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Addressing the homogeneity dilemma by customizing tourism development supports for rural regions using the typology of tourism dependence

Introduction:

The plight of rural areas has generated significant attention at the policy level throughout Canada, due in large part to the recognition of issues such as depopulation, aging, shifting economic realities, infrastructure decline and service loss. Despite the tendency to generalize about rural areas, there is a growing awareness that they are not homogenous and that context matters. For example, some rural regions are experiencing significant out-migration whereas others are challenged with the influx of in-migrants. Some have benefitted from tourism development while others have not. Those involved in tourism development at the local level or through supporting policies and programs need to be mindful of the homogeneity dilemma to ensure that adequate and customized supports are in place for rural areas with different social and economic realities.

Literature

The development of tourism has been pursued by many rural areas either as a new sector for economic development, or as a tool for broader amenity-based rural development. The development of tourism in rural areas is not without its challenges. Some of these include: lack of sufficient knowledge in tourism, lack of business clusters, lack of “market ready” experiences to offer visitors, lack of ongoing funding support, lack of support by leaders or residents, and lack of market data to inform planning (English, Marcouiller & Cordell, 2000; Flemming, 2009). Across Canada, provincial governments have been encouraged by the potential for tourism as a diversification tool for communities and many have created a range of support programs to enable its growth. Within Atlantic Canada for example, programs to support businesses in the development of products and to encourage market readiness have emerged. In Ontario and Alberta, programs have evolved to encourage various stakeholders in regions to collaborate and brand themselves around key attractions. The range of supports across the Canadian landscape suggests that alternative approaches exist to enable tourism development, yet there is a lack of evidence in the academic literature to indicate which approaches are most effective in rural contexts or in destinations at different stages of tourism development.

The development of tourism in rural areas is complex, includes a variety of stakeholders and evolves in stages (Butler, 1980, Butler, 2006a, 2006b; Hunt & Stronza, 2014). Stage based models were largely introduced in 1980 with the Tourism Area Life Cycle Model (TALC) by Butler based on an alternation of a product life cycle. Numerous scholars have also built upon seminal works by Doxey (1975) and Dogan (1989) to highlight a clear theoretical relationship between time and local responses to tourism typically measured by resident attitudes or perceptions. More recent efforts have been made to integrate the concepts of sustainable tourism development proposed by these early models by Hunt & Stronza (2014) who noted that stage based models most often focus on mature destinations in developing countries. They proposed the addition of two stages to the TALC to account for the experiences of early stage destinations including absence of tourism awareness or concern/hesitance

and the arrival of early tourists. These early stages are critical to the principles of ecotourism and could aid in education and participation of the local residents to effectively manage the impacts associated to tourism.

In order to ensure adequate and customized supports for heterogenous rural communities a typology of destinations that differentiates communities or regions based on their level of engagement with tourism may be helpful and build upon the existing theoretical foundation. A potential starting point is to build on the tourism dependence classification proposed by Smith and Krannich (1998). In an effort to illustrate differences in resident support for tourism, they developed the tourism dependence hypothesis and categorized three types of communities that varied in their overall economic dependence on tourism. The three categories were tourism hungry, tourism realized and tourism saturated communities. They tested for differences in community support for tourism among four rural communities with various levels of economic dependence on the industry. As their analysis used quantitative measures to provide cut-offs or definitions for the categories no description of the community types emerged which has limited the application of the theory in practice. Adding descriptive detail to these categories would further our understanding of what contextual conditions exist within communities at each stage. For rural communities that are at early stages of development, a better description of the characteristics that exist in tourism hungry destinations would aid in the design of customized supports that enable tourism to become established. Similarly, for rural areas that are dealing with the impacts associated to tourism saturation, a description of the characteristics and supportive management actions that could bring about more sustainable levels of tourism development would be valuable.

Methodology

The purpose of this paper is to enable the development of sustainable tourism in rural areas by advocating for customized supports for communities/regions with different levels of dependence on tourism. The paper presents a typology that was developed using grounded theory and data obtained through extensive fieldwork with rural communities within British Columbia from 2005-2015. During this time, a multiple partner initiative called the Tourism Research Innovation Project (TRIP) took place within the province. The key aims were to synthesize and mobilize knowledge about rural tourism between communities, academics and government partners. Activities of the project included annual extension work, where during the time frame of the project, over seventy rural communities and 500 operators and leaders were visited. Additionally, a series of in depth interviews and site visits generated over eighty innovation profiles and annual extension reports that documented the realities of tourism development in the rural context. Content analysis was used on these various knowledge outputs to analyse and classify communities based on their level of dependence and maturity with tourism. The typology proposed by Smith and Krannich (1998) was used for the initial classification and was modified slightly based on qualitative observations of the diversity of rural communities encountered in the fieldwork. The typology identifies how the categories align with the Tourism Area Life Cycle (Butler, 1980) and the addition of early stage destinations by Hunt and Stronza (2014). Descriptive detail was added to the typology to describe the conditions at the destination and enabling actions were added based on insights from sustainable tourism management literature.

Findings

The typology of tourism dependence and the supports that are needed to enable sustainable tourism development is shown in table 1. Analysis of the data revealed a high degree of theme saturation for each category indicating that the complexity of the topic had been largely captured within the classifications in the resulting typology. Additionally, the categories in the typology align with and expand upon existing literature on stage models in tourism. The three types of communities are classified as tourism desperate, tourism active and tourism saturated communities. For each type of community, a brief description is provided and a set of enabling actions is described to ensure that the community is able to develop and manage tourism and its associated impacts.

Conclusion

Despite the growing understanding of rural development and the importance of recognizing the heterogeneity within rural contexts in the academic literature (Van Assche and Hornidge, 2015; Moseley, M., 2003, Milone, Ventura and Ye, 2015) policy and program supports have been somewhat slow to adapt and many still assume that rural areas are homogenous. This bias can result in inadequate supports for rural areas, inappropriate use of programs, unintended impacts and costly, frustrating experiences at the local level. This paper identifies a typology of tourism dependence and enabling actions which may be useful to assess and customize supports to ensure that adequate supports are available to communities at all stages of tourism development. It builds upon the Smith and Krannich tourism dependence hypothesis (1989) and Hunt and Stronza's (2014) addition of early stage destinations by providing a description of the characteristics of communities at various stages and potential enabling supports to facilitate sustainable tourism development in rural areas. Further research is needed to test the typology and enhance the description of the community types. Research is also needed to identify and measure the impact of supportive policies and programs to enable tourism development among different community types.

Table 1: Typology of tourism dependence and supports needed to enable sustainable tourism development

<i>Type of community/region</i>	<i>Alignment with theory</i>	<i>Description of tourism maturity</i>	<i>Supports needed to enable sustainable tourism development</i>
Tourism desperate communities/regions	<p>Smith and Krannich</p> <p><i>Tourism hungry communities</i></p> <p>Hunt and Stronza</p> <p><i>Absence of tourism and arrival of early tourists</i></p> <p>Butler's TALC</p> <p><i>absent</i></p>	<p>No well-established tourism industry operating yet but have expressed some interest, desire or need in order to diversify. Tourism products are not often developed, organizations may or may not be in place, understanding of tourism is weak and myths and stereotypes exist. Planning documents and processes are often weak and/or do not integrate tourism activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education on tourism (its consequences, approaches to development, keys to success) • Assessment strategies (to determine fit, potential, market demand, amenities, products) • Engagement tools (to get residents input into tourism, discuss resources, types of visitors to invite, ways to ensure tourism benefits the local residents) • Planning tools (to establish a vision for tourism, to determine what timeframe and key strategies are going to be needed to reach the vision) • Supports to encourage collaboration (within and among regional stakeholders, identify supports that are lacking and initiate them) • Product development supports (to determine the types of experiences for visitors and get them ready for visiting markets, support of business clusters, market readiness)

<i>Type of community/ region</i>	<i>Alignment with theory</i>	<i>Description of tourism maturity</i>	<i>Supports needed to enable sustainable tourism development</i>
Tourism active communities/regions	Smith and Krannich <i>Tourism realized communities</i> Butler's TALC <i>Exploration, Involvement and Development</i>	Some well-developed products exist which are attracting visitors. Experience hosting visitors and recognition of their value to the local economy by various stakeholder groups. These regions have a delivery system in place and are promoting the experiences they can provide to external audiences using marketing strategies. This grouping varies in terms of the approach used – but most often the strategies are linked to marketing the destination (i.e. set of tourism committees, collaborative marketing initiatives, branding). Emphasis in planning at the community or on tourism specific plans is placed on growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destination marketing supports (to develop a brand image and position the destination competitively in the mindsets of visiting markets, integrated marketing and cooperative initiatives in place) • Product development and maintenance supports (to keep the product mix relevant to visiting markets, to identify and develop new products or markets, proactive business clusters) • Assessment strategies (to determine performance of markets, effectiveness of models or product mix, to monitor growth and overall quality of visitor experience) • Engagement tools (to enable residents to provide input on tourism initiatives and engage in ambassador roles, to encourage industry stakeholders to engage in delivering exceptional experiences) • Supports to sustain and expand collaboration and cooperation (within the industry, within and among the region, and within aligned sector). • Planning tools (to implement existing plans and monitor changes, or to revise/renew plans. Efforts to integrate tourism with broader community/regional plans)

<i>Type of community/region</i>	<i>Alignment with theory</i>	<i>Description of tourism maturity</i>	<i>Supports needed to enable sustainable tourism development</i>
Tourism saturated communities/regions	<p>Smith and Krannich <i>Tourism saturated communities</i></p> <p>Butler's TALC</p> <p><i>Consolidation and Stagnation</i></p>	<p>Tourism developed to the extent that an attractive image of the destination is in visitor markets mindsets. Marketing system entities have emerged to establish the image, promote widely to potential visitors. Growth in visitation exists, usually seasonal in nature, and evidence of some negative impacts associated to tourism are present. There are usually concerns about the sustainability of the industry and strategies or plans may indicate mitigation strategies.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning tools (to implement existing plans with a focus on sustainable development, systems in place to monitor changes and impacts. Integrated planning where tourism is embedded in broader community/regional plans) • Assessment strategies (to determine performance of markets, effectiveness of models or product mix, monitor growth and overall quality of visitor experience and resident attitudes to tourism) • Destination marketing supports (to retain competitive strength and positive brand image and position the destination in the mindsets of select or desired visiting markets) • Product development and maintenance supports (to keep the product mix relevant to visiting or desired markets, to identify and develop new products or phase out, proactive and long term thinking aimed at addressing negative perceptions of visitors and residents). • Engagement tools (to enable residents to provide input on tourism initiatives and engage in ambassador roles, to encourage industry stakeholders to engage in delivering exceptional experiences) • Supports to sustain and expand collaboration and cooperation (within the industry, within and among the region, and within aligned sector).

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