

## Using Tourism to Build Social Capital in Communities: New Pathways to Sustainable Tourism Futures

*Gianna Moscardo\* & Andrea Schurmann^ & Elena Konovalov° & Nancy G. McGehee^*

*\*James Cook University, Australia, [gianna.moscardo@jcu.edu.au](mailto:gianna.moscardo@jcu.edu.au)*

*^James Cook University, Australia, [andrea.schurmann@my.jcu.edu.au](mailto:andrea.schurmann@my.jcu.edu.au)*

*°James Cook University, Australia, [elena.konovalov@my.jcu.edu.au](mailto:elena.konovalov@my.jcu.edu.au)*

*^Virginia Tech, Blacksburg VA, USA, [nmcgehee@vt.edu](mailto:nmcgehee@vt.edu)*

### Abstract

Despite considerable discussion about how tourism could or should contribute to sustainable destination development, there is little evidence that the practice of tourism planning or development has altered in any significant way in the last 30 years. This paper will report on an action research project aimed at identifying and applying new approaches to using tourism effectively as a strategy for sustainable development in destination communities. The research reported in this paper adopted a community capitals approach to sustainable destination development and explored the links between features of tourism development and impacts on the social capital available to destination communities. The study was based on a workshop conducted with sixteen regional tourism development officers that used a variety of techniques, including a futures wheel exercise, to identify the relationships between aspects of tourism development and both positive and negative impacts on social capital. The results of the workshop highlighted the importance of effective local resident engagement in tourism planning and activity and suggested several new dimensions of tourism planning for further exploration and development. These included the need for tourism leaders to take on a broader responsibility for community development, the need for tourism take a more social entrepreneurial role in destination communities and the need to find different models for local and regional tourism organisations.

### Introduction

Tourism is often described by its proponents as “a driver of economic growth, inclusive development and environmental sustainability” (UNWTO, 2013) and as making a positive contribution to well-being (WTTC, 2013). It is not, however, always clear whose well-being benefits from tourism or how these benefits arise (Moscardo, 2008). This paper follows Costanza’s ‘Full World Model’ of economies in thinking about sustainability (see Costanza, Cumberland et al, 2010) and argues that if tourism is to make a significant positive contribution to sustainability in destination communities and regions, it must be developed

in such a way as to minimize its negative impacts on, and maximize its positive contributions to, the wide range of different capitals needed to support community well-being. In order to do this we need to have a much more detailed understanding of the processes that connect aspects of tourism to different impacts within destination communities. This paper seeks to contribute to this improved understanding of the mechanisms that result in actual tourism impacts, by reporting on an exercise designed to map out existing and potential connections between tourism and social capital in destinations in Australia.

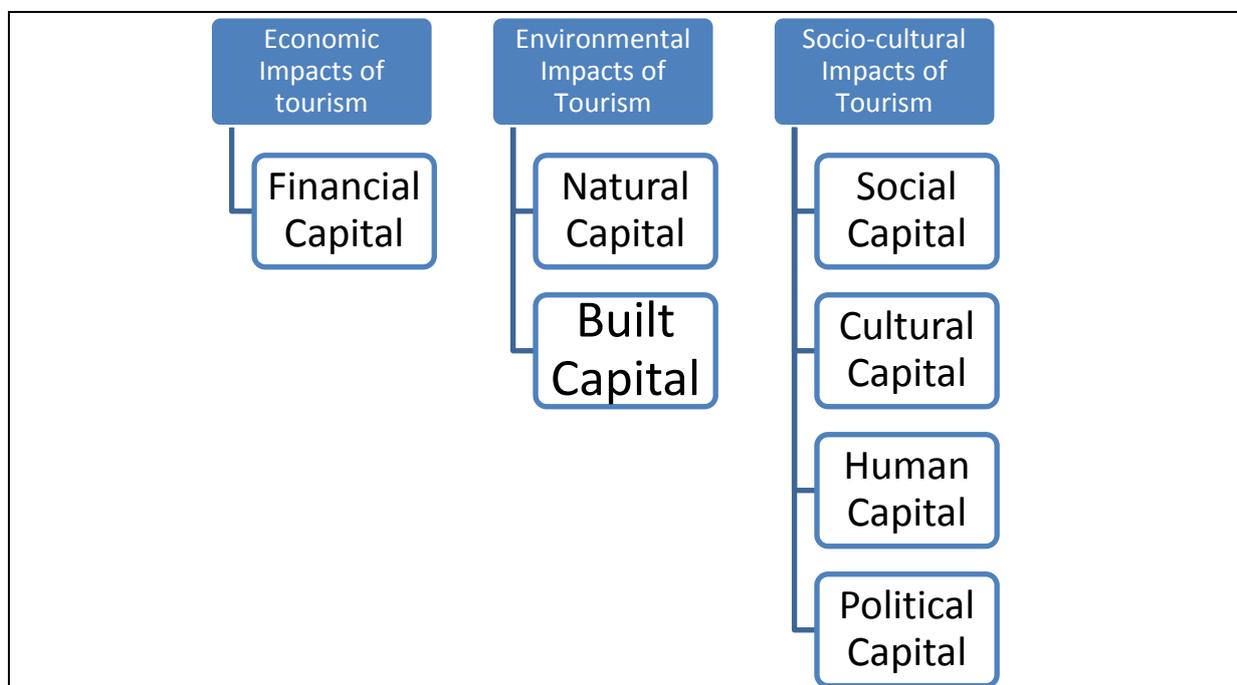
### **A Capitals Approach to Sustainability**

According to Costanza and colleagues (Costanza et al, 2007; Costanza et al, 2010) sustainability can be best explained by comparing the ‘empty world’ and ‘full world’ models of economies. In the ‘empty world’ model the only capital that matters is manufactured or financial capital and individual well-being is seen as resulting from the consumption of goods and services. In the ‘empty world’ model the goal of economic activity is to convert land and labour into goods and services. Costanza argues that it is this model that has generated the issues that drive the sustainability agenda and it is this model that has to change if sustainability is to be achieved. Costanza proposes an alternative, the ‘full world’ model in which there are multiple forms of capital to be considered including natural capital, social capital and human capital; well-being is expanded to include recognition of the need to balance individual and community well-being; and the goal of economic and government action is to protect and enhance stocks of all forms of capital. Lehtonen (2004) refers to this as a capitals approach to sustainability and defines sustainability as “the maintenance or increase of the total stock of different types of capital” (p. 200). In taking this capitals approach it is important to remember that not all capitals are easily exchanged or replaced, and a stronger approach to sustainability highlights the critical importance of natural capital to the whole system and that it cannot be easily replaced by other forms of capital (Dietz and Neumayer, 2007). Adapting this approach to tourism suggests that from the destination perspective, sustainable tourism development can be defined as tourism activities that maintain and enhance all forms of capital, recognising the primary importance of natural capital.

### **Understanding Tourism Impacts on Destinations**

Murphy and Price’s (2005) review of the literature on tourism and sustainable development linked tourism sustainability to the management of its impacts at the destination and global level. These impacts are most often considered in three categories - economic, environmental and socio-cultural (cf. Hall & Lew, 2009). It has been suggested that insufficient attention has been paid to the latter category and consequently much less is known about mechanisms that link tourism to its social impacts (Deery, Jago & Fredline, 2012). There are two main reasons for this gap – the research approaches that have been taken and the complexity of the phenomenon under study.

In the first instance, much of the research done on socio-cultural impacts falls into one of two traditions – surveys of resident perceptions of tourism impacts (see Nunkoo, Smith & Ramkissoon, 2013 for a review) and ethnographic analyses of particular destinations and/or tourism developments (see Harrison, 2007, for a discussion of this approach). While the tradition of surveys of resident perceptions of impacts has generated considerable data describing the existence and extent of different tourism impacts, especially in the socio-cultural domain, a number of weaknesses in this research have also been identified. Firstly, it is important to remember that perceived impacts are not the same as actual impacts (Moscardo, 2008). Even where perceived and actual impacts are the same, the surveys typically measure only the existence and extent of the impact, not the factors that have contributed to its presence (Harrill, 2004; Saarinen, 2006). Indeed much of the explanatory focus in this research tradition has been on analysing differences in perceptions of tourism impacts across different characteristics of the respondent rather than differences in the characteristics of tourism (Andereck & Nyuapane, 2010; Moscardo, 2012). Ethnographic approaches on the other hand offer much more detailed analyses of the mechanisms that link features of tourism development to specific impacts on the destination communities. The problem has been that much of this research has been conducted in peripheral regions where there is often considerable economic, social, cultural difference between tourists and residents. While this research generates considerable and detailed knowledge of socio-cultural impacts it could be argued that this knowledge is limited to certain types of tourism situations.



**Figure 1: Mapping Tourism Impact Domains onto Different Forms of Capital**

The second reason for the lesser theoretical development of research into the socio-cultural impacts of tourism is its complexity. When the three domains of tourism impacts are

mapped to the different forms of capital recognized in the wider literature on sustainability it can be seen that the socio-cultural domain incorporates several different types of capital including social, cultural, and human (see Figure 1). Further these forms of capital are much less clearly defined than natural and financial capital.

### **Tourism and Community Well-Being**

This brief discussion of the tourism impacts literature highlights some of the challenges to developing coherent theoretical frameworks for understanding how different types and processes of tourism development result in specific socio-cultural impacts. One option that has emerged independently in both the ethnographic approaches and surveys of resident perceptions of tourism impacts, for addressing this challenge is that of examining the ways in which tourism effects the different capitals that have been identified (Moscardo, 2012).

A number of recent papers in tourism impacts research have applied Flora's (2004) framework of community well-being and/or the argument that destination community well-being depends on multiple forms of capital, (Andereck & Nyuapane, 2010; Bennett, Lemelin, Koster & Budke, 2012; Macbeth, Carson & Northcote, 2004; McGehee, O'Bannon & Perdue, 2010; Moscardo, 2008, 2009 & 2012). The Community Wellbeing framework expands on the work of Bourdieu (1985) and Coleman (1988) to identify and define several different forms of capital. The framework proposes that community well-being is made up of seven overlapping and related forms of capital including:-

- Financial capital, which can be defined as the monetary assets and resources available for investment in a community;
- Natural capital, which refers to the resources, amenities and assets available in the natural environment and ecosystems to support a community;
- Built capital, which is the physical infrastructure that allows for various community activities;
- Cultural capital, defined as the traditions, ways of life and knowing, activities, arts, rituals and languages that support community values and identities;
- Human capital, which can be defined as the skills, assets, knowledge, capabilities, connections and experiences of community members;
- Political capital, which refers to the community's ability to access and influence power and decisions; and
- Social capital, which is defined as the networks and relationships, built on trust and reciprocity, connecting people within the community and connecting the community to other people and places. (Emery & Flora, 2006; Fey, Bregendahl & Flora, 2006; Flora, 2004).

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## Tourism and Social Capital

This paper reports on a study guided by Flora's (2004) community wellbeing framework but focused on tourism and social capital. Despite, or perhaps as a result of, a substantial literature across multiple disciplines seeking to define and explain the operation of social capital, there is considerable debate about its definition (Moscardo, 2012). Pawar's (2006) review of social capital definitions, which included descriptions from Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), Portes (1998) and Woolcock (1998), identified the following as the most common elements: - collective action, cooperation, networks, relationships, shared norms and values, social interaction and trust. While these elements could be seen as making up a working definition of social capital, it is important to note two key criticisms of the diverse ways in which researchers have conceptualised and used social capital. Firstly, there is often confusion and ambiguity about what social capital is versus what it can be used for (Portes, 1998). Secondly, there is often confusion between what social capital is and the structures or mechanisms that allow for its development (Woolcock, 1998). Therefore it is important to distinguish between the structures that allow social capital to be created, the dimensions of social capital itself, and the outcomes that are said to derive from its use. For the purposes of the present study, social capital at a community level was defined as the trust, obligations, reciprocity, shared values and social identity, and cohesiveness of social relationships within a community. This social capital then offers members of the community access to support and resources to pursue various goals, and it is derived from networks, both formal and informal and both within and outside the community, associations and engagement in communal or social activity. For the purposes of the present study the researchers were interested in the links between aspects of tourism and any of these dimensions of social capital.

Discussions of social capital at a community level in tourism can be seen as falling into two main areas: –

- Studies of how tourism businesses and tourism development in general use and benefit from existing social capital within a community (cf., Karlsson, 2005, Svendsen, Kjeldsen and Noe, 2010, and von Friedrichs Grangsjø and Gummesson, 2006 for examples), and
- Research into the positive and negative impacts of tourism on social capital.

It is the latter that is of most relevance to the present discussion. There is a small but growing body of research in this area and a review of the available published work suggests convergence around three themes- the importance of events, the value of networks developed for tourism coordination and planning, and the role of community conflict over tourism developments as both a generator and destroyer of social capital. The majority of the research that has explicitly examined social capital and tourism has been conducted looking at the impacts of events. Reviews of this area by Moscardo (2007) and Misener and

Mason (2006) have identified several links between the hosting of events and social capital including:

- Events as a source of community pride and an expression of shared values and identity;
- The use of events by local residents as opportunities to socialise and build bonds with family and friends; and
- The development of networks (both internal and external) through local participation in event coordination and management.

In each case the nature of the event, its history and how it is managed will influence whether these links result in positive or negative impacts. In short, events are more likely to enhance social capital if they offer more opportunities for local participation and involvement, if they remain consistent with the values and perceptions of community residents, and if they do not overwhelm or exclude local residents (Misener & Mason, 2006; Moscardo, 2007).

The last theme identified in the events research highlights a key way in which tourism more generally can contribute to social capital - through the creation of networks and associations to organise and coordinate tourism activity within a community. Several studies have provided evidence that the establishment of local tourism coordination bodies or organisations can enhance social capital, especially when there is equitable and diverse representation of community sectors and interest, strong leadership and motivation to use tourism to generate a range of benefits for the community as a whole (Ashley, 2000; Johannesson, Skaptadottir & Benediktsson, 2003; Jones, 2005; McGehee et al, 2010; Moscardo 2012; Nordin & Westlund, 2009; Wang & Xiang, 2007).

The final theme in the existing literature on tourism and social capital is that of conflict. Many of the papers cited in the previous paragraphs provide evidence of both positive and negative tourism impacts on social capital. Community conflict over tourism is often discussed as a major factor in both these positive and negative impacts on social capital. A number of conditions are seen as contributing to conflict including inequitable access to tourism opportunities and benefits (Ashley, 2000; Jones, 2005), competition for tourist attention (Ashley, 2000), and the development of types of tourism that are inconsistent with community values and perceptions (Moscardo, 2012). Typically this conflict is seen as depleting social capital by eroding trust and cooperation, but it is possible that conflict generated by tourism development can build social capital through the development of associations and organisations to oppose the development (Moscardo, 2012) and through the consolidation of shared values and community identity (cf. Finkel, 2010).

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## **Aims of the Research**

This brief review of the research that has explicitly examined the links between tourism and social capital in community destinations does offer some initial evidence of the processes that can influence tourism impacts in this area. But the number of studies is still quite small, the majority of the evidence is limited to events and/or rural regions with limited tourism development, and the descriptions have been about what has happened historically, not what might happen in the future.

The research described in this paper is part of a larger project that seeks to address these limitations by investigating how the characteristics of tourism development can be linked to differential outcomes for rural communities in northern Australia in the present, and what future opportunities key stakeholders see for using tourism to enhance community well-being. This paper focusses on social capital and reports on the outcomes of a workshop with regional tourism development officers on finding ways to improve tourism contributions to community well-being. The main aims of the component of the research reported in this paper were to explore in more detail both actual and potential connections between tourism and social capital in regional destination development and to encourage innovative thinking about how tourism might make a stronger contribution to sustainable development in the future. The approach taken fits within Pain, Kindon and Kesby's (2007) description of action research in that it was designed to simultaneously gather data to improve broader understanding of the phenomenon under study whilst also offering specific practical guidance for action. Thus the workshop activity reported here had two objectives:-

- To gather data from people with extensive experience and current involvement in regional tourism development, on how tourism could contribute to social capital in destination communities; and
- To demonstrate a method that could be used for engaging destination stakeholders in tourism planning and suggest programs for adoption in the participants' work settings.

The focus of the present paper is on the first objective.

## **Methodology**

The data reported in this paper were generated from a three hour workshop facilitated by the researchers with sixteen regional tourism officers attending a national conference on regional tourism development and management. There were ten female and six male participants who were employed at a range of different destinations around the country, including remote and rural regions, as well as two state capitals. Half were employed by a local government agency either directly as a development officer, or indirectly through a local or regional tourism association as either a tourism development officer or tourism coordinator. The remainder were either responsible for regional tourism development within a state tourist association, were managers in a tourism business, or were tourism

development consultants. The majority described their position as being 100% focussed on tourism development in their destination.

The workshop involved three exercises designed to reveal connections between specific aspects of tourism development and the different capitals that make up community well-being. The workshop further narrowed its attention to social, cultural, human and political capital. After an initial short discussion of Flora's community capitals framework the participants were divided into four groups. The room was organised with four large tables - one allocated to each of the community capitals under study. Each participant group then began the first exercise with one of the four capitals. Every 20 minutes the groups rotated to the next table and capital and completed the exercise again adding to the material listed by the previous group. This process was repeated so that all groups engaged in all three steps for all four capitals. This paper reports in detail on the results for the social capital component. The following definition of social capital was provided to the workshop participants.

*Social capital consists of a set of cultivated and produced networks through which people gain access to power and resources and/or develop leadership skills.*

*Social capital also refers to the level of trust, reciprocity, and cooperation that exists within a community. Social capital can be found in business, social and hobby/sport organisations, local charities, and/or other networks that facilitate communication and resources mobilization for a broad variety of stakeholders in the community.*

### **Exercise 1: The Futures Wheel**

The first exercise asked participants to think in more detail about the different connections between tourism and social capital within a Backcasting Futures Wheel exercise. This kind of Futures Wheel begins with a question or statement about a desirable future placed at the centre, or "hub" of the wheel, and is used as a mind mapping technique to explore the consequences of a decision (see Benckendorff, Edwards, Jurowski, Liburd & Moscardo, 2009; List, 2007; and Kohtala, 2008 for more details on this activity). In the present case the desirable future at the centre of the wheel was "In 10 years, tourism will make a positive contribution to social capital in destination communities". Participants are then asked to identify what conditions would have to exist for this statement to be seen as true and these were each given a circle in a first ring around this future. In a second round of discussion participants were asked to consider each of these conditions and offer ways in which tourism could support or contribute to the condition. Finally, participants were asked to suggest actions that regional/destination tourism planners and managers could take to encourage these contributions to social capital.

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### **Exercise 2: Appreciative Inquiry**

The second exercise was Cooperrider and Srivastva's (1987) Appreciative Inquiry. This activity asks participants to contribute positive examples from their own experience. More specifically they are directed to consider any past, present, or future tourism strategies or programs that they thought were good examples of the positive connections that could be made between tourism and social capital. They were asked to both list these and to link them to the relevant part of the future wheel. This activity was designed to identify and share examples of positive practices that participants could adapt for their destinations.

### **Exercise 3: Make it Fail**

The last exercise was designed to encourage participants to think more critically and creatively about the links between tourism and community well-being. De Bono (2009) argues that critical thinking and creativity can be stimulated by idea generating exercises that break routine thinking habits. One option to achieve this is to use provocation idea generators, which involve actions such as wishing, exaggerating, and reversal. The last action, reversal, asks people to reverse the goal of their thinking. Miller (2007) offers an example of this with the Make it Fail exercise. In this exercise the target thinkers, who are normally required to focus on how to achieve a specific target or outcome, are directed to reverse this process and identify ways they could guarantee they would not reach the target or achieve the desired outcome. In the present situation the workshop participants were asked to consider how they could ensure that tourism did not make a positive contribution to social capital in their destination communities.

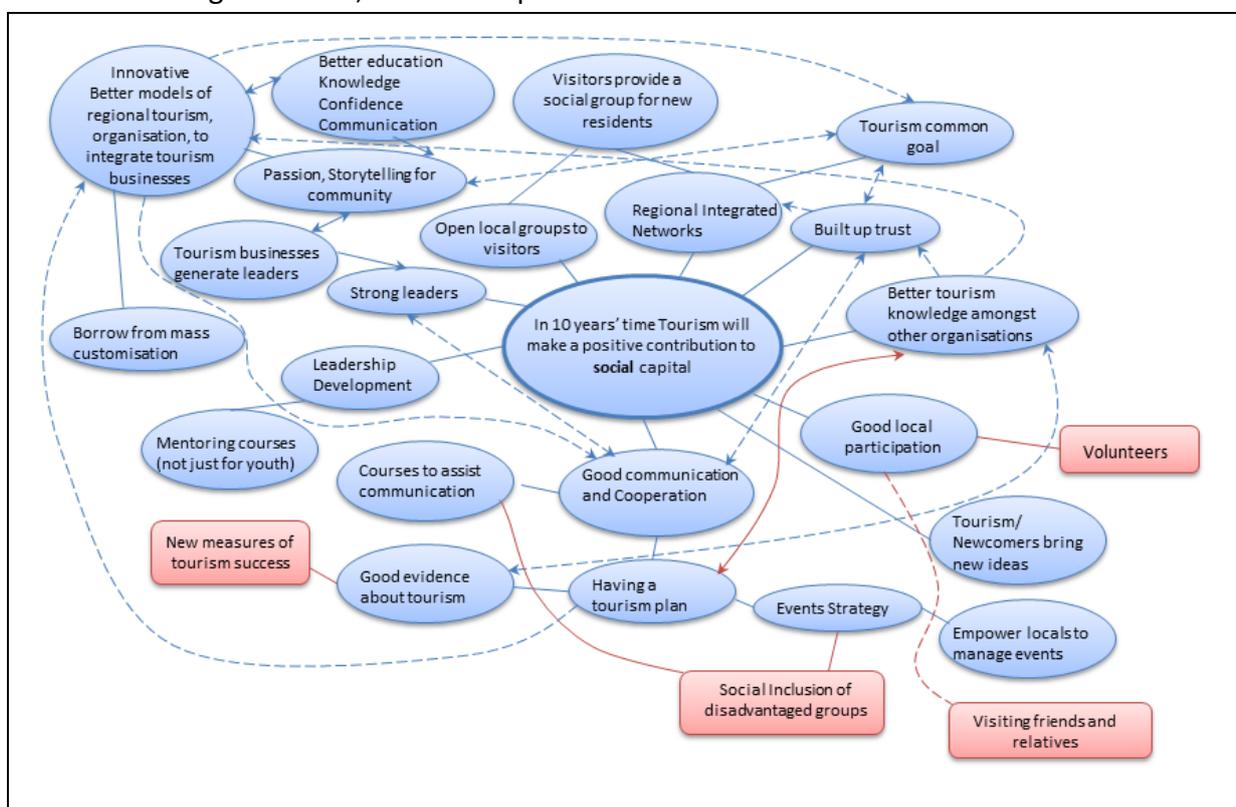
After the completion of the three exercises the workshop was closed. The final outcomes of all the exercises were summarised and sent to the participants. In addition, participants were given a handbook describing how to conduct the exercise and encouraged to use the three exercises with stakeholders in their destination community to encourage more discussion about improving tourism's contribution to destination community well-being.

### **Results and Discussion**

Figure 2 provides the results of the Backcasting Futures Wheel exercise. The participants were asked to add to the futures wheel by identifying ways in which tourism could make a positive contribution to social capital and to map out what was needed from tourism planners and managers to achieve these contributions. The first set of conditions seen as necessary to achieve the desired future suggested that the destination community had to have good communication systems and a spirit of cooperation, good local participation in tourism, integrated networks connecting people throughout the destination region, a local community that was open to, and inclusive of, visitors, and strong leaders. This first round reflected the different dimensions of social capital as it was defined for the participants.

The next two rounds and sets of linkages began to explore in more detail how tourism could contribute to each of these conditions.

Good communication systems and cooperative spirit were linked to training in communication, having a tourism plan, building trust and having strong community and tourism leaders. A tourism plan, in turn, was linked to having good evidence about tourism, particularly evidence that focussed on new or alternative measures of tourism success, and the development of event strategies that empowered local residents and focussed on opportunities to include otherwise disadvantaged groups. Good local participation in tourism was seen as being supported by the development of strong volunteer programs within tourism. Integrated regional networks was seen as depending upon trust, having or sharing a common goal for tourism development, better integration of tourism and other sectors and organisations, and better provision of social and other benefits for residents.



**Figure 2: Tourism and Social Capital Futures Wheel**

An open and inclusive local community was seen as being supported by positive social interactions between visitors and residents. Finally, strong leaders were seen as linked to many other aspects of social capital and supported by specific leadership and training and development. Tourism was put forward as a potential source of community leaders as local tourism business owners were seen as often having a passion for presenting local communities in a positive light. The overall pattern of results from this exercise was

consistent with both the existing research into tourism and social capital impacts and the wider literature on sustainable tourism development (Moscardo, 2011a; Timothy, 2007).

The second exercise focussed on the experiences of the participants and asked them to describe programs and action that they had observed that were examples of how tourism could make the linkages outlined in the futures wheel. Five main types of activity were identified in the responses – training programs, events, communication strategies, government planning approaches, and activities that encouraged local participation in tourism and social inclusion in general. These supported the main pathways linking tourism to social capital identified in the futures wheel. It is also noteworthy that just over half the responses to this activity were not actual or real programs or activities but suggestions for programs that could be useful, supporting the argument that the practice of tourism planning and development remains largely disconnected from academic discussions of tourism and destination sustainability.

**Table 1: Making Tourism Fail to Contribute to Social Capital**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Abbreviated Comments</b>
Actions that threaten tourism viability in general	Encourage businesses to go elsewhere Build a road bypass Don't collect data Data results are incomprehensible Limit opening hours Close visitor centres
Impose burdens on local residents	Get rid of all public spaces Make locals to pay for everything
Failure to encourage and develop leadership/skills	Discourage any new ideas Not having leaders, tall poppy syndrome No space for young people to learn No training
Lack of appropriate planning approaches that include local resident concerns	No plans for tourism or succession No public consultation Encourage conflict over development Discourage cooperation
Poor communication	No communication Don't talk to new residents Continue to reward difficult people Encourage media sensation
Support/encourage inappropriate forms of tourism or types of tourist	Fly in – fly out visitors Encourage anti-social behaviour Schoolies week every holiday Encouraging inappropriate development

The final Make it Fail exercise, generated a number of themes that are summarised in Table 1. The discussion in this exercise began at a broader level with some participants responding with actions that would undermine the viability of tourism in general. Others began by thinking about general costs of tourism for local residents. Several comments were about leadership and training reflecting a key area of convergence between social and human capital at a community level. As the discussion continued a focus on the more specific links between tourism and social capital began to emerge. Three related themes connected tourism to social capital – planning, communication and appropriate tourism. Participants argued that a failure to involve local residents in a meaningful way in tourism planning and to encourage effective communication between tourism managers and planners and local residents, could result in conflict and inappropriate forms of tourism.

Conflict in particular, was considered to be a major threat to local social capital and the wider discussion around conflict was consistent with the previous research into tourism impacts on social capital (Ashley, 2000; Jones, 2005). While previous research focussed on competition for tourism and inequitable access to tourism and its benefits as the prime sources of conflict, workshop participants made much stronger links between inappropriate forms of tourism and community conflict. The workshop participants also highlighted limited or poor communication about tourism and between the tourism sector and other groups as contributing to both the development of inappropriate types of tourism and wider community conflict about tourism.

### **Summary and Implications**

Taken together the responses to the three exercises generated a consistent pattern of linkages between features of tourism development and the maintenance and development of social capital in the destination community. Figure 3 provides an overview of this pattern. At the centre is effective local resident engagement in all aspects of tourism, not just planning, but also tourism activity and benefits. This is the central mechanism that links all the other elements to the development of appropriate forms of tourism and the key aspects of social capital – trust, cooperation, networks. This local resident engagement is more likely to happen if there is strong community leadership, training and education, both for tourism and about tourism planning, effective communication about tourism, and integration between tourism and other sectors.

This argument that effective local resident engagement in tourism should be central in tourism planning and management is not surprising as it is an often cited doctrine in academic literature on sustainable tourism development (Timothy, 2007). But the participant discussion reinforced the common absence of programs to encourage and support this type of engagement in practice. Moscardo's (2011b) review of tourism planning models concluded that resident engagement or public participation in tourism planning was rarely given serious consideration. Further, when it was included, it was

typically presented as a way to improve efficiencies for tourism developers rather than as a way to improve benefits for destination communities. Similarly, the focus was on using public participation as a way to encourage resident support for the forms of development deemed most suitable for tourists or tourism businesses, not as a mechanism for matching the style and type of tourism to the needs of the destination residents. The results reported from this workshop suggested that programs for public participation in tourism need to be conducted both earlier in, and more often throughout, the planning process and to more explicitly and critically evaluate tourism as a tool for the destination community development, not as an end in itself.

The workshop activities also introduced five new dimensions of tourism development which are included in the circles in Figure 3. Firstly, the workshop participants suggested that effective communication and training/education needed to be based on both better evidence of tourism benefits and new ways to measure tourism success. In post workshop communications several participants commented on the potential value of the community capitals approach as a way to measure tourism success, either instead of, or as well as, current measures of visitor numbers and expenditure.

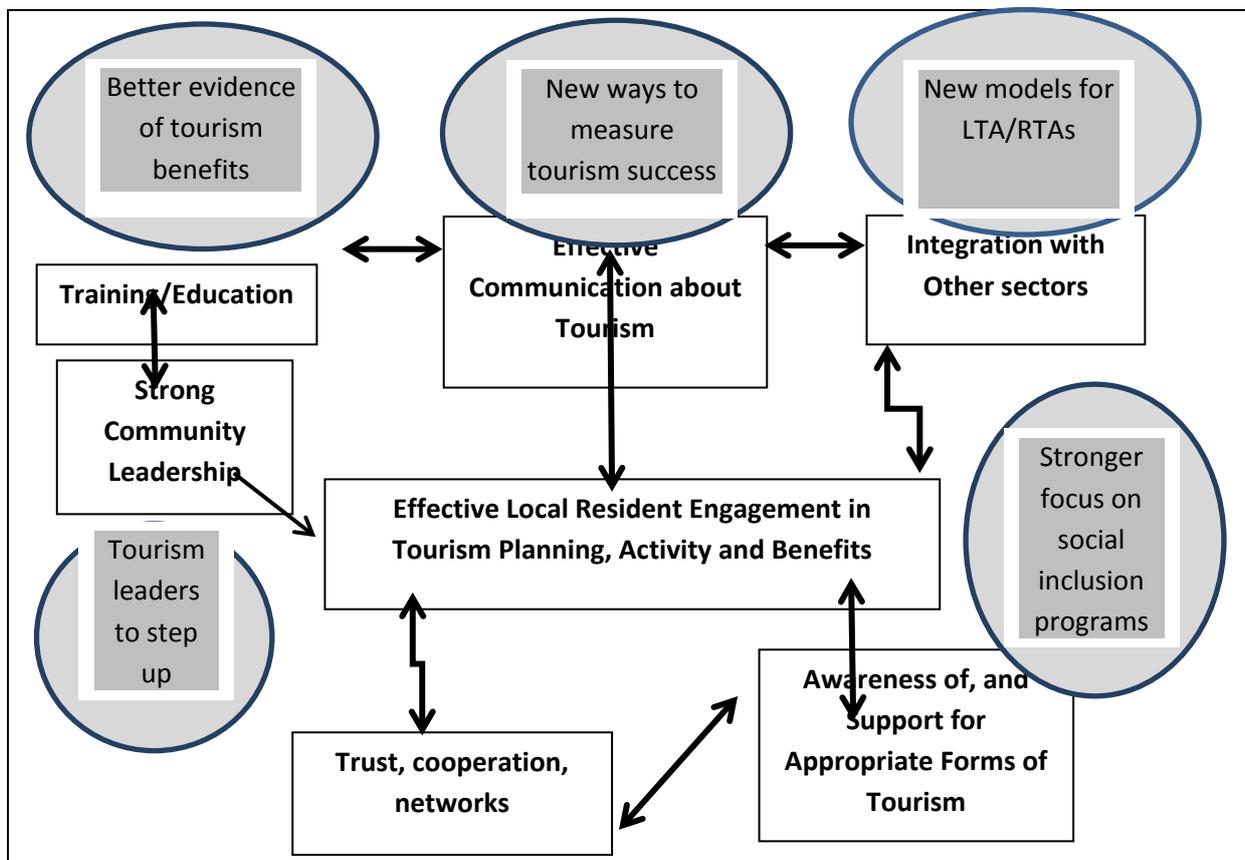


Figure 3: Pathways for Building Social Capital in Destination Communities

In combination these elements of better measures and evidence, improved communication, effective training/education and integration with other sectors were seen as dependent on new models of regional and local tourist organisations. The fourth new dimension was that of finding ways to get tourism leaders to step up to the challenge of wider community leadership. One whole section of the futures wheel discussed the value of having tourism leaders, with their passion for the destination, take on a greater a greater role in community development beyond tourism. This was also consistent with the fifth new dimension, which was the need for tourism planners and businesses to focus much more on social inclusion programs and the use of tourism as a way to reach out to and improve the well-being of disadvantaged groups within the destination community.

### **Conclusions and Future Directions**

The workshop activity reported in this paper was an example of an effective action research project. It generated new options for practice that the participants could use in their destinations, encouraged critical reflections amongst the practitioners about their assumptions and current actions, and identified a wider range of relationships that linked aspects of tourism development to both positive and negative impacts on destination community social capital. The research also offers a series of challenges to tourism educators highlighting the need to incorporate topics related to social inclusion, public communication, empowerment of others, innovation, leadership and a community well-being in tourism education programs.

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