

**Strategic Planning for Local Tourism Destinations: An Analysis of Tourism
Plans**

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study of the planning practices of local tourism destinations. The tourism plans of 30 local tourism destinations in Queensland, Australia were analyzed to determine the extent to which sustainability principles, namely strategic planning and stakeholder participation, were integrated into the planning process. Utilizing a tourism planning process evaluation instrument developed by Simpson (2001), it was found that local tourism destinations are not integrating sustainability principles in their planning processes.

Introduction

There are numerous examples of tourism destinations around the world that have been adversely impacted upon by tourism development. The negative impacts have been attributed, among other things, to inadequate or non-existent planning frameworks for tourism development. Therefore it has been advocated that tourism planning is vital to offset some of the negative impacts that tourism can have on the destination community. While several different approaches have been advocated over the years, tourism planning based on the philosophies of sustainability has emerged as one of the most comprehensive and accepted approaches. However, the sustainable approach to tourism planning hinges on two key caveats: firstly, an

enhanced level of multiple stakeholder participation in the tourism planning process is required; and secondly, a need for a strategic orientation towards tourism planning (Simpson, 2001). While Ritchie and Crouch (2000) claim that more destinations are adopting strategic perspectives towards tourism development, Simpson (2001: 4) finds that “although the concepts of stakeholder participation and strategic orientation are widely endorsed as valuable contributors to sustainable development, there have been no previous attempts to gauge the extent to which such considerations play their part in real world tourism planning processes”.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the extent to which sustainable development principles, specifically strategic planning and stakeholder participation, are integrated into the planning practices of local tourism destinations. While, the integration of sustainable development principles into tourism planning for any type of destination, be it national, state, regional or local, is vital; local tourism destinations have been selected for this investigation due to the fact that it is at the local level where there is considerable opportunity to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism, particularly as local government has the most direct and immediate control over tourism development in the area (Hall, Jenkins and Kearsley, 1997). Utilizing the most recent, publicly available tourism planning documents of each of the 125 local tourism destinations in Queensland, Australia, a qualitative analysis was conducted using a tourism planning evaluation instrument developed by Simpson (2001). This paper will present the findings from this investigation and

discuss how the planning processes of local tourism destinations are meeting sustainability, strategic planning and stakeholder participation principles.

Literature Review

Tourism has undoubtedly had a profound impact on destinations all over the world. Coccossis (1996) claims that in some areas it has revitalized local economies whilst in others it has destroyed them; in some areas it has reinforced local identity whilst in others it has damaged customs, traditions and social relations; in some areas it has helped protect environmentally sensitive areas whilst in others it has wrought havoc with local ecosystems and resources. The economic optimism following World War II saw many nations and communities lured into the tourism business, encouraged by the highly publicised economic benefits the industry can generate. However, this once positive picture did not take long to be revised as the environmental and cultural impacts of tourism on host communities became increasingly apparent. As Murphy (1985) finds, tourism was seized upon with little forethought concerning a viable tourism product, the social and environmental consequences of development, or the spill over effects in surrounding areas. Unfortunately many destinations are still paying the social and environmental consequences of rapid tourism development and have been forced to implement remedial actions for failing to plan and control tourism development (Inskeep, 1991). Therefore, Hall (1998) quite rightly states that, tourism cannot be allowed to progress in an ad hoc manner without an overall guiding framework and predetermined strategies toward development objectives.

This is necessary as it is often too late to reverse or redirect unwanted development once it has become established in a destination and these destinations will always suffer from environmental and social problems that are both detrimental to tourists and residents (Gunn, 1994).

A number of different planning approaches have evolved to meet the changing development demands and characteristics of the tourism industry and the global increase in visitor numbers (Hall, 1998). The first of these, the often criticized economic approach to tourism planning (Getz, 1986), reflected the confidence in the tourism sector, and a level of ignorance regarding the impacts of tourism on the destination. Planning was seen as simply encouraging new hotels to open, ensuring there was transportation access to the area, and organizing a tourist promotion campaign. The second phase, the land use approach, was also grounded in a period when the negative impacts had not been realized or were minimal enough to be hidden or ignored. Tourism planning generally involved detailed surveys and appraisals of the physical resources of the country or region with little or no concern about possible spin-off effects of proposals and projects on adjacent areas or environments (Baud- Bovy, 1982; Baud-Bovy and Lawson, 1971; Choy, 1991; Getz, 1986; Murphy, 1985). The environmental approach to tourism planning emerged as the effects of tourism became more tangible and in part due to the global conservation movement of the 1960s (Krippendorf, 1982). During this period attention moved away from a narrow economic and physical planning focus and

began to address environmental concerns. Similar to the environmental approach, the community approach to tourism planning stemmed from the realization that tourism was having irreversible and damaging effects to the communities and cultures that were exposed to tourism, and that alternative planning and management was needed to develop more socially acceptable guidelines for tourism expansion (Blank, 1989; Murphy, 1985). The community approach, essentially a form of ‘bottom up’ planning, emphasized development in the community rather than development of the community (Hall, 1998).

The sustainable approach to tourism planning developed from broader international concerns over ecological issues. The concept of sustainability was formally recognized by the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), which defined sustainable practices as those, which “meet the goals of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987: 43). Sustainable development has been advocated for the tourism sector as a possible solution to the environmental and social degradation of the industry’s resources and due to the fact that tourism is a resource industry which is dependent on nature’s endowment and society’s heritage (Cooper, 1995; Murphy, 1994). The sustainable approach can also be viewed as an umbrella to some of the ad hoc methods advocated in the literature that were outlined above, and for this reason has emerged as one of the most comprehensive and accepted tourism planning approaches.

Simpson (2001) identifies two key precursors to a sustainable approach to tourism planning: multiple stakeholder participation in the planning process and a need for a more strategic and long-term orientation in tourism planning. The achievement of sustainable development objectives hinges on the adoption of a participatory model, involving the meaningful engagement of the community, along with industry stakeholders and relevant government agencies, which in turn will lead to agreement on planning directions and goals (Faulkner, 2003). Dutton and Hall (1989) claim that this has led to a need for decision-making bodies such as governments to actively seek and take into account host community attitudes to tourism. The engagement and involvement of multiple stakeholder groups is considered a pivotal issue in a sustainable approach as in typical planning processes stakeholders are consulted minimally near the end of the process, which leaves little chance for meaningful input into the process. A further prerequisite for a sustainable tourism planning approach is the use of strategic planning to supersede conventional planning approaches (Dutton and Hall, 1989). Strategy as it applies to sustainable tourism planning and development seeks to achieve three basic strategic objectives: conservation of tourism resource values; enhanced experiences of the visitors who interact with tourism resources; and the maximization of the economic, social and environmental returns to stakeholders in the host community (Hall, 2000). Under the sustainable, strategic approach, tourism planning is proactive, adopts a long-term planning horizon, is responsive to community needs, and perceives planning and

implementation as part of a single process that is ongoing (Hall, 2000; Ritchie, 1999).

The importance of sustainable development cannot be overemphasized and it is a concept that has been widely discussed and debated in the academic literature (see Bramwell and Lane, 1993; Butler, 1991, 1998; Clarke, 1997; Dutton and Hall, 1989; Godfrey, 1996; Hall and Lew, 1998; Jamal and Getz, 1997; Joppe, 1996). It can also be said that the tourism industry and the wider community are increasingly adopting and recognizing the importance of the concept (Ritchie and Crouch, 2000), or at least the associated jargon. It has been suggested that there is a growing gap between sustainability doctrine and its 'real world' application (Simpson, 2001; Trousdale, 1999). That is, despite the widespread acceptance of the sustainability concept, particularly in the academic sector, the question must be asked as to whether the destination planners, managers and industry operators who are making the day-to-day decisions about tourism within their respective destinations, are actually implementing the key principles of sustainable development theory. Therefore this study has sought to examine the extent to which sustainable development principles are integrated into the planning practices of local tourism destinations, and in turn attempt to determine whether tourism destinations are in fact adopting sustainable approaches to tourism planning and destination management.

Research Methods

To investigate the extent to which sustainable development principles, namely strategic planning and stakeholder participation, are integrated into the planning practices of local tourism destinations, the state of Queensland, Australia was selected for sampling for this study. An analysis was conducted of the most recent, publicly available, tourism planning documents of each of the 125 local tourism destinations in Queensland. For the purposes of this study a local tourism destination has been equated with shire council areas, or local government region. Tourism specific planning documents were sought, such as tourism strategies, development plans, management plans, etc. Marketing plans were not included due to the focus of the study, however a number of local tourism plans tended to include tourism marketing plans in their broader tourism destination strategies. Of the 125 local tourism destinations in Queensland only 24% or 30 of the 125 destinations had a tourism specific planning document. The vast majority, 65% or 81 of the 125 destinations did not have a tourism planning document for their area, and the remaining 14 (11%) destinations were in the process of developing a tourism plan or strategy at the time of sampling, as can be seen in Figure One. Destinations that did not have a tourism planning document or were in the process of developing a tourism plan at the time of sampling were excluded from further analysis. Therefore a total of 30 local tourism plans were analyzed for this study.

[Figure One about here]

Each of the 30 tourism plans were qualitatively analyzed using an evaluative tourism planning instrument developed by Ken Simpson (2001). Simpson (2001: 23) describes the evaluation instrument as “an aggregate measure of evaluator attitudes, culminating in an inventory of contributing components, which together delineate the specific planning process under review”. Although Simpson’s tourism planning evaluation instrument was initially developed to quantitatively assess regional tourism destinations’ planning approaches, studies addressing tourism planning issues have also adopted qualitative methods, particularly the content analysis of tourism plans (Bahaire and Elliott-White, 1999; Getz, 1992; Jennings, 2001). Simpson’s evaluation instrument, due to its quantitative origins, has been subject to considerable efforts to reduce bias in the construction. This quantitative ‘thoroughness’ can assist the qualitative researcher in reducing some of the inherent subjectivity in qualitative research, and was therefore considered a useful evaluation tool for analyzing the tourism planning documents and therefore adopted for this study. The evaluative instrument has been slightly modified from Simpson’s to incorporate the differences in methodology and scope of the research, however these changes have been minor.

The qualitative methodology adopted for this investigation has allowed the researcher some degree of flexibility in how the evaluation instrument has been utilized. Simpson used a panel of assessors to meet the quantitative requirements of his study, however the analysis in this study was conducted solely by the researcher.

Similar to what Mason (2002) describes as categorical indexing, the researcher used a three-point likert type scale (similar to the more quantitative likert scale), to determine whether the evaluative criteria were evident, somewhat evident or not evident in the tourism planning documents. While the evaluation of the planning documents was at the author's discretion, the categorical indexing approach was adopted to assist the researcher in distancing themselves from the immediacy of the elements, and gain a more measured view of the whole, thus increasing the objectivity of the study (Mason, 2002). Therefore, a plan that was assessed as having a number of evident categories would suggest that the planning process had adopted the principles of strategic planning, stakeholder participation and sustainable development. Alternatively if the plan had a number of not evident categories it would suggest that the planning process had not incorporated the sustainability principles under investigation. Due to the qualitative approach the somewhat evident category was included so as not to exclude elements which are in the plan but which would otherwise be discarded due to the objective statements in the evaluative instrument. So that the extent to which the criteria appear in the plans can be more easily appreciated, the evident and somewhat evident criteria have been combined into a single dimension in the results section. The tourism planning evaluation instrument used in this study is presented in Table One.

[Table I about here]

The evaluation instrument provided the means for assessing the extent to which local Queensland tourism destination plans were compliant with and/or integrated the principles of sustainable development, strategic planning and stakeholder participation into their tourism planning process. The results of this assessment are presented in the following section.

Results

As was mentioned previously, of the 125 local tourism destinations in Queensland sampled for this study only 30 of the 125 destinations had a tourism planning document. Therefore, 30 tourism plans were available for analysis and as was outlined in Table One above, each of the planning documents were analyzed using a number of evaluative criteria. These included: strategic indicators of destination planning; physical, environmental and economic situation analysis; stakeholder participation and influence in the planning process; and destination community vision and values.

The first evaluation section, 'strategic indicators of destination planning', included twelve assessment items (refer to Table One). These items assess the future direction for the destination, thereby establishing a clear base from which planned development can commence (Simpson, 2001). Figure Two illustrates whether the assessment items which were found to be evident/somewhat evident or not evident in the plans.

[Figure Two about here]

As can be seen in Figure Two, the majority of the planning documents did not address the assessment items relating to ‘strategic indicators of destination planning’. A long-term orientation (defined as a time scale of three years or longer) was evident/ somewhat evident in 22 of the plans. Where the plans were assessed as not evident for this item can generally be attributed to the fact that either a time scale was not included in the document or the plan had an immediate time frame of no more than 12 months. However a number of the other assessment items in this section were not evident in the plans, including ‘goals related to the nature and scale of future tourism development’ (22 plans), ‘goals related to the economic benefits of future tourism development’ (26 plans), ‘goals related to environmental protection’ (20 plans), ‘goals related to community values and lifestyle protection’ (22 plans), and the ‘goals which emphasize the local benefits of tourism development’ (25 plans).

The seventh assessment item in this section, ‘the planning document identifies a range of alternative strategies by which broadly based goals may be achieved’, was evident in just over half of the plans analyzed (16 plans). However, 24 of the 30 plans generally did not demonstrate that ‘each strategy option was evaluated prior to determining a range of specific objectives’, nor did they include ‘specific objectives to support previously established broad goals’ (20 plans). The tenth assessment item

which addresses 'supply capability as opposed to market demand' was evident/ somewhat evident in the majority of the tourism plans (18), although the assessment items 'specific objectives target the equitable distribution of tourism's economic benefits throughout the local area', and 'specific objectives for future tourism activity are quantifiable and readily measurable' were not evident in the majority of the tourism plans, with only 8 and 12 of the plans respectively addressing these assessment items.

The physical, environmental and economic situation analysis section included 15 assessment items (refer to Table One). Simpson (2001) incorporated these factors in the original instrument as it is considered necessary for a planning process to include an assessment of existing economic, environmental and socio-cultural parameters, alongside an evaluation of current visitor activity levels in the subject area. Figure Three illustrates whether the assessment items were found to be evident/ somewhat evident or not evident in the analyzed plans.

[Figure III about here]

The first assessment item of this section addresses the extent to which the 'planning document describes the area's principal geographic features', and the majority of plans (17) did include this item. However the vast majority of the other assessment items in this section were not evident in the planning documents. The majority of plans did not address the local climate (24 plans), local flora and fauna (26 plans),

physical environment (23 plans), population and demographics (19 plans) or land use of the area (24 plans). The seventh assessment item in this section, 'the major economic activities in the local area' was identified in half of the analyzed plans (15), and 17 of the plans also addressed the 'relative importance of tourism compared to other industries in the economic development of the local area'. However, only 7 of the plans respectively addressed the assessment items, 'the planning document quantifies the economic benefit of tourism to the area' and 'the planning document quantifies the employment creation ability of local tourism activity'.

The eleventh item, 'the planning document describes the principal tourism sites in the area', was evident/ somewhat evident in the majority of tourism plans (17), although only 9 of the plans addressed the current capacity of tourism plant and infrastructure, and only 6 documents addressed the 'adequacy of business skills possessed by local tourism industry operators'. The majority of the planning documents (18) did include a quantitative analysis of current visitor numbers, length of stay and spending. However, the final assessment item for this section, the 'planning document acknowledges the need to integrate local tourism strategies with other local, regional, state and national plans for tourism development', was included in only 10 of the planning documents.

The stakeholder participation and influence in the planning process section, seeks to investigate the nature and influence of stakeholder involvement, including the stage at which involvement occurred. The stakeholder participation section (refer to Table One) includes assessment items which seek to establish the temporal dimension of community participation, that is whether involvement took place throughout the process, or at specific stages only, and to measure the extent to which local stakeholder opinion has been taken into account in the final planning outcomes (Simpson, 2001). Figure Four illustrates the extent to which stakeholder participation in the planning process was evident/ somewhat evident or not evident in the plans.

[Figure IV about here]

The first assessment item investigates whether the planning document addresses the relationships between destination stakeholders. It was found that the majority of planning documents, 26 of the 30, did address the relationships between stakeholders. It was also found that in most of the plans (25), the relevant state/federal government agencies took part in the planning process, and in just over half of the plans (16) it was stated that the relevant local agency took part in the planning process. However only 10 of the documents showed that the relevant regional tourism organization took part in the planning process, and only 12 of the plans referred to the involvement of the relevant local tourism authority in the planning process. Tourism industry participation in the planning process was more

evident with 19 of the plans indicating this occurred, however, non-tourism organizations were less likely to participate in the planning process with only 10 of the 30 plans detailing their participation. The final assessment item, 'ordinary local residents took part in the planning process', was evident in 13 of the 30 tourism plans.

Although not presented in Figure Four above, this section included a number of assessment items relating to stakeholder influence on the final strategic direction selected (see Table One). It was found that none of the assessment items relating to influence on the final strategic direction selected were rated as evident in the planning documents. This was due to the fact that unless it was specifically stated in the plan it was difficult to gauge whether the stakeholders participation did in fact contribute to the final strategic direction selected, even though they may have been cited in the document as participating in the planning process. This issue is currently been addressed in further research by the author.

The destination community vision and values section (refer to Table One) examines the integration of community values into the planning process and the extent to which the vision for the future of the destination is in keeping with such values (Simpson, 2001). Figure Five presents the extent to which these assessment items were evident/ somewhat evident or not evident in the plans.

[Figure V about here]

It was found that the vast majority of plans analyzed did not address the assessment items relating to destination community vision and values. The first assessment item, 'the planning document identifies locally important community values', was only evident in five of the planning documents. Similarly, the remaining assessment items were only evident in several of the analyzed plans, 'locally important lifestyle features' (6 plans), 'current issues which are critical to residents' (7 plans), 'community attitudes to tourism' (7 plans), and 'the overall quality of life in the area' (3 plans). The final assessment item in the instrument, 'the planning document includes a vision for the future which aligns with local community values, attitudes and lifestyles' was evident in just 7 of the documents, with the remaining 23 documents not including a vision for the future of the destination.

Discussion

As the results have shown, the local tourism plans analyzed, generally did not meet with many of the planning process assessment criteria. The 'strategic indicators of destination planning' section sought to address the key aspects of the traditional strategic planning approach (see Cooper, 1995; Faulkner, 2003; Hall, 1998; Moutinho, 2000), and were included in Simpson's (2001) study to indicate future direction for the destination, thereby establishing a clear base from which planned development can commence. The assessment items represent key components of any planning activity, and as was discussed in the literature review are key criteria

for a sustainable approach to tourism planning. Aside from several assessment items, the Queensland tourism plans did not meet with the strategic indicators of destination planning defined in the literature. It was found that generally the plans adopted a long-term orientation, which is a key strategic planning objective, but tended not to include other key strategic aspects such as plans for the nature and scale of future development, economic goals and local benefits of tourism development. As was discussed in the literature review, a key prerequisite for a sustainable tourism planning approach is the use of strategic planning (Dutton and Hall, 1989), yet a strategic orientation was not evident in the local tourism plans analyzed. The failure to incorporate or consider such issues suggests that local tourism destinations are not taking into account the bigger picture and it is likely that given time these destinations will experience the repercussions for such oversight. As Ritchie (1999: 273) quite rightly states, “tourism planning and development decisions need to adopt longer-term perspectives, as the cumulative effects of today’s development decisions will have impacts well beyond the lifetimes of those making the decisions”. This is certainly not the case for the vast majority of local tourism destinations investigated for this study.

The ‘physical, environmental and economic situation analysis’ section is considered a key aspect of any planning exercise. Simpson (2001) incorporated these items, as it is necessary for a planning process to include an assessment of existing economic, environmental and socio-cultural parameters, alongside an evaluation of current

visitor activity levels in the subject area (Simpson, 2001). While a number of the items were not evident in the plan, other items were evident particularly the economic aspects such as the importance of tourism, the principal tourism sites in the area and quantitative analysis' of visitor numbers, length of stay, spending, etc. This information is generally baseline data and local knowledge that form the basis of any planning exercise and should be readily available within a destination. Such basic information should be on hand to guide decision making and most definitely be available to inform a tourism planning and management strategy. If these destinations cannot quantify such things as current land use patterns and infrastructure capacity, the question must be asked as to how they are going to make informed decisions about tourism viability, impacts and ultimate sustainability.

The third assessment section, 'stakeholder participation and influence in the planning process', included evaluation items to assess the nature and influence of stakeholder involvement (Simpson, 2001). As the literature suggests, effective strategic planning is a collective phenomenon, typically involving a diverse set of stakeholders in various ways and at various times (Bryson, 1995; Bryson and Roering, 1987). From the sample of plans analyzed in this study it was evident that a number of stakeholder groups participated in the planning process to some extent, however due to the nature of secondary resources it was difficult to determine the extent to which this participation influenced the planning process, and as mentioned previously this is being investigated further. The majority of plans did indicate that federal or state

government representatives were involved but interestingly less plans indicated that the local government, local tourism authority or local residents participated in the process; all key stakeholder groups for a destination. Therefore a number of the planning processes have also omitted this key prerequisite to a sustainable planning approach.

The ‘vision and values’ section was included to measure the extent to which the planning approach isolated the dominant values which exist in its community, and the extent to which these values were incorporated in the vision subsequently established (Simpson, 2001). Specifically it examines the integration of community values into the planning process and the extent to which the vision for the future of the destination is in keeping with such values. Few of the plans addressed the assessment items from this section. While a number of plans did include a vision statement for the destination, these were generally fairly superficial statements, such as;

‘a sustainable local and regional tourism industry that complements X’s unique natural assets and preferred lifestyle and is recognized for its encouragement for cooperation and coordination in offering memorable experiences for its visitors’.

And;

‘To make X a desirable destination offering quality experiences for tourists and economic benefits for the community’.

However, while a number of the vision statements mentioned community values, lifestyle features, and the like, these were not carried through into the actual plan for tourism in the destination, thereby suggesting that the stated visions are unlikely to be realized.

To assist in making a more objective assessment of the extent to which the tourism plans met with the evaluative criteria, a ranking system has been devised. The ranking has been derived from awarding evident items a score of 2; somewhat evident items a score of 1 and items that are not evident in the plans do not receive a score. Within the strategic indicators section there were 12 assessment items and therefore a plan could potentially receive a score of 24 if all 12 of the assessment items were evident (12 assessment items x a score of 2). The situation analysis items could potentially achieve a score of 30 (15 assessment items), stakeholder participation 26 (13 assessment items) and destination vision and values a score of 12 (6 assessment items). Therefore, a plan that had met with all the stated criteria could potentially receive a score of 92. This is presented in Table Two.

[Table II about here]

By ranking the plans in accordance with their compliance with the assessment criteria, a total assessment score for each plan can be derived as seen in the final columns of Table Two. For ease of interpretation this information is presented graphically in Figure Six where the plans have been grouped within 25 percent

quartiles. As can be seen, none of the plans were ranked as meeting all (or even most) of the criteria. Only 5 plans met with over half the assessment criteria, with the highest ranking plan deriving a score of 64 out of a possible 92, or it included 69.5% of the assessment criteria. A further 9 plans had 26-50% compliance with the criteria and the majority of plans had less than 25% compliance with the criteria, with several plans only receiving a score of 1 or 2 out of a possible 92.

[Figure VI about here]

Conclusion

The purpose of this study has been to examine the extent to which sustainable development principles, specifically strategic planning and stakeholder participation, are integrated into the planning practices of local tourism destinations. Despite claims that more destinations are adopting sustainable, strategic perspectives towards tourism development (Ritchie and Crouch, 2000), this investigation has found that for local tourism destinations in Queensland, this is not the case. Based on a qualitative review of 30 local tourism planning documents, utilizing an evaluative criteria developed by Simpson (2001), the plans were generally found to not be meeting the sustainable planning criteria of strategic orientation, situational analysis, stakeholder participation and community vision and values.

Based on the results of this study, it does appear that local tourism destinations are not actively or adequately planning and managing tourism development. Even

where tourism planning is occurring, this is limited to fairly superficial overviews of tourism in the area. The question was raised earlier in this paper as to whether the destination planners, managers and industry operators who are making the day-to-day decisions about tourism within their respective destinations, are actually implementing the key principles of sustainable development theory, and the insight gained from this study suggests that this is not happening. This is a concerning issue considering that it is at the local level where there is the greatest opportunity to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism, particularly due to local government having such considerable control over tourism development in the area (Hall et al, 1997), and community participation likely to have the most impact. The reason for this may be that local governments have little or no experience in planning for a sector such as tourism. In Australia, like many countries, primary industries have been the mainstay of many areas, but as these economic sectors face decline and tourism rises in importance, local governments are faced with a need to re-channel their planning and management skills to cope with a sector such as tourism (Ruhanen and Cooper, 2003).

This study has raised several areas of investigation for future research; firstly, whether the lack of a sustainable, strategic planning focus is unique to local tourism destinations, or is a more widespread problem. More importantly this study has raised the issue of how to move the wealth of sustainability knowledge in academic circles into the 'real world' where those who are actually making decisions have the

resources, knowledge and skills to implement sustainable approaches to planning and management. Practical models or best practice exemplars for implementing sustainability principles should also be considered to assist destination decision-makers in ensuring that sustainability principles, such as strategic planning and stakeholder participation can be achieved.

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Table I Tourism Planning Process Evaluation Instrument

<p>Strategic Indicators of Destination Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The time dimension of the planning process reflects a long term orientation • The planning document includes broadly based goals related to the nature and scale of future tourism development • The planning document identifies broadly based goals related to the economic benefits of future tourism development • The planning document includes broadly based goals related to environmental protection • The planning document includes broadly based goals related to community values and lifestyle protection • The planning document includes broadly based goals which emphasize the local benefits of tourism development • The planning document identifies a range of alternative strategies by which broadly based goals may be achieved • The planning document evaluates each strategy option prior to determining a range of specific objectives • Specific objectives support previously established broad goals • Specific objectives selected are based on supply capability as opposed to market demand • Specific objectives target the equitable distribution of tourism's economic benefits throughout the local area • Specific objectives for future tourism activity are quantified and readily measurable <p>Physical, Environmental and Economic Situation Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The planning document describes the area's principal geographic features • The planning document describes the main characteristics of the local climate • The planning document identifies flora and fauna which are unique to the area • The planning document assesses the resilience and/or fragility of the physical environment • The planning document identifies current population levels and demographics • The planning document identifies current land use and ownership patterns in the area • The planning document identifies the major economic activities in the local area • The planning document establishes the relative importance of tourism, compared with other industries, to the economic development of the local area • The planning document quantifies the economic benefit of tourism to the area • The planning document quantifies the employment creation ability of local tourism activity • The planning document describes the principal tourism sites in the area • The planning document evaluates the current capacity of tourism plant and infrastructure • The planning document evaluates the adequacy of business skills possessed by local tourism industry operators • The planning document includes quantitative analysis of current visitor numbers, length of stay and spending • The planning document acknowledges the need to integrate local tourism strategies with other local, regional, state and national plans for tourism development <p>Stakeholder Participation and Influence in the Planning Process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The planning document addresses the relationships between destination stakeholders • Relevant state/federal government agencies took part in the planning process • Relevant local agencies took part in the planning process • Governmental opinions (federal, state, or local) influenced the final strategic direction selected • The relevant regional tourism organization took part in the planning process • The relevant local tourism authority took part in the planning process • Regional tourism organization or local tourism authority opinion influenced the final strategic direction selected • The local tourism industry took part in the planning process • Local tourism industry opinion influenced the final strategic direction selected • Other local non-tourism organizations took part in the planning process • Other local non-tourism organization opinion influenced the final strategic direction selected • Ordinary local residents took part in the planning process • Ordinary local resident opinion influenced the final strategic direction selected <p>Destination Community Vision and Values</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The planning document identifies locally important community values • The planning document identifies locally important lifestyle features • The planning document identifies current issues which are critical to residents • The planning document assesses community attitudes to tourism • The planning document assesses the overall quality of life in the area • The planning document includes a vision for the future which aligns with local community values, attitudes and lifestyles

Table II Tourism Plans and Compliance with Assessment Criteria

	Strategic Indicators (Max score 24)		Situation Analysis (Max score 30)		Stakeholder Participation (Max score 26)		Destination Vision (Max score 12)		Total Assessment (Max Score 92)	
	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%
Plan 1	0	-	0	-	1	3.8	0	-	1	1.0
Plan 2	9	37.5	16	53.3	2	7.6	0	-	27	29.3
Plan 3	2	8.3	10	33.3	1	3.8	0	-	13	14.1
Plan 4	2	8.3	0	-	1	3.8	0	-	3	3.2
Plan 5	5	20.8	19	63.3	8	30.7	0	-	32	34.7
Plan 6	8	33.3	2	6.6	6	23.0	0	-	16	17.3
Plan 7	6	25.0	6	20.0	12	46.1	0	-	24	26.0
Plan 8	9	37.5	17	56.6	7	26.9	6	50.0	39	42.3
Plan 9	0	-	0	-	2	7.6	0	-	2	2.1
Plan 10	15	62.5	20	66.6	14	53.8	8	66.6	57	61.9
Plan 11	5	20.8	10	33.3	5	19.2	0	-	20	21.7
Plan 12	12	50.0	20	66.6	21	80.7	3	25.0	56	60.8
Plan 13	3	12.5	4	13.3	11	42.3	0	-	18	19.5
Plan 14	10	41.6	4	13.3	8	30.7	0	-	22	23.9
Plan 15	5	20.8	8	26.6	21	80.7	0	-	34	36.9
Plan 16	3	12.5	10	33.3	2	7.6	0	-	15	16.3
Plan 17	0	-	0	-	2	7.6	0	-	2	2.1
Plan 18	10	41.6	17	51.5	18	69.2	1	8.3	46	50.0
Plan 19	4	16.6	24	80.0	10	38.4	3	25.0	41	44.5
Plan 20	8	33.3	1	3.3	12	46.1	1	8.3	22	23.9
Plan 21	1	4.1	0	-	2	7.6	0	-	3	3.2
Plan 22	5	20.8	8	26.6	10	38.4	0	-	23	25.0
Plan 23	17	70.8	4	13.3	10	38.4	1	8.3	32	34.7
Plan 24	2	8.3	3	1.0	0	-	0	-	5	5.4
Plan 25	2	8.3	0	-	1	3.8	0	-	3	3.2
Plan 26	14	58.3	7	23.3	2	7.6	9	75.0	32	34.7
Plan 27	18	75.0	20	66.6	20	76.9	6	50.0	64	69.5
Plan 28	3	12.5	0	-	1	3.8	0	-	4	4.3
Plan 29	20	83.3	24	80.0	12	46.1	6	50.0	62	67.3
Plan 30	15	62.5	13	43.3	19	73.0	0	-	47	51.0

Figure I Local tourism destination planning documents $n=125$

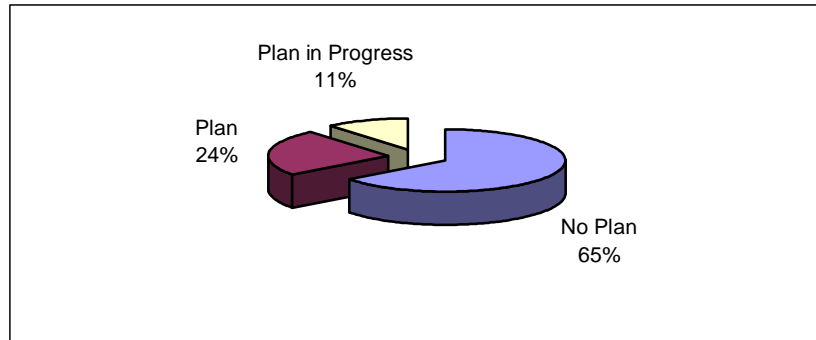


Figure II Strategic Indicators of Destination Planning *n=30*

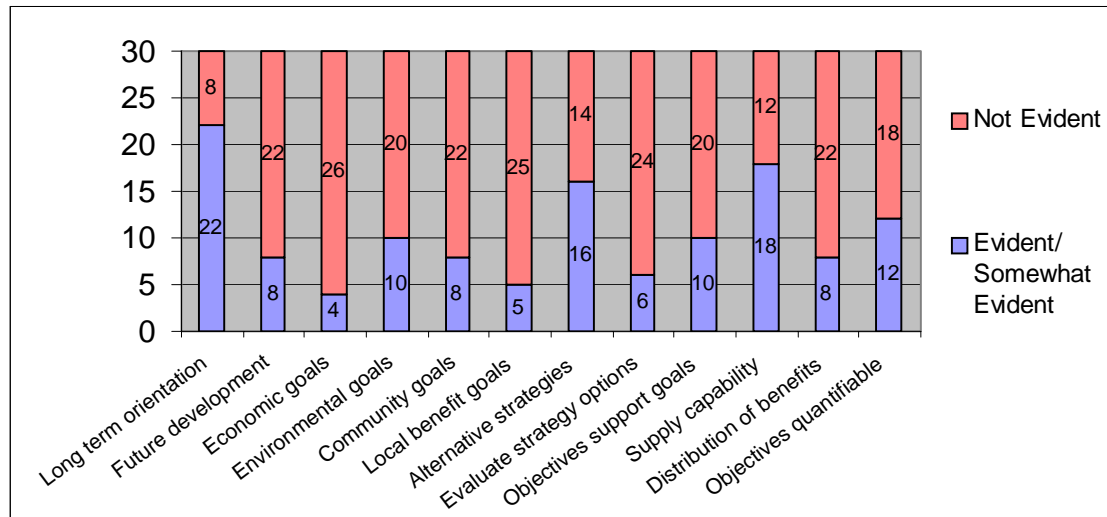


Figure III Physical, Environmental and Economic Situation Analysis $n=30$

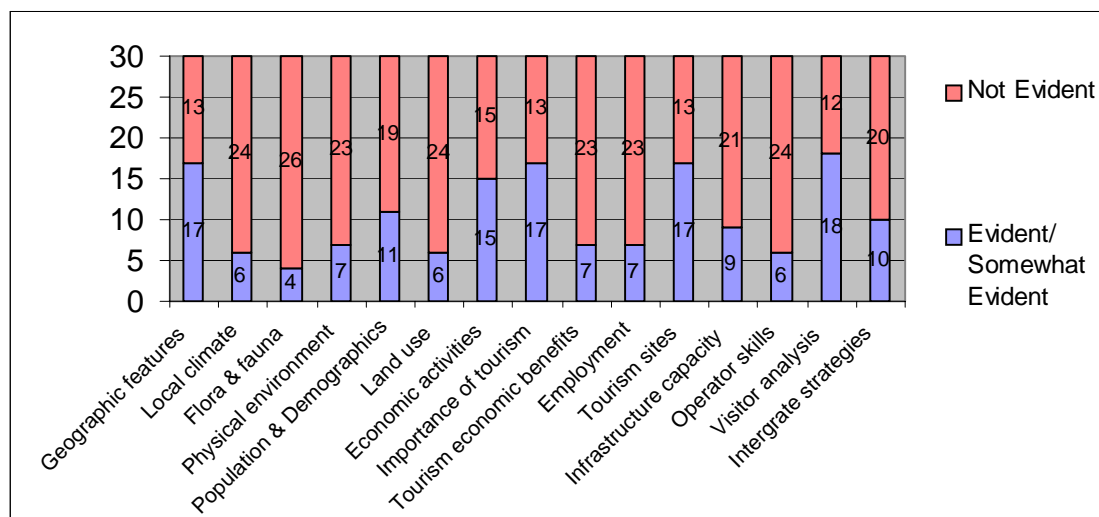


Figure IV Stakeholder Participation in the Planning Process *n=30*

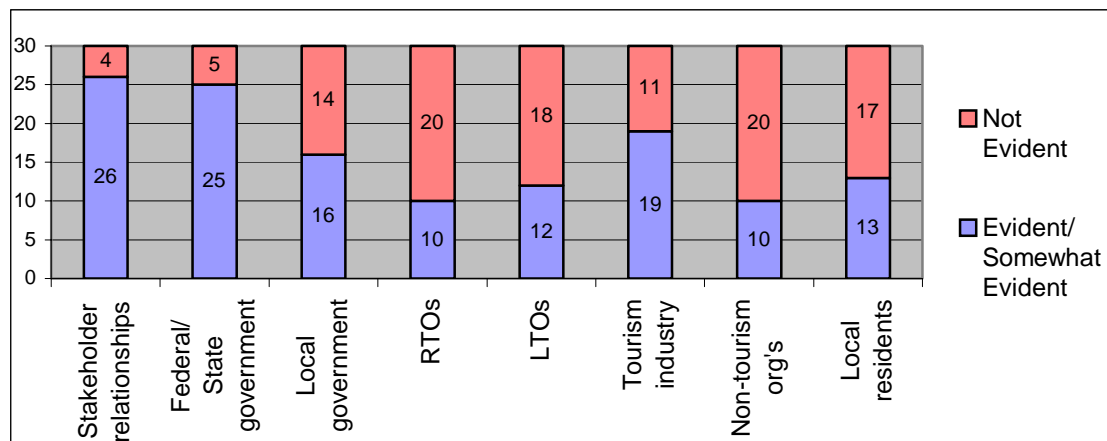


Figure V **Destination Community Vision and Values** *n=30*

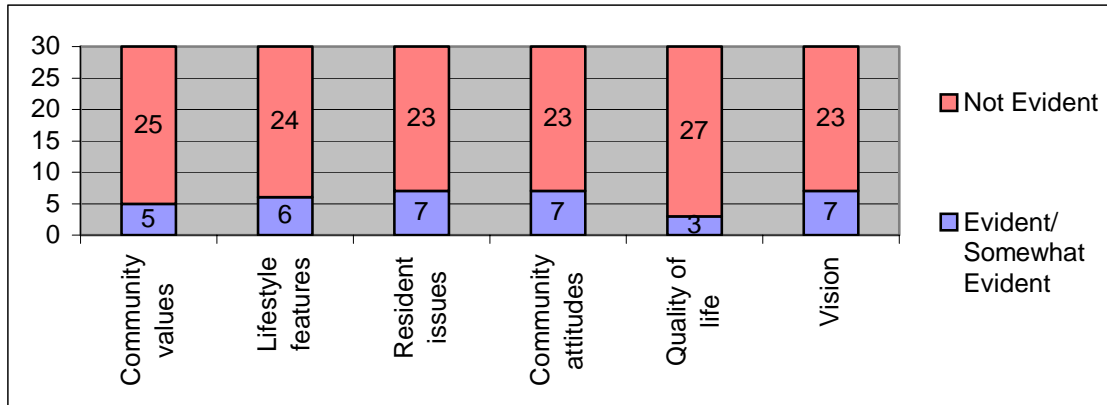


Figure VI Ranking of Tourism Plans *n=30*

