Designing a new model for sustainable ecological tourism in the Northern Forest region: an atelier course

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<http://www.uvm.edu/envnr/nsrc/>
Project Summary

• The main goal of the project was to design a new form of sustainable ecological tourism that might have positive, rather than merely neutral or negative impacts on forest ecosystem health and which would also provide more fulfilling, better-paying jobs.
• The project achieved this goal by firstly analyzing the ecological and economic costs and benefits of conventional tourism and various existing forms of Ecotourism.
• Secondly, the project relied on an atelier workshop/course to design a new form of tourism. The course involved a range of affected stakeholders, in addition to UVM faculty and students.
• Main outcomes were the establishment of a tight network of practitioners in the field of sustainable tourism in Vermont, the completion of two book proposals and two presentations to national conferences.
Background and Justification

• Traditional tourism in the Northern Forest is based on the region’s scenic beauty and extensive opportunities for outdoor recreation.
• As forest conservation efforts increasingly limit the expansion and profitability of the extractive timber economy in the region, tourism has been proposed as an alternative source of jobs and income for local communities.
• While appealing at first glance, tourism should not be seen as a ‘silver bullet’. Without careful planning, tourism activities can be damaging to natural ecosystems and can run counter to conservation goals (Orams 1995, Tershy 1999, Isaacs 2000).
• In addition, the tourism industry tends to provide low-wage service jobs (Fredrick 1993). The trade-off is not always seen by locals to be a desirable replacement for high wage timber-related jobs.
• Finally, conventional tourism often leads to export of earnings to out of state resort owners.
Background and Justification

• Many recent developments in tourism attempt to minimize its negative consequences. Ecotourism, for example, emphasizes natural and cultural resource protection, and the reinvestment of tourist income in conservation efforts.

• The concept still usually involves tourists passively visiting natural areas, often taken out of their ecological, cultural and historical context and appreciated merely for their abstract beauty or rarity.

• Ecotourism, when it does not generate a spirit of inquiry, promotes spectacle over cognitive experience (Ryan 2000). This form of resource use reflects values tightly bound to a culture of consumerism (Urry 1995).

• The result is development which is often less than optimal from the standpoint of the local community and also with regard to sustainability.
Background and Justification

• Companies that organize ecotourism opportunities are often located far from the region of impact, thus reducing the net income stream to local communities.
• This form of ecotourism is therefore neither helpful to local communities transitioning from extractive-based economies nor is it environmentally sustainable.
• A new, more integrative and sustainable form of ecotourism is possible; one that would allow environmental conservation, education, and employment goals to be met simultaneously.
• The Northern Forest region is an ideal location to develop and test such a tourism concept, and, if successful, it might spread to many other parts of the world.
Methods

• The project developed as part of the problem-based graduate course “Designing a new model of sustainable tourism in the Northern forest” held at the University of Vermont in the Fall of 2004.
• Participants included members of the major recreational organizations in the area. Such as Green Mountain Club, Vermont Mountain Bike Association, Northern Forest Canoe Trail, Vermont Association of Snow Travelers.
• Panel discussions were held and writing groups were formed with the idea of collaboratively write a book on visions and success stories of sustainable tourism in Vermont.
• A working group of graduate students met regularly during the second year of funding to finalize the book proposals.
Results/Project outcomes

• The course participants, including students, professionals and UVM university professors, produced a review and ecological economic analysis of current tourism practices.
• In addition they designed the new, creative alternative of positive impact tourism, a more desirable and sustainable form of ecotourism for the Northern Forest.
• The project produced a framework for assessing impacts and trade-offs of different forms of tourism and a series of case studies for the Northern Forest region.
Results/Project outcomes

• Definition of Positive impact tourism:
  “the practice of visiting locations outside one's home for the purpose of enhancing the sustainable quality of life derived from the integrated contributions of built, human, social, and natural capital of both the visitor and the visited location.”

• Positive impact tourism goes beyond the normal goal of minimizing the negative impacts of tourism and envisions forms of tourism that have positive impacts on both the tourists themselves and the visited natural and social communities.

• The goal is not to make positive impact tourism a new niche in the tourism industry. Rather, its principles and framework can provide useful guidelines in the assessment and planning of all tourism options on the four types of capital that contribute to sustainable human well-being: natural, social, built and human.
Assessment framework

The purpose of PI tourism is to enhance the sustainable quality of life derived from the integrated contributions of built, human, social, and natural capital.

- **Natural capital**: Stock of natural resources and environmental assets
- **Social capital**: social networks, trust, and shared norms on which cooperation within and among groups is based. E.g. Neighborhood associations, sports clubs, and cooperatives are all essential form of social capital.”
- **Built capital**: in physical form or as investments, provides a foundation for activities in a human community. Roads, bridges, airports, railroads, utilities, waste-disposal systems, schools, hospitals, and communication systems are each examples of built capital.
- **Human capital**: Stock of knowledge and information. Examples include the education, skills, history, and work that people lend to their communities, and then pass on to future generations.
Assessment framework - cont.

• This broadening of the types of impacts assessed is critical for a thorough and honest assessment, and it reveals many of the underlying trade-offs that confront tourist operations.

• For example, conventional forms of tourism may often increase the built capital and economic income of a select few in the community, but at the same time may reduce the natural and social capital of the community and thereby reduce overall quality of life.

• Positive impact tourism is cognizant of these trade-offs and attempts to balance them in such a way that the tourism offers a net positive impact, distributed in such a way that it benefits the social capital of the local community.
### Generic representation of impacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Conventional Tourism</th>
<th>Ecotourism</th>
<th>PI Tourism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visitor</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Visitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built</td>
<td>0/+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>0/+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Impact is assessed based on effects on quality of life, as reflected in the four basic types of capital. This broadening of the types of impacts assessed is critical for a thorough and honest assessment, and it reveals many of the underlying trade-offs that confront tourist operations.
Implications and applications in the Northern Forest region

• The framework developed in the course is general and can be adopted in any region of the world. Yet, we have decided to base most of the examples, cases and stories in Vermont after realizing how limited the documentation on sustainable tourism is in the Northeastern region and in Vermont in particular.
• Most studies of sustainable tourism and ecotourism are typically conducted in remote areas of the world and focus on relatively pristine and threatened ecosystems where ecotourism represents a vehicle for sustainable development.
• With the framework and the local case studies we wanted to emphasize the value of integrated approaches in sustainable tourism not only for those more typical ecotourism locations but also for communities in the Northern hemisphere that face similar problems, such as finding viable alternatives to declining extractive economies.
• The framework, going beyond the niche created by ecotourism, proposes a model that is suitable for any area where the natural and human landscapes coexist, and where history and traditions are an integral part.
One working group focused on tourism opportunities for the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. The course included a canoeing trip the Clyde River in the Northeast Kingdom.
Future directions and synergistic work

- The project developed ties with David Kestenbaum, Senior Program Manager the Vermont Tourist Data Center.
- Kestenbaum’s ongoing efforts to establish a geotourism site in the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont have been very successful.
- Geotourism is defined as “tourism that supports the geographical character of a place—its environment, culture, heritage, aesthetics, and the well-being of its citizens”, it can therefore be considered a form of positive impact tourism.
- The Northeast Kingdom experience opens the way for an assessment of this form of tourism using our framework.
- Besides conducting collaborative work on this front we will complete the ongoing publication efforts.
List of products

✓ Two conference presentations


✓ Two book proposals for the book Positive Impact Tourism: case studies and visions from Vermont (one to Island Press and the other to University Press of New England - see next slide)

✓ One draft article (Positive Impact Tourism: assessing net benefits across multiple dimensions of quality of life)

✓ Three completed book chapters for the book Positive Impact Tourism: case studies and visions from Vermont

✓ One course website
http://www.uvm.edu/~mceroni/ecotourism_course/syllabus.html
Book proposal Title: Positive Impact Tourism: case studies and visions from Vermont

- **Part I. Tourism: Definitions, Problems, and Solutions**
  Chapter 1. Tourism and Ecological Economic Systems (Amy Diller and Dr. Robert Costanza)
  Chapter 2. What is Positive Impact Tourism? (Daniel Baker)
  Chapter 3. Costs and benefits of various forms of tourism: a framework (Amy Diller)
  Chapter 4. Why Vermont? (Kate Finley Wood, Amy Diller and Dr. Marta Ceroni)
    1. The Vermont Visitor
    2. Protecting the Beauty
    3. Marketing Vermont
  Chapter 5. Rural Economies and Communities in a Dynamic Landscape (Dr. Walter Kuentzel)

- **Part II. Positive Impact Tourism Options in the Making**
  Chapter 6. Cultural Landscape (Kate Finley Wood and Danielle Roy)
  Chapter 7. Agricultural Landscape (David Timmons)
  Chapter 8. Natural Landscape (Joshua Halman, Matthew Bresler, Brooke Scatchard, Grant Janukajtis)
  Chapter 9. Built Landscape (Dr. Roelof Boumans et al.)
  Chapter 10. Learning Landscape (Dr. Thomas Hudspeth et al.)

- **Part III. Making Positive Impact Tourism Happen**
  Chapter 11. Guiding Principles of Positive Impact Tourism (Daniel Baker et al.)
  Chapter 12. Community Participation (Dr. Roelof Boumans et al.)
  Chapter 13. Infrastructure (Rebecca Lewis, Sam Couture, David Timmons, Matthew Bresler)
  Chapter 14. Policies, Planning and Institutional Support for Positive Impact Tourism (Dr. Marta Ceroni et al.)
List of products

• In addition, the project developed synergistic relationships with Dr. Chase and Dr. Boumans, who. As part of an NSRC grant, conducted a series of participatory modeling workshops to envision tourism and development options in selected communities in the Northern Forest.

• Students had the opportunity to attend one of these workshops and familiarize with participatory modeling in the classroom and in a real-world context, with stakeholders and community members.