

St. Kitts at a Crossroad

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Abstract

■ Like many island economies, St. Kitts is at a crossroads. The acceleration of globalization and the decision of the European Union in 2005 to remove preferential treatment for its main industry, sugar cane, have left the island with limited options. Tourism has now become the key avenue for economic growth.

Destinations go through various cycles, both popular and unstable, which are affected by market and tourism trends as well environmental and social factors. For many tourism destinations, especially islands, there is intense competition and weak differentiating factors and the product has become commoditized. As tourism has been put forth as the key driver for economic growth and sustainability within the island, long term strategies need to be put in place to adapt to changing trends and markets. There is a need for strong governance and resource management using an integrated and holistic framework. The destination life cycle model provides a useful framework for a discussion of the factors which inhibit sustainable tourism development in islands and various measures that are needed to ensure a stable economy. St. Kitts will be used as a specific case to illustrate these factors in an island context.

Key Words:

Caribbean Tourism Policy, competitiveness, St. Kitts, sustainability

Resumen

■ Como muchas economías isleñas, St. Kitts está en una encrucijada. La aceleración de la globalización y la decisión de la Unión Europea en el 2005 de eliminar el tratamiento preferencial para su industria principal, la caña de azúcar, han dejado opciones limitadas a la isla. El turismo se ha convertido ahora en el factor clave para su desarrollo económico. Los destinos pasan por varios ciclos, tanto de popularidad como de inestabilidad, afectados por las tendencias del mercado y del turismo, así como por factores ambientales y sociales. Para muchos destinos turísticos, especialmente las islas, existe una competencia intensa, los factores diferenciales son débiles y el producto se ha mercantilizado. Habiéndose presentado el turismo como el factor clave del desarrollo económico y sostenible de la isla, es necesario implementar estrategias a largo plazo para adaptarse a unos mercados y a unas tendencias cambiantes. Es necesaria una fuerte dirección y gestión de los recursos en un marco integrado y holístico. El modelo del ciclo de vida del destino proporciona un marco útil para discutir sobre los factores que impiden el desarrollo sostenible del turismo en las islas y las diversas medidas que son necesarias para asegurar una economía estable. St. Kitts será utilizado como un caso específico para ilustrar estos factores en un contexto insular.

Palabras clave:

Política turística caribeña, competitividad, St. Kitts, sostenibilidad

Introduction

■ Probably the main political and social stimuli and motivations for developing a tourism industry derive from its assumed potential to generate employment and economic development (Puppim de Oliveira, 2003). Generally, tourism produces beneficial economic results such as jobs, foreign exchange, infrastructure additions (air-

ports, cruise ports), but is also responsible for mixed social and environmental impacts.

Hence, governments often focus on short term economic gains from tourism without considering the possible longer term, social and environmental consequences.

Tourism can transform local communities and raise living standards and quality of life through greater income, new employment and educational opportunities (Eber, 1992; Hall & Jenkins, 1995; Elliot, 1997). However, tourism is more than an industry and economic activity since it influences the socio-cultural and environmental aspects of most countries in the world. As early as the 1980s, Krippendorf (1987) wrote about tourism's role as a potential burden on cultures, economies and the environment. The issues that call for more sustainable forms

of tourism and tourism development arise from the same concerns over general sustainable development. These issues include increased population density, overdevelopment of the built environment, increasing dependency of a host community's economy on tourism, increased use and therefore pollution of resources, and degradation or even elimination of the natural environment, competition, increased congestion, inflation and strains on infrastructure (Wilkinson, 1989; Wheeler, 1993; Stabler & Goodall, 1996; Filho, 1996).

Destination Life Cycles

■ Butler's (1980) destination life cycle model has been used to describe the tourism development process in many tourism destinations. It represents an application of the familiar product life cycle in the marketing literature. Describing an inductive approach with *laissez-faire* conditions rather than strict regulatory environments, the life cycle model describes six stages of an evolutionary sequence that a tourist area passes through: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation and rejuvenation or decline. Each stage is characterized by changes in the nature and extent of facilities provided and in the development process:

- Exploration: the initial discovery of a tourist area through limited visitation by 'explorers'.
- Involvement: characterized by basic and limited provisions, initial advertising and marketing initiations for the tourist product. The product creates or fulfils a need in the marketplace.
- Development: described by more facilities, growth and tourists. Accessibility is enhanced and outside investment or competition is attracted to the destination. Companies raise entry barriers through cost and quality to make imitation difficult. This stage usually marks the commencement of growing antagonism by the local or host community.
- Consolidation: portrays the maximum number of tourists that have reached capacity levels. Tourist interest is no longer peak and ownership turnover is high although the resort is well established. Demand starts to level off and competition intensifies.
- Stagnation: depicts when tourist numbers hold steady

and efforts are made to maximize what profits are still accessible.

Following stagnation, Butler suggests two, key, likely scenarios: rejuvenation (efforts are made to revitalize levels of interest) and decline (demonstrates a waning market).

As facilities are provided, awareness grows, but visitors will eventually decline as carrying capacities are reached. Each stage is accompanied by changes in the nature and extent of facilities provided and the local/non local provision of these. Generally, no local involvement is apparent until the decline stage as employees are able to purchase facilities at significantly lower prices as the market declines (Butler, 1990).

There has been much discussion of the operationalization of the life cycle model in relation to broad evolutionary patterns (Agarwal, 1997). Controversy about the exact shape and pattern of the life cycle curve and detailed specification of its parameters has been an ongoing characteristic of the literature. However, it remains the most quoted framework for describing the general patterns of tourism development (Hovinen, 2002). An abbreviated three-stage version of the model -low, intermediate and high impact- has been successfully applied to a sample of 20 small Caribbean islands (McElroy & deAlbuquerque, 1998) as well as to a global sample of 47 island microstates (McElroy, 2002). In each case, the so-called Tourism Penetration Index (TPI) ranked destinations according to their level of tourism development and has become recognized as a comprehensive measure of the industry's overall socio-economic and environmental footprint.

Tourism Development in St. Kitts

■ The postwar economic history of many small Caribbean islands is the story of restructuring away from colonial staples (sugar, cotton) towards the most sustained engine in global commerce, tourism. Today interna-

tional tourism accounts for roughly 10% of global income, employment, investment and exports (WTTC, 2007). Not surprisingly, the Caribbean represents the most tourist-penetrated region in the world. According to

WTTC estimates for 2007, tourism accounts for 16.5% of Caribbean GDP, 14.8% of employment, and roughly 20 and 21% respectively of new capital formation and exports. The region, which contains only 1% of world population, consistently attracts a disproportionate share of tourism activity, i.e. roughly 3% of global tourist arrivals and expenditure (Andrew, 2005 in Dodds, 2006).

Located in the northern Leeward Islands of the Caribbean, St. Kitts has a land area of 168 km² with a population of approximately 39,000 inhabitants (CIA, 2007). Originally populated by native Carib Indians, the island was colonized by the British in 1623 and gained its independence, in Federation with Nevis, in 1983. For approximately 300 years, St. Kitts developed as a colonial sugar estate with tourism and manufacturing developing slowly from the 1980s. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for the island declined due to the reliance on sugar and by the 1980's, unemployment reached up to 25 percent despite persistent emigration (www.country-studies.com). The high level of unemployment was attributed to the inefficient performance of the sugar sector as well as to the poor transition of labour from agriculture to tourism-related services and lack of necessary training to make the change. In 2005 the government closed the state-run sugar company and embarked on a serious diversification strategy emphasizing tourism and, to a lesser extent, offshore banking, export manufacturing and domestic agriculture -an ongoing process begun in the late 1980s (CCA, 1991). "At its height in the 1970s, the sugar industry on St Kitts employed 2,500 people. Now that number is less than 20" (Bartlett, 2006). According to *The World Factbook* (CIA, 2007: 7), "tourism revenues are now the chief source of the islands' foreign exchange."

The dominance of the visitor industry in the St. Kitts economy is evident also from 2007 WTTC estimates. Tourism absorbs 33% of local GDP, employs 35% of the workforce, and accounts for 28% of new investment and 43% of exports. In the most recent study of tourism penetration (McElroy, 2006), St. Kitts falls in the intermediate impact range of a global sample of 36 small islands. It ranks below its more popular resort neighbors -Aruba, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, St. Maarten, Turks & Caicos, and UK and US Virgins- but well above many African and Pacific outposts: Cape Verde, Comoros, Samoa and Tuvalu. Along with many other destinations at the intermediate level of development, St. Kitts' tourism is characterized by growth volatility, intense pressure from competitor destinations, and planning challenges as resource conflicts emerge as land and labor migrate from traditional activities to the more lucrative tourism sector.

Recent tourism trends in Table 1 indirectly suggest some of the volatility and competitive pressures characteristic of the middle stage of development. For example, stay over arrivals peaked in 1998 and did not recover fully from the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the U.S. until 2004. Since then growth has been steady with the expansion of the resort complex at Frigate Bay, the construction of the China-financed Warner Park Cricket Stadium, and the advent of direct air flights from New York (American) and Atlanta (Delta). Cruise traffic has been more erratic, buffeted by weather vagaries, competition from nearby destinations, and the profitability dynamics of the international cruise lines. However, record levels are expected for cruise arrivals in 2007 and 2008 (*Caribbean News*, 2007).

Table 1: Selected Tourism Statistics, St. Kitts-Nevis 1995-2005

| Year | Tourists (000) | Day (000) | % Leisure | % Amer. | ALOS | Spend (mill) | Rooms |
|-------|-------------------|--------------|--------------|------------|------|-----------------|-------|
| 1995 | 79 | 124 | 74 | 69 | 9.4 | 65 | 1,563 |
| 1996 | 84 | 88 | 78 | 71 | 8.8 | 67 | 1,610 |
| 1997 | 88 | 106 | 82 | 75 | 8.3 | 72 | 1,759 |
| 1998 | 93 | 157 | 86 | 77 | 8.7 | 76 | 1,762 |
| 1999 | 84 | 140 | 78 | 68 | 8.7 | 70 | 1,754 |
| 2000 | 73 | 190 | -- | 45 | -- | 58 | 1,602 |
| 2001 | 71 | 263 | 63 | 59 | -- | 62 | 1,482 |
| 2002 | 69 | 170 | -- | 60 | 9.6 | 57 | 1,438 |
| 2003 | 91 | 153 | -- | -- | -- | 75 | 1,611 |
| 2004 | 118 | 259 | -- | -- | -- | 103 | 1,825 |
| 2005 | 123 | 217 | -- | -- | 9.5 | 107 | -- |
| 2006* | 135 | -- | -- | -- | -- | 111 | -- |

Sources: Compendium of Tourism Statistics, 2001, 2004, 2007 Editions (WTO); SKTA (2007).

Note: * Estimates from Prime Minister Denzil Douglas reported in "St. Kitts-Nevis expects EC \$300m from tourism in 2006" (September 25, 2007) at: www.caribbeanetnews.com.

On the other hand, there are two somewhat worrisome indicators: the slight drop in the share of leisure travelers (see Table 1), and the decline in visitors from the Americas, the traditional mainstay market of the region. For example, according to Table 2, data from 1995-2000 show noticeable losses in both North American (U.S. and Canadian) and European market shares. However, preliminary figures for 2005 suggest the North American market is recovering (St. Kitts Tourism Authority, 2007). Part of the long-term problem has been St. Kitts' inability to establish a brand identity beyond the traditional generic paradise image of sun-sand-sea beach tourism. Several other intermediate islands which are nearby competitors in the Eastern Caribbean have successfully established niche markets: diving in Bonaire, ecotourism in Dominica, sailing in Antigua and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, volcanic exploration in Montserrat, and gastronomy in St. Bartholomey.

To counter these trends, the island heavily promotes the historical Brimstone Hill Fortress, the only man-made UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Eastern Caribbean.

Other tourism offerings include the scenic railway which mimics the original sugar transport. Recent marketing efforts include soft adventure and eco type adventures including rainforest hikes, and heritage tours of the island's sugar plantations. In 2007, St. Kitts was a host venue for the ICC (International Cricket Council) Cricket World Cup with six Phase One matches that took place at Warner Park Stadium in March. However, such efforts have not yet achieved international visibility for these local attractions. As a result, average trip expenditure of stay over visitors remains among the lowest in the Caribbean. According to Duval (2004: 15), the St. Kitts' figure (US\$731) was less than 40% of the highest average (\$1879) in Turks & Caicos. In addition, even average spending per passenger in the recently buoyant cruise sector is the lowest in the region except for Puerto Rico. According to Table 3, in the first quarter of 2000, per capita passenger spending averaged over US\$170 in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands while the same average for cruise and yacht arrivals in St. Kitts (US\$56) was only one third of that amount.

Table 2: Total Stay over Arrivals and Arrivals by Country/Region 1995-2000

| | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | % change 95' -00' |
|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------|
| United States | 36,454 | 36,640 | 38,380 | 39,907 | 34,716 | 20,867 | -43% |
| Canada | 9,081 | 9,346 | 8,629 | 7,596 | 5,880 | 5,141 | -44% |
| U. Kingdom | 6,729 | 9,092 | 9,938 | 12,847 | 13,163 | 11,855 | +76% |
| Other Europe | 3,104 | 906 | 3,130 | 2,319 | 2,563 | 1,367 | -56% |
| Caribbean | 22,953 | 27,182 | 27,455 | 29,273 | 26,296 | 28,046 | +22% |
| Other | 547 | 1,010 | 765 | 1,248 | 1,384 | 1,255 | 129% |
| Total | 78,868 | 84,176 | 88,297 | 93,190 | 84,002 | 68,531 | -14% |

Source: St. Kitts & Nevis Ministry of Tourism (found in TDI, 2002).

Table 3: Passenger Spending During Port of Call Visits – Q1 2000

| Ports of Call | Average Spending per Passenger |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Antigua | \$86.81 |
| Aruba | \$82.02 |
| Bahamas | \$77.90 |
| Barbados | \$81.12 |
| Cayman Islands | \$79.42 |
| Jamaica | \$73.15 |
| Cozumel | \$131.40 |
| Puerto Rico | \$53.84 |
| St. Kitts and Nevis | \$56.22 |
| St. Thomas | \$173.24 |
| Average Spend | \$103.83 |

Source: PricewaterhouseCoopers (found in TDI, 2002).

Like many other tourism destinations, concern over intense regional and international competition has led St. Kitts to adopt a copy cat strategy that is based on the development of new product offerings and the exploitation of local resources. For example, a port was built to accommodate large cruise ships without regard to economic benefits that were not proportional to the level of visitations that resulted. In addition, there is a current focus on new golf course and coastal hotel development which provide short-term return that may not be sustainable because of impacts on the environment which supports them. Such projects may indeed prolong St. Kitts competitiveness and defer its decline, but cannot be regarded as an alternative to long term planning. As Butler (1999) and Wall (1997) have argued, the effort to enhance 'competitiveness' as tourist destinations mirrors the inability or unwillingness of policy-makers and politicians to distinguish between sustainable tourism and the need to promote tourism within an overall balanced growth framework.

In 2002, the county's tourism plan attributed the recent volatility in visitation to a number of factors (Table 4). These include the high price of airlift, lack of brand identity and marketing efforts, deteriorating price/value relationships, a more educated and cost-conscious consumer

and rapidly increasing competition from other destinations both inside and outside the region (TDI, 2002).

Table 4: Weaknesses relating to St. Kitts Competitive Advantage

1. Airlift – availability and price
2. High prices – price/value relationship
3. Lack of enforcement of laws on the books
4. Tourism politicized/lack of intra-island cooperation
5. Weak planning and coordination
6. Litter/solid waste disposal
7. Failure to preserve, protect, develop natural and cultural assets
8. Lack of market research / don't know our customers
9. Lack of Tourism and Environmental Awareness
10. Tourism careers not promoted in schools
11. Lack of technical training/low service levels
12. Funding for marketing and promotion

Source: TDI, 2002, p 13

Development Issues and Constraints

■ In the consolidation stage of the life cycle model (Butler, 1980); destinations have a number of choices: 1) they can increase marketing and incentives hoping that airlift and other businesses will invest in tourism development; 2) they can do nothing or 3) they can implement a number of competitive strategies to try to retain or extend market share.

In the case of St. Kitts, such strategies were identified to try and counter weaknesses and are outlined in Table 5 (TDI, 2002). Although some of these priorities were addressed, many have not been integrated into a wider tourism plan for the region, nor have any substantial improvements been made. This is first and foremost illustrated by the country's lack of a long term sustainable tourism development strategy. In addition, the last tourism plan for the island was in 2002 and to date (2007) there is no current plan for tourism development.

Measures to implement the 12 priorities have also not been apparent. There has been some training and a taxi driver history and tourism training program has been developed. However, there is no current training for other areas of the tourism industry and there are no industry standards for environmental management, quality, health and safety, certification, social integration or customer service. There has been some success by the St. Kitts Tourism Board to improve airlift, but this is still a challenge (personal interview with Director of St. Kitts Tourism Board)

Table 5: Priorities for Development.
Based on the 'shared vision for the future of the industry'

1. Training and human resource development
2. Improving airlift
3. Protection of the environment
4. Promotion of entrepreneurship and empowerment
5. Environmental cleanup and maintenance (litter, solid waste)
6. Broader industry involvement in the marketing process
7. Community and rural tourism development
8. Promoting greater harmony/cooperation between St. Kitts & Nevis
9. The development of industry standards
10. Product development (nightlife, heritage)
11. Public/private partnership
12. Maintaining a relatively crime-free environment

Source: TDI, 2002

The level of environmental awareness on the part of government is evident in the failure to hold in check land encroachment by international developers, the re-

luctance to establish a marine or national park and absence of controls over the dumping of wastes. For example, currently there is no standard or policy for cleanup of the many rusted old vehicles which have been discarded in the rainforest and near abandoned sugar mills. Although entrepreneurship is encouraged by the Tourist Board, there are no economic incentives or training programs to assist new business development or community and rural development.

With the notable exception of Brimstone Hill Fortress, tourist attractions seem old and decrepit. Visitors have long been attracted to the island by its plantations and factories which are a legacy of British investment in the sugar industry. Unless privately owned and operated, unfortunately, these are falling into disrepair. Moreover, lodging on plantations is often expensive, their facilities need improvement and the quality of service is low. The recent completion of a Marriott resort is an attempt to improve the standard and provides the Tourist Board with a product that is heavily promoted in the marketing literature that has been produced by the island.

Tourism in many small islands has been developed without any systematic attempt to catalogue resources and to clearly designate areas for tourist visitation (Filho, 1996). St. Kitts cannot rely merely on the 3 Ss of sun, sea and sand and efforts to develop a competitive advantage out of its marine assets. The island continues to market itself the same way as other Caribbean nations despite an inability to compete in price or beach quality. There is a lack of diversification in marketing, and the history and authenticity of the tourism product are not being developed. "...There are dangers that market failure will be used to justify and rationalize any form of state intervention at the national or local levels and that tourism policy will reflect the lobbying and influence of vested interests" (Hartley & Hooper: 1992: 21). Clearly, economic development strategies must also take into account broader concerns such as whether the local population will adequately benefit and if there will be adequate protection and conservation of the environment. Indeed, St. Kitts' 2002 tourism plan noted that "the principal challenge in stimulating tourism growth is to define strate-

gies that preserve those assets for future generations, generate broad-based economic impacts across all segments of society, and make the most productive use of limited resources" (TDI, 2002). Four years later, the country needs to focus on changing realities in the world and to adapt and change to these realities. As Gilmore and Pine (2001) suggest, there is a new customer who expects new experiences. New revenue growth within a destination lies not only in driving sales of existing goods and services but in creating experiences (p 11). For example, Rawlins Plantation and Ottley's Plantation on the island, considered 'gracious, elegant and unique' in much tourism promotional literature are able to charge high rates for a unique experience – often 2-3 times that of a regular hotel room rate. "...the St. Kitts Scenic Railway, which is better known as the "Sugar Train" uses the same tracks originally built in 1912 to carry sugar cane from more than 300 sugar cane estates to the mill in Basseterre in the days when the sugar trade was the island's primary industry. Many of these old sugar estates have been converted into idyllic plantation inns, offering some of the most elegant accommodations on St. Kitts" (Schultz, 2004). For a destination, the very natural and cultural resources which originally attract the tourist need to be protected and offered to the consumer as an experience rather than just a product. "Experiences are a distinct economic offering, as distinct from services as services are from goods" (Pine & Gilmore, 2004: 9).

Pine and Gilmore may be correct that the most effective strategy may lie in the creation of demand for unique products that can differentiate St. Kitts from other destinations. "Each concept [or destination] may have something valuable to say about how the environment has changed but none really address the core problem: people have become relatively immune to messages being broadcast at them. The way to reach your customer is to create an experience within them" (2004: 5). Pine and Gilmore offer the way to achieve this is by treating the product [or destination] as a 'distinct economic offering' rather than solely a marketing effort. In order to achieve this, St. Kitts must not copycat market other islands but find the unique value amenities that can be found nowhere else.

Implications for Future Tourism Development

■ Issues that the destination faces include lack of long term planning and the focus on short term numbers rather than yield. Measures of the effectiveness and success of tourism policy to date are invariably set according to the numbers of tourists that arrive at destinations rather than the net benefits that tourism brings to a destination. There also needs to be a change in government's role in tourism from solely promotion to long term economic benefit as well as social and environmental protection and awareness (Hall, 1994; Hall & Jenkins, 1995; Elliot, 1997). For example, the government of Sin-

gapore has recently announced a plan to fund a holistic approach for the training of new tourism workers and enhancing service levels. This is part of a wider tourism strategy that aims to achieve an increase in tourism yield as well as numbers (Travel Daily News, Nov 2007). St. Kitts is focusing a great deal on foreign investment which, although beneficial for foreign exchange earnings in the short term, may have longer term implications as this focus is also a function of choice and markets. As declared by Hartley & Hooper (1992), society sometimes accepts the outcome of private markets which, left to

themselves, may fail to function properly as externalities surface cumulatively over time such as environmental alterations and social intrusions.

Because of the nature of tourism development in St. Kitts, a number of challenges are apparent if tourism is to move towards long term sustainability. In order to achieve a holistic and integrated approach for tourism development, a number of key factors must be incorporated. These include:

- Participation and accountability of multiple stakeholders (ranging from the general public to politicians).
- Having a long term/holistic view for sustainable tourism and its implementation.
- Political will/good governance.
- Educating politicians and the general public about sustainable tourism.
- Integrating tourism policy into a wider framework.
- Adaptive management (used to ensure a long term and integrated approach).

Stakeholder Participation

■ Effective policy formulation mechanisms need to be open and to encourage active participation from all sectors of the policy community to engage their support and see-through the implementation of policy objectives. It has to be dynamic, manage the continual tension between tourism development and sustainable development and involve a focus on communication, cooperation and the exchange of information and research, all with the objective of avoiding or solving conflict and gaining support for sustainable development (Elliot, 1997). Wilkinson (1989) also claims that government involvement in integrating tourism into national and regional planning is much needed as multinational hotels, tours and airline companies often have their own agendas and are not sensitive to local issues. Colla-

boration of stakeholders alone is not sufficient to address power issues which arise. All stakeholders must be accountable for elements of policy implementation and adaptive management techniques should be considered as tourism is dynamic and the marketplace is continually shifting. The advantage of adopting an adaptive management approach is that it requires the collaboration and identification of shared values (Reed, 1999) which may help to overcome barriers of inadequate stakeholder involvement, values held by different stakeholders and coordination between government sectors. Additionally, collaboration and participation are needed to address the overall concept of public good as well as environmental and social concerns in the context of development rather than solely market interests.

Long-Term View

■ Cooperation between Authorities and Ministries must be undertaken to ensure cooperation and advancement although often cooperation has been a hindrance to policy implementation (Dodds, 2007a & b, Bianchi, 2004), and a 20-30 year time frame for resource management and longevity of the industry considered. Governments must realize that it needs to mobilize the private sector

and public community to undertake sustainability initiatives and that buy-in to the long term vision is imperative. With the increased competition for the tourism pie, especially in an island, a long term strategy which takes into account a holistic framework for development is essential.

Integration & Education

■ Sustainable tourism must be closely linked to sustainable development and that sustainable tourism must be set within this larger context as it cannot be separated from the wider debate on sustainable development (Stabler & Goodall, 1996). Tourism is a fragmented industry and dependant on other sectors and therefore it is the strength of these linkages which determines the success of tourism and policy. Although there is an argument that policy must be implemented at the local level, there needs to be support and higher level direction from regional/national areas for it to be successful. Territorial, resource, education and transportation plans and policies are dependant on regional frameworks and municip-

pal and sustainability efforts are more wide reaching than just the immediate destination. Many local policy enforcements need to be supported from the regional and national levels – a national policy should provide the outline and legislation for integration. For example, in St. Kitts, there is currently no environmental plan for protection of marine areas. As dive tourism is one of the island's key attractions, there is a need to ensure recognition as well as integration of environmental planning with tourism planning. The need for integrated sustainable tourism is ever present as economic and environmental forces clash to create social conflicts and industry inefficiencies (Ritchie, 1999, Manning, 1999). While the

need for an integrated framework seems relatively straightforward in theory, it must be noted that social and environmental agendas are played off against each

other and the links between the two are not always made clear.

Political Will & Good Governance

■ Researchers have concluded on various occasions that the level of external or government control affects development stages and the authenticity of the destination. Many destinations have fallen for the vision of economic gain with little or no consideration to long term negative effects. Tooman (1997) links this notion to Butler's model by suggesting that tourism has become the dominant industry in many areas accompanied by a general decline of agriculture so that economic diversity of sources of primary income and control is lacking.

In order for sustainable tourism development to be achieved, there needs to be a political will to achieve it. A focus on tourism yield instead of solely numbers and long term planning is imperative. Enlightening government requires finding a balance between social, environmental and economic issues; however, there is no perfect solution and therefore compromise and balance

must be felt. Policy implementation in tourism has various complexities such as the conflicting and different definitions, uncertain tourism growth predictions and the short-term view of operations within the tourism industry. Who implements policy depends on market forces and what type of government is in power. For good governance to take place, the political will of a dynamic, charismatic leader is needed to influence various stakeholders to participate and support sustainability initiatives and to raise awareness of the benefits of environmental and social integration into policy issues and the benefit of a holistic view. As Trousdale (1999) states in his examination of Boracay Island in the Philippines, "Better governance should clearly delineate local, regional and national roles and incorporate community input to mitigate against the adverse effects of tourism development while maximizing benefits" (p. 840).

Conclusion

■ Experience from the life cycle literature suggests that sustainable destinations must constantly innovate to maintain and grow their position in a changing global marketplace. For islands like St. Kitts in the consolidation stage of development -facing instability and intensifying competition at the crossroads between past reliance on the traditional sun lust formula and mounting new directions- this means a strategic shift toward diversifying its product and identity. In recent years St. Kitts has begun to turn the corner with the development and marketing of its plantation legacy, Brimstone Hill Fortress, and natural onshore amenities. In addition, it is just beginning to reap the international recognition and financial benefits from its first-rate cricket complex, thus adding sports tourism to its industry portfolio. The work that remains is to integrate those and other new initiatives (along with its traditional marine attractions) into a comprehensive planning framework that both mobilizes all key tourism stakeholders and provide the basis for establishing a fresh destination identity that its citizens

will embrace and that will help distinguish St. Kitts from its nearby Caribbean competitors.

To achieve such a sustainable tourism that is socially acceptable, economically viable, and environmentally compatible requires serious effort and long-term commitment. It calls for consistent sets of policies, practices and programmes that move towards more sustainable tourism implementation. For this agenda to be promoted, each stakeholder group must play a critical part. Participation, although fundamentally a positive approach, is not enough without accountability and the actual formulation as well as implementation of tourism master plans. In short, it requires two indispensable ingredients mentioned in a recent review of the sustainable tourism literature (McElroy & Dodds, 2007: 3), namely "proactive and strategic planning over the long-term [and] public environmental education and community participation in tourism decision-making."

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Ecotourism as a Means of Community Development: The case of the indigenous populations of the Greater Caribbean

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Abstract

■ There are many types of tourism on offer in the world market, with tourism types being as diverse as the kind of experience that the visitor demands. Destinations characteristically engage in tourism models that cater to the needs and wants of the tourist market they attract. However, research and experience have shown that different tourism models affect the local people of a destination in different ways. For example, some models favor greater participation of historically marginalized communities than others. This paper focuses on two tourism models: ecotourism and community-based tourism. It is conceptual in nature and builds on previous academic research and secondary data in addressing the very topical theme of the use of ecotourism as a means of community development. It presents successful case studies of community-based ecotourism, making particular reference to the indigenous populations of the Greater Caribbean to make these connections. There is reason to believe that the lessons derived from these case studies will be of interest and use to other indigenous communities in the Greater Caribbean and similar geographical regions in search of an alternative path of development that conserves natural areas while capitalizing on the opportunity for social welfare development and economic diversification for present as well as future generations.

Key Words:

Ecotourism, community development, poverty alleviation, indigenous peoples, Greater Caribbean

Resumen

■ El mercado mundial ofrece muchas clases de turismo con tipologías tan diversas como las experiencias demandadas por los turistas. Los destinos se especializan en modelos turísticos que satisfacen las necesidades y deseos del mercado turístico al cual atraen. Sin embargo, la investigación y la experiencia han demostrado que los diferentes modelos turísticos afectan de diferentes maneras a la población local de los destinos. Por ejemplo, algunos modelos favorecen la participación de comunidades históricamente marginadas más que otros. Este artículo se centra en dos modelos turísticos: el ecoturismo y el turismo basado en la comunidad. De naturaleza conceptual, se construye sobre investigaciones académicas previas e información secundaria aplicando el tópico del uso del ecoturismo como medio de desarrollo comunitario. Presenta exitosos estudios de casos de ecoturismo basados en la comunidad, haciendo una referencia especial a las poblaciones indígenas del Gran Caribe para establecer dichas conexiones. Hay razones para creer que las lecciones derivadas de estos estudios del caso serán de interés y de uso para otras comunidades indígenas en el Gran Caribe y similares regiones geográficas en búsqueda de una vía alternativa de desarrollo que conserve las áreas naturales al mismo tiempo que capitalice la oportunidad para el desarrollo del bienestar social y la diversificación económica, tanto para las presentes generaciones como para las futuras.

Palabras clave:

Ecoturismo, desarrollo comunitario, reducción de la pobreza, población indígena, el Gran Caribe

Introduction

■ There are many types of tourism on offer in the world market, with tourism types being as diverse as the kind

of experience that the visitor demands. Destinations characteristically engage in tourism models that cater to

the needs and wants of the tourist market they attract. However, research and experience have shown that different tourism models affect the local people of a destination in different ways. For example, some models favour greater participation of historically marginalised communities than others (Ashley, 2006).

Alternative forms of tourism that seek to enhance the benefits of tourism while reducing its disbenefits are seen as the best way forward in this regard. Unlike conventional mass tourism, alternative forms of tourism such as ecotourism are characteristically supplied through small and medium operators and are most likely to bring direct revenue and benefits to rural communities, indigenous communities and the poor. Moreover, the upsurge in interest in the equity dimension of sustainable development within recent years has led to con-

siderable attention being paid to the community as a critical element in achieving sustainable development goals (Hall, 2007:112).

Thus, in the face of burgeoning poverty levels, two tourism models - the ecotourism and community-based tourism models - have gained widespread attention in the Greater Caribbean primarily because of their potential to bring meaningful benefits to historically marginalised communities. The prospect of merging these two models into what is known as community-based ecotourism presents a valuable opportunity for several communities in search of an alternative path of development that conserves natural areas while capitalising on the opportunity for social welfare development and economic diversification for present as well as future generations.

The International and Greater Caribbean tourism landscape

■ Tourism has assumed prominence as the largest business sector in the world economy; the world's leading source of export earnings; and among the world's largest employers. According to the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), the number of international tourist arrivals has experienced an average growth rate of 6.5% per annum between 1950 and 2006. In 2006, there were 846 million international tourist arrivals with international tourism receipts totalling US\$ 733 billion, or US\$ 2 billion a day; tourism accounted for approximately 35% of the world's export of services and over 70% in Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Moreover, international tourist arrivals are forecasted to reach 1.6 billion by the year 2020 (WTO, 2007).

Many governments have realised and have even lauded,

the potential of tourism as an economic development tool to the extent that tourism continues to be adopted as a priority development option for many struggling economies searching for viable alternatives (Cattarinich, 2001:1). The Greater Caribbean circumstance is a case in point. The development of tourism –especially international tourism– has been identified as a priority by many governments, with governments generally being attracted to tourism on the strength of its potential to create jobs, provide much needed foreign exchange, and opportunities for economic diversification. In 2007 for example, the Caribbean received 19.3 million tourists or 20% of world arrivals. The travel and tourism industry accounted for 16.4% of the region's GDP; and provided 2.6 Million jobs which equals 15.5% of total employment (UNWTO 2008).

Tourism and poverty alleviation: prospect and peril

■ Notwithstanding the existence of extreme poverty in many developing countries around the globe, it is not uncommon that these countries have also experienced substantial growth in international tourist arrivals and receipts (Cattarinich, 2001:1). For example, in 2001, tourism was a significant sector in eleven of the twelve countries in the world which were home to 80% of the world's poor (Cattarinich, 2001:1). Moreover, "developing countries received US\$177 billion in tourism receipts in 2004, with tourism being the primary source of foreign exchange earnings in 46 of the 49 poorest nations that the UN describes as the "Least Developed Countries" (eTurboNews, 2005a in Hall, 2007: 114). This has led some observers like the World Tourism Organisation and the World Travel and Tourism Council to regard the tourism industry as playing a vital role in poverty alleviation on the merit of its labour intensive

nature and its inclusion of historically marginalised groups such as women, the informal sector, rural communities and the poor, who have few other employment generating opportunities.

Others have adopted a more tempered outlook on the issue, suggesting instead that major challenges exist in unlocking the potential of tourism to contribute meaningfully to the poverty alleviation agenda. Research and experience has shown that some tourism models favour greater participation of local communities and people than others (Ashley, 2006). Several valid points have been put forward in this regard. It is widely accepted, for example, that tourism is inherently a commercial activity that is governed by the laws of supply and demand. As such, the possibility of the creation, and it seems, the perpetuation of economic and social inequities within

this tremendous sector exists. In many developing countries around the world, it has been observed that there has traditionally been unequal social benefit distribution within the sector. Of key concern is the fact that the consumption of tourism remains the domain of the wealthy; and so too has its production (Hall, 2007:116). This is because the traditional structure and organisation of international tourism trade has seen a pattern of ownership which favours inputs and participation from the for-

mal (and often times foreign owned) sector such as international airline operators, foreign-owned hotels, large scale external travel distributors, and ancillary tourism businesses owned by a small cluster of local elites. To date, there are several cases in which local, economically marginalised communities (whether poor, indigenous, rural or a mix of all these) that account for most of the socially disadvantaged of this world, have found it difficult to participate meaningfully in such a system.

Problem definition

Dependency on Tourism

■ It has been observed that “for poor countries and small island states, tourism is the leading export - often the only sustainable growth sector of their economies and a catalyst for many related sectors” (eTurboNews, 2005a in Hall, 2007:114). The Greater Caribbean region’s tourism statistics reflect a profound dependency on the industry: tourism is the single largest earner of foreign

exchange in 16 of 28 countries in the wider Caribbean; directly or indirectly employs one in four people native to the Caribbean; and generates income for the region in excess of US\$ 2 billion per year. It accounts for approximately one-third of the region’s GDP, reflecting nearly 30% of all jobs and more than 75% of all the investment in the Caribbean (Griffin, 2007).

Chronic Poverty among some Social Groups

■ However, like many other parts of the world, the growth in tourism numbers has not necessarily translated into economic, social or environmental benefits for many Greater Caribbean territories. Although many examples of shortcomings exist in each of these categories, one area of disparity stands out for the purpose of our discussion – the fact that in tandem with the growth of tourism in the Greater Caribbean has been the persistence of poverty in the region. According to Bourne (2005), surveys of living conditions conducted in many Caribbean countries between 1996 and 2002 revealed that several countries were positioned at various points along the poverty incidence spectrum. Haiti and Suriname for example, were at the high end of the spectrum of poverty incidence with an estimated 65% and 63% respectively of their populations below the poverty line; Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, St. Kitts and Nevis and St. Vincent and the Grenadines had poverty incidences of 30%-40%; while Jamaica, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago and the Turks and Caicos Islands were between 20% and 29% (Bourne, 2005).

Indigenous people and ethnic minorities are particularly at risk as among some of the poorest groups in the world. Duffy (2002) for example uses the case study of the Mayan communities in Belize to make this connec-

tion. She argues that “Mayan communities have the highest rates of infant mortality, illiteracy, poverty and malnutrition in Belize... Most Mayan people experience social, political and economic marginalization, and even exclusion” (Duffy, 2002:113). Torres (1997) concurs in her reference to the Mayan Indians who inhabit the peripheral *Zona Maya* of Quintana Roo, Mexico as ‘the poorest of the poor’. Eight years later in 2005, little improvement has been made. Torres et al. (2005) relates:

“Most of Quintana Roo’s inhabitants are still Mayan Indians. The *Zona Maya* is the most marginalised and impoverished region in Quintana Roo, with over 75% of its inhabitants speaking Maya. The Mayas of this peripheral region are the ‘poorest of the poor’”.

Torres, 1997

Torres et al. (2005: 276) describes “the general lack of economic opportunities in Mayan villages” and in doing so presents alarming socio-economic statistics: adults with education above primary school account for only 27% of the local population; illiteracy is at 13%; while infrastructure is severely lacking. There is only one hotel in Felipe Carillo Puerto and it does not qualify to receive a single star (Torres et al., 2005: 275).

Failure of Some Tourism Models to Bring Grassroots Benefits

■ Geographically and politically speaking, the Greater Caribbean is highly diverse and complex. Within this region there are several opportunities for the natural and

cultural to be displayed and for the tourism industry to provide access to these benefits of such activity. Yet, the Caribbean tourism landscape is one of successes and