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A TRAVEL ECOLOGY APPROACH**

Thomas D. Potts and Rich Harrill

**Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management
Clemson University
Clemson, SC**

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ENHANCING COMMUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABILITY: A TRAVEL ECOLOGY APPROACH

THOMAS D. POTTS and RICH HARRILL

Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management, Clemson University,
275-A Lehotsky Hall, Clemson, SC 29634-1005

Address correspondence to Dr. Thomas D. Potts. Tel: (864) 656-0372; Fax: (864) 656-4780.
tpotts@strom.clemson.edu

The purpose of this article is to outline a community tourism planning approach uniting the themes of social development and ecological sustainability. We argue that sustainable tourism and “sustainable community tourism development” have thus far failed to account for the social and political inequalities inherent within the concept of sustainable development. We contend that tourism planning should help create equitable, sustainable communities resilient enough to survive in a highly volatile international environment. A dual approach is advanced in this article: a political ecology critique of the emerging global economy combined with a communitarian perspective aimed at enhancing communities. Based on theoretical and practical considerations, we term this approach travel ecology and provide six broad principles to guide tourism planners working for local, regional, national, and international communities: discovery, mutuality, locality, historicity, potentiality, and enhancement.

Tourism planning Community tourism Political ecology Sustainable development

It has become nearly pro forma to mention at the beginning of research papers and articles that tourism has become the world’s largest industry. This statement is usually followed with ample statistical support, including figures for top destinations, top tourism earners, and top tourism spenders. Mentioned less frequently, however, is tourism’s increasing role as an international agent of social and ecological change, with both desirable and undesirable consequences. For example, Ioannides (1995) observed that, “Even though tourism’s earnings may be considerable in such settings [in less developed countries or LDCs], the excessive leakages arising from a small elite class substantially lessen the industry’s benefits in the local community at large” (p. 240). Neither sustainable tourism nor “sustainable community tourism development” adequately addresses planning for community tourism within an integrating global economy and the gross social and political inequities resulting from this integration.

Critics of this emerging economy argue that “the process of closer international integration has reinforced existing disparities in the economic performance of groups in developing countries” (Cook & Kirkpatrick, 1997, p. 61). As multinational or transnational corporations (MNCs or TNCs) extend their relentless search for cheaper raw materials and labor, a transnational “race to the bottom” occurs regarding real-wage and job opportunities (Brecher & Costello, 1994). These effects are unequally distributed by race, class, and gender. Ironically, many of the same international actors involved in sustainable tourism and ecotourism development may also undermine the sustainability of communities supporting local tourism. Such discrepancies pose a serious challenge to research on the impact of community tourism development, particularly in the South and marginal Northern regions.

We argue that sustainable development should be approached by tourism planners as a social and political issue grounded within a community, if not a progressive communitarian, framework. We concur with McCool and Martin (1994) that the “overall purpose of tourism development should be to enhance the quality of residents’ lives by addressing economic, social, cultural, and other benefits of tourism” (p. 29). These benefits depend upon the continued existence and maintenance of natural capital, the allocation and use of which is largely determined by social and political institutions. Thus, we believe that “the basic problems which pit society against nature emerge from within social development itself — not between society and nature” (Bookchin, 1989, p. 33). We therefore approach planning for sustainable community tourism through the enhancement of social networks and civic institutions. The purpose of this article is to outline a community tourism planning approach uniting the themes of social development and ecological sustainability.

We begin with a brief survey of the community tourism planning literature, illustrating the gradual movement away from constrictive physical development approaches to more inclusive models emphasizing public participation. This review demonstrates that the concept of sustainable development has infused the tourism discourses of the 1990s with a new ecological awareness, although the social and political differences within the concept are far from resolved. These differences, emerging along North-South and transatlantic cleavages at such recent international conferences as Rio “Plus Five” and the Kyoto Protocols, have led us to develop a planning approach we term *travel ecology*, reflecting an emphasis on political ecology as well as an attempt to move away from sustainable tourism models. The travel ecology approach is based upon six broadly conceived principles: discovery, mutuality, locality, historicity, potentiality, and enhancement. We view these principles as contributing to tourism planning theory, rather than constituting a definitive model or process (see Getz, 1986).

Community Tourism Planning: An Overview

Based on experiences with early resorts during the 1800s, but especially with the appearance of mass tourism after World War II, tourism planners found that degraded environment would inevitably lead to financial ruin. Beginning in the early 1970s a few authors proposed planning techniques for sustaining tourism on a site or destination. Contemporary to Ian McHarg’s (1969) *Design With Nature*, signaling the beginning of environmental design, Gunn’s (1972) *Vacationscape: Designing Tourism Regions* sympathetically integrated landscape design principles with the resources provided by the tourism region. This emphasis on physical planning and development was followed by Baud-Bovy and Lawson (1977) in *Tourism and Recreation Development* in which the authors called for integrating tourism planning into national goals and policies. However, although the “expert” technical

approach found in these works led to new professional roles for tourism planners, many early plans placed little emphasis on public participation. As tourism planners have come to learn, negative resident perceptions of tourism development, beginning with limited or nonexistent opportunities for participation, can lead to tourist dissatisfaction and ultimately decreased visitation.

Stimulated by tourism planners' increasing field experiences and the social upheavals of the late 1960s and 1970s, more participatory frameworks followed, allowing for increased opportunity for participation by the mid-1970s. In the late 1970s, in *Tourism Planning: Basics, Concepts, and Cases*, Gunn (1979) advocated the participation of a full range of actors in the tourism planning process. Rosenow and Pulsipher (1979), in *Tourism: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, noted that limits to growth are important to sustaining the tourism product, with final decisions falling "to the hands of managers of the resources with full public input" (p. 229). Seekings (1980) also took a strong position on the issue of community participation: "Tourism has become too important to be left to the experts" (p. 253). Tourism planners realized that the development of an authentic, well-managed tourism experience depended upon the contributions of "ordinary" citizens as well as the participation of public, private, and nonprofit organizations.

During the 1980s and 1990s, community-driven tourism planning became a major research theme (Blank, 1989; Harrison & Husbands, 1996; Haywood, 1988; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Keogh, 1990; Murphy 1983, 1988, 1993; Prentice, 1993; Simmons, 1994). In *Tourism: A Community Approach*, Murphy (1985) stressed resident involvement early in the tourism planning process before key, and often irreversible, decisions are made. The author also emphasized environmental and accessibility issues as critical elements of successful community tourism development. Murphy's approach has been buttressed by sustainable development during the 1990s. For example, Inskip's (1991) *Tourism Planning: An Integrated and Sustainable Development Approach* identified sustainable development as a primary tourism planning theme, although narrowly conceived around the integrative aspects of sustainability and carrying capacity. Gunn's 1994 edition of *Tourism Planning* included a chapter on sustainable development as a critical element of effective tourism planning.

However, many observers question whether sustainable tourism development can be achieved given the politics of resource distribution. Based upon inter-organizational theory, Getz and Jamal (1994) thought of "tourism planning and development as a political process within which the numerous stakeholders representing the community, industry and environmental interests can strive together for common objectives" (p. 155). Noting tensions between stakeholders inside and outside the community, Taylor (1995) remained skeptical whether an "insider approach" to community tourism differs from non-community-based approaches. Joppe (1996) "revisited" sustainable community tourism development, arguing that the concept of community development itself, its objectives and players, is in need of review.

Despite the gradual evolution of participatory frameworks and ecological awareness, the recent literature reflects conceptual problems related to how sustainable tourism is defined: of the eight definitions for sustainable tourism listed by Garrod and Fyall (1998, p. 201), only two specifically mention "communities" and none refer to "planning." Furthermore, most definitions emphasize the necessity of economic growth in maintaining the tourism industry, rather than the effect of economic conditions on tourism development. Considering these problems, tourism planners might investigate other models of sustainability. For example, Orr (1992, pp. 121-122) cited literature from 13 different models of sustainable development, including centralist and decentralist models; management of the

commons; social ecology; steady-state economics; agrarianism; bioregionalism; voluntary simplicity; de-industrialization; deep ecology; radical or “deeper” ecology; and anthropological approaches. Although some argue for greater integration between sustainable development and tourism planning, we argue that the field should explore different models and perhaps even alternatives to sustainability itself.

What Is Travel Ecology?

A potential catalyst for alternative models, *political ecology* is the inquiry into the causes and consequences of environmental change, with the goal of facilitating sustainable development through the reconstruction of social and political institutions (Atkinson, 1991; Bryant, 1991). In “Political Ecology of Tourism,” Stonich (1998) drew important parallels between politics and ecology at the local level, employing political ecology as a framework for tourism analysis. Stonich identified variables relevant to this inquiry, including ideological orientation; international interests; global economics; the role of the state; class and ethnic structures; local resource use and decision making; environmental history, and gender as a critical social category. In consideration of these variables, tourism planners should recognize that “sustainability” encompasses not only meeting the needs of the present without harming future generations, but also understanding how “international forces and the state affect the actions of local people on the environment, on the local ecology, and other human actors” (p. 27).

How might political ecology influence the direction of community tourism planning? Travel ecology is a community tourism planning approach based upon a political ecology critique of international development (Potts & Harrill, 1997, 1998). Travel ecology implies that tourism planning should help create sustainable communities resilient enough to survive in a highly volatile international environment, rather than “sustaining” tourism or specific aspects of tourism development. Philosophically, travel ecology stresses the political economy of Mill, Marx, and Dewey along with the environmental ethics of Leopold, Muir, and Carson.

We define tourism as “all travel with the exception of commuting” (Gunn, 1994, p. 4). This definition accounts for most travel affecting communities. In addition, emphasizing both territorial and psychological attributes, we define community as “a limited number of people in a somewhat restricted social space or network held together by shared understandings and a sense of obligation” (Bender, 1978, p. 7).

Furthermore, we follow Etzioni (1998) in recognizing that communities exist at many scales:

What is the scope of communities? It is best to think about communities as nested, each within a more encompassing one. Thus, neighborhoods are parts of more encompassing suburbs or cities or regional communities. These, in turn, often intersect or are part of larger ethnic, racial, or professional communities. And most communities are contextualized by the national society. Ultimately, some aspire to a world community that would encapsulate all people. (p. xv)

If tourism is a global industry as so often noted, then this notion of “embeddedness” would seem appropriate to community tourism planning world wide. For example, Human (1994) recognized in a case study of Cambridge, UK, that local sustainable tourism efforts depended upon support from international, national, regional, and county levels. Thus, in a sense, local sustainable community

tourism is either supported or non-supported by regional, national, and international communities. The travel ecology approach calls for the enhancement of community networks and greater social obligation at these integrated scales of development. In attempting to address these questions with broad application to each scale or “community,” we provide six planning principles: discovery, mutuality, locality, historicity, potentiality, and enhancement.

Discovery

The initial planning phase of discovery is based upon the participation of all relevant stakeholders. Potential stakeholders include government officials, public organizations, tourism industry associations, resident organizations, social agencies, and special interest groups (Jamal & Getz, 1995). A key to involvement is the development of self-awareness in a community, as these groups inventory their own social, economic, and ecological resources. Discovery is the beginning of dialogue among residents, during which they discover mutual fears and expectations. Once goals and objectives are established, this phase is distinguished by the collection of quantitative and qualitative data used in the local tourism plan. These activities are developed through the completion of workshops and public discussions. It is during this phase that the tourism planner must assist with the construction of goals and objectives, assist inventory development, facilitate public dialogue, and at times mitigate conflict between stakeholder groups.

The process of discovery is perhaps the most turbulent phase in the tourism planning process, as differences in development values are gradually uncovered. The sustainable tourism literature places little emphasis on potential conflicts arising over resource distribution and use. The travel ecology approach recognizes that conflict is a necessary part of the “good” community as a method of social learning:

A good community is one in which there is argument, even conflict, about the meaning of the shared values and goals, and certainly about how they will be actualized in everyday life. Community is not about silent consensus; it is a form of intelligent, reflective life, in which there is indeed consensus, but where the consensus can be challenged and changed — often gradually, sometimes radically — over time. (Bellah, 1998, p. 16)

Planners and policymakers should realize that conflict over tourism development reflects forces emanating from regional, national, and international communities. For tourism planners, an estimation of actors and stakeholders in a community, or “stakeholder analysis,” depends upon an in-depth understanding of how such policies originated and where the policies may lead a community socially, economically, and ecologically. It is critical that this analysis takes place before the onset of the discovery phase. In sum, discovery marks the beginning of some residents’ awareness of one another and the place they inhabit, an important function in a world that can sometimes appear fragmented by mass technology and rapidly changing economic conditions.

Mutuality

During discovery, visions for future tourism development are gradually uncovered. If tourism is chosen and dialogue continues, it is expected that at least some consensus can be reached, with residents finding a common ground from which to construct a foundation for community tourism development. Mutuality means residents engage in a common language emphasizing shared values,

ideas, and concerns, while at the same time respecting individual perspectives. We agree with Jamal and Getz (1995) that collaboration “will require the recognition of individual and/or mutual benefits to be derived from the [planning] process” (p. 196). However, we also assert that mutuality “must go beyond impersonal exchange, beyond coordination for limited goals [or benefits] ... mutuality must implicate persons or groups as *unities* and not only in respect to segmental goals or roles” (Selznick, 1996, p. 198).

Whereas circumstantial social exchanges between residents, tourists, and other actors play an important part in evaluating the perceived impacts of tourism development (Ap, 1990, 1992; Getz, 1994; Jurowski, Uysal, & Williams, 1997; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1990), equal emphasis should be placed on social networks and community attachment constructs (McCool & Martin, 1994; Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992; Um & Crompton, 1987). Arguably, mutualistic networks of social and political relationships regarding tourism development are more appropriate for the sustainability paradigm than those ad hoc exchanges underscoring the competitive ethos of international capitalism. Supposedly, sustainable development is about relationship building: between generations, between social groups and institutions, and between individuals sharing nature’s wealth on a local basis.

The development of these relationships in the form of social capital is fundamental to any definition of community enhancement. According to Putnam (1993), social capital refers to “networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (p. 35). Many tourism planners fail to enlist local social and civic groups when building support for community tourism development. The creation of social capital becomes important to tourism development not only for generating hospitality that helps make a community a desirable destination, but also for sharing scarce resources required for creating a successful product. The relationship between social and natural capital is symbiotic: strong community networks are required for effective planning and decision making while the community owes its existence to natural capital.

Locality

The monolithic forces of globalization can undermine the importance of specific locations that form the ecological basis of community. We are often asked to “think globally” at times when we need to think and act locally. The travel ecology approach emphasizes “backyard activism” or the “geography of everywhere”: the recognition that all landscapes, no matter how mundane, contribute to the community tourism product. Locality begins with the notion that environmental awareness toward environments such as rainforests or savannas begins with an awareness of common place environments. This is not to advocate an abandonment of “endangered” environments, only that awareness of locality is critical to the development of “sense of place” — often mentioned as an aesthetic component of sustainability. The travel ecology approach is based upon the belief that the community is both a socially constructed experience and an ecologically grounded place. Social networks and natural and built environments in which such networks take place are mutually reinforcing elements of community.

It is important that tourism planners consciously link the creation of “sacred places” out of the mundane to the ultimate goal of community sustainability. Natural and built community landmarks

help define locality for residents and visitors. In Kemmis' (1990) *Community and the Politics of Place*, the author describes the relationship between community and locality:

Clearly, the practices which shaped the behavior and the character of frontier families did not appear out of thin air; they grew out of the one thing those people had most fundamentally in common: the effort to survive in hard country. And when the effort to survive comes to rely upon shared and repeated practices like barn raising, survival itself is transformed -- it becomes inhabitation. *To inhabit* a place is to dwell in a practiced way, in a way which relies upon certain regular, trusted habits. (p. 79)

A community's self-discovery necessarily involves a discovery of place or enhanced awareness of locality. Mutuality is encouraged by place-bound relationships that evolve between residents over time. The principles of mutuality and locality should manifest themselves as tools and methods tailored specifically to a community's tourism planning process, as opposed to reliance on "cookie-cutter" planning techniques that devalue social networks and the unique characteristics of place. Despite the attractiveness of the "global village" metaphor, planners should recognize that many communities still function largely as worlds in themselves.

Historicity

Historical knowledge is indispensable to the tourism planning process, despite the postmodern contention that "history is dead." As sustainable tourism models often emphasize "best practices" management grounded in the present, a community's historical patterns of land and resource use are often neglected in sustainable development plans and policies. Tourism planners should become thoroughly familiar with oral and written traditions that may serve as keys to understanding local cultures, if he or she is to fully appreciate how residents interact with one another and their environment. As some aspects of modernization lead to bureaucratic standardization and uniformity effect referred to as the "McDonaldization" of society (Ritzer, 1993) — the discovery of locality and the preservation of historicity become increasingly important to the maintenance of residents' sense of identity and self-esteem.

Encouragingly, the historical aspects of community tourism have received more attention in recent years, due to the increasing interest in historic preservation and heritage tourism. However, few tourism planners seem to appreciate the role that historicity plays in contributing to a community's social fabric. For example, Selznick (1996) noted that:

The bonds of community are strongest when they are fashioned from strands of shared history and culture. They are weak and precarious when they must depend on very general interests or abstract ideas. Furthermore, the character of a community largely reflects the particularities of custom, language, and institutional life; a heritage of significant events or crisis; and historically determined attributes such as size, geography, and demography. (p. 97)

History and heritage in tourism planning should be considered as important for residents as well as tourists: both seek to add meaning to modern life through the discovery of the past. An inclusive, democratic historicity that respects and maintains the cultural heritage of all residents is important for the development of authentic tourism, for a better understanding of past and present land and resource use, and for its enriching educational value mutually determined by residents and tourists.

Potentiality

Whereas sustainable tourism tends to emphasize the integration of social, economic, and ecological concerns (Inskip, 1991), the travel ecology approach emphasizes notions of growth and maturation along with integration. Thus, travel ecology is an *integrative* and *developmental* approach, whereas sustainable tourism is often conceived as simply integrative. It is not enough to consider disparate community characteristics holistically; it is also important to consider these elements as they longitudinally change and transform the character and complexion of the community. This principle is based upon Bookchin's (1986) notion of potentiality, derived from Aristotle:

Wholeness is the relative completion of a phenomena's potentiality, the fulfillment of latent possibilities as such, all its' concrete manifestations aside, to become more than a realm of mere possibility and attain a "truth" of fulfilled reality of possibility. (p. 61)

A major tenet of Bookchin's (1996) ecophilosophy of social ecology is that the relationships between society and nature are co-evolutionary and developmental, rather than only the sum of integrated parts. For example, a sustainable community may be seen as one that is whole, that has reached its potential in maintaining a high quality of life for all residents. This developmental logic, also known as ecological rationality (Bartlett, 1986; Dryzek, 1987; Sagoff, 1988), is attracting attention as a procedural and substantive model for planning and policy.

The notion of potentiality can also be extended to individual development. A primary objective of sustainable community tourism should be to create communities in which human potential is maximized. Strong social networks, requiring intelligent and creative decision making, must be built from a healthy population. Many conceptualizations of sustainable development leave out such ideas as education, health care, fitness, and nutrition. Sustainable tourism virtually ignores these critical aspects of community health. Ideally, the community is a setting within which individuals grow and develop to their fullest potential. In turn, a community of individuals actualizing their physical and intellectual potential may harness their collective abilities and resources toward enhancing the community for sustainability.

Enhancement

Sustainable tourism stresses negative impacts, whether resource depletion or "adverse effects" on human environments. For example, quantitative carrying capacity is generally thought of as a tool measuring negative conditions resulting from numbers of tourists. We believe that carrying capacity can be enhanced through democratic dialogue and participation. How is carrying capacity related to a political idea like democracy? The management of the global commons is intrinsically a political problem. Hardin (1968) suggested that centralized authority would be necessary to prevent an ecological overshoot of the commons. Conversely, others claim that decentralization without authority will return the commons to a "state of nature." We believe that sustainable development is possible through an active, democratic society that allocates scarce natural resources through participatory deliberation. The impetus for sustainability should become stronger if liberties and freedoms are threatened in the face of prospective ecological crises. The right to enjoy travel and leisure in an open society and the politics of ecology have yet to be adequately addressed in sustainable tourism models.

Enhancement also means that tourism planners exercise their expertise and support within this larger democratic framework. Most tourism planners realize that tourists possess the same common needs as residents, including adequate housing, public safety, environmental quality, and cultural amenities. The key to meeting these needs is to empower community residents. If planners can consistently provide residents with long-term organizational and technical support, then individuals and the community as a whole will be enhanced. The travel ecology approach should be considered as a framework for cultivating and enhancing existing community resources as well as developing or marketing those resources required for bringing the tourist into the community. In sum, as to enhance means to make greater or intensify, we must no longer be content with “sustaining” tourism and instilling visitors with passive environmental awareness, instead becoming focused on developing an “ecological identity” for tourists, residents, and planners (Thomashow, 1995). This transformation will not occur in deteriorating communities.

Limitations to the Approach

Although we believe that the principles of discovery, mutuality, locality, historicity, potentiality and enhancement may offer new perspectives on sustainable community tourism and hopefully stimulate fresh debate, we also recognize that building new constructs for better understanding the world is an endeavor fraught with pitfalls. For example, many of the same problems plaguing political ecology as an analytical framework also hinder travel ecology as a planning approach. Drawing liberally on political economy, planning and development, and environmental philosophy and science, political ecology is so diverse that researchers may have trouble developing a theoretical framework pulling together the goals of community planning, as well as assessing the social and political implications of sustainable development.

We also recognize that a few principles provided in this article are at this point unachieved goals. The emphasis on discovery as related to democratic discourse remains a partially fulfilled idea. Citizen participation remains a major challenge for effective community tourism planning. In addition, the strength of community bonds seem to come and go with the tides of economic fortunes. During periods of hardship or recession, we usually experience an increase in community sentiment. In periods of prosperity, the voices of frugality, mutuality, and common cause are somewhat muted. Although a new framework with inherent limitations, we believe that the travel ecology approach contains a number of ideas that may lend new relevance to tourism development. In an emerging and enmeshing global economy, the idea of community lives on as a place of protection, restoration, as well as a place of psychological and physical nourishment.

Conclusion

We would like to reiterate that the problem of moving toward sustainable community tourism should be considered a problem of social development rather than in terms of humankind versus nature simplifications. Further, it is communities that should be sustained to support tourism, rather than “sustainable tourism.” More research is required on tourism development impacts that also address planning and sustainability. As a crucible for people, politics, and ecology, the “community approach” to tourism development should persist in importance. Theoretically, tourism researchers should explore other sustainable development models, instead of merely synthesizing the latest thinking on sustainable development into existing models and processes. New research is beginning to assess

the social implications of the concept; we argue strongly that the tourism industry and research community address these issues in a proactive manner.

In this article, we have attempted to outline an approach to planning for sustainable community tourism that might adequately take into account prevalent international conditions as well as formulate a strong communitarian orientation for effectively addressing local change. This orientation calls upon tourism planners to facilitate discovery, encourage mutuality, discover locality, preserve historicity, maximize potentiality, and to invest in enhancement strategies. Although it will be difficult to achieve community sustainability when confronted with international economics and politics, planners at all levels must recognize the tensions between the tourism industry as a primary player in the global economy and the desire for communities to cultivate tourism as an enriching experience and a source of meaningful work. Increasingly, local ecological issues will be used to contextualize these problems and opportunities. It is our hope that more tourism planners and researchers will take an active interest in this approach and perhaps begin to articulate a “post-sustainable” direction.

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