

To Our Audience

Whether this book is being read by academic researchers, university teachers, students of tourism, politicians of any level, agency employees or local resident action groups, it is important that you recognise not only our belief in the capacity of the ‘regions’ to innovate in the face of development dilemmas but also that tourism is but one of many potential vehicles for regional development. This book is about community development in the broadest sense of the phrase and whether tourism grows or withers is not the issue. Tourism is not an end in itself but rather a potential contributor to regions that are better places to live and work, that are more viable as healthy communities.

Tourism is a unique ‘product’ in that it is not exported; the tourist comes to the producer. A side benefit of this can be that the tourists coming into a region bring with them not only their financial support for diverse local businesses but also their ‘connection’ with the rich cultural traditions and practices of their home, whether it be another Australian location or an overseas country. Tourists do interact with locals, they do share their perspectives on life while also wanting to know more about those in the region. But, visitors also consume cultural products in regions and in doing so may inject not only more economic viability into such cultural products but also may themselves become part of the creation and development of that product. A direct and pertinent example comes from this book. The authors themselves were ‘tourists’ whilst researching and, in many cases, sharing that research with residents, businesses and agencies in the region. As tourists, our impacts also arose from the conversations we had, the questions we posed, the feedback we offered and the money we spent. As important, though, is that we made connections with our disciplines and our experiences that we could share with people in the regions.

Sustainable Development and Tourism

It is our view that regional tourism development, as all development, should be seen in the context of an important contemporary paradigm, that of sustainable development. Again, tourism is and of itself not important although making tourism a sustainable industry should contribute to making the region sustainable and, likewise, the nation sustainable – all within a global context of a goal of sustainability.

There are various formulations of the concept of sustainable development but we use here a four part model that foregrounds in our thinking that sustainability is an holistic and complex imperative. There is no ‘bottom line’ because there are four ‘bottom lines’ in our attempt to move toward viable regions. The four parts to this model can be expressed briefly as follows:

1. Ecological sustainability requires that development be compatible with the self-maintenance and self-direction of ecological processes, biological diversity and biological resources.
2. Social sustainability requires that development increase people’s control over their lives; and maintain and strengthen community identity.
3. Cultural sustainability requires that development preserve and foster the cultural meanings and practices of the societies in which it takes place.
4. Economic sustainability requires that development be economically efficient and that the benefits and costs arising from it be shared equitably.

Informing our understanding of this framework is an ethical position that emphasises another pair of social imperatives – inter and intra-generational equity. It is clear from tourism and other scholarship that these four dimensions and the underlying ethical position are widely accepted at a general or *framework* level of analysis; the meanings here are vague and simplistic, as in the definition above. As any reader in a western developed country knows, the vocabulary and rhetoric are now common among governments, NGOs and business. In fact, the framework rhetoric is so common that we tend to ignore the fact that the core meanings are still being argued. That is, there is still substantial and important argument over how to apply the concept and the ethical position *in practice*. The implications of this for the use of this book are that, first, you must recognise the fundamental ethical questions embedded in this concept and the important debate that comes with the concept. Second, one of the imperatives in moving beyond these case studies as examples is that each practitioner, each activist, each politician and each business person is encouraged to think seriously about how to translate the framework definitions into a praxis that will make our regions viable and sustainable.

The Prosper project out of which this book arose is not simply about economic imperatives but about an holistic view of the viability of regions that encompasses, as well as the economic, the social, cultural and environmental demands of sustainable development.