

## **Tropical Communities as Resources for Tourism or Tourism as a Resource for Tropical Communities: Changing the Perspective by Applying a Community Well-being Framework in the Mekong Delta**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this paper is to review the barriers to sustainable tourism development faced by rural and developing regions and to explore the notion of tourism and its potential contribution to community well-being, with a focus on Flora's community capitals framework. A description is provided of a case study focusing on the development of agri-tourism in the Can Tho region of the Mekong Delta. The results of the initial stages of a mixed method approach to the application of a community well-being framework to tourism development are presented. It will conclude by identifying the challenges of applying models of tourism conceptualised in developed western economies in a developing economy with a socialist republic political regime. In particular, implications for tourism development policy, planning and education to support more sustainable approaches in tourism governance and development are highlighted.

Key Words: sustainable tourism, community well-being, agri-tourism

### **Introduction**

People and place are at the core of the tourism experience. According to Hall (2003), the creation and representation of place is a social process and, by its very nature, tourism is explicitly related to the notions of place through tourism promotion and development. Saarinen (2014) emphasises that the definition of touristic space as being an "area dominated by tourist activities or one that is organised for meeting the needs of visitors" (cf. Getz, 1999), means that the needs and values of the customers and the industry, not the local people, are the leading guidelines in market-driven economic activities like tourism.

Wearing and McDonald (2002) also emphasise that this interactive space is a place where institutionalized beliefs, worldviews and intuitions come into play. They emphasise that new meanings do not just ‘happen’ in the interaction between people, rather they can be seen as the outcome of a long history of complex power/ knowledge relations, which are institutionalized in both society and in the individual.

If tourism destinations are conceptualized as spaces of production and consumption in which different interest groups contest the appropriation and use of space in accordance with a range of distinctive values and interests, then tourism spaces reflect the contest over the meaning of an ‘appropriate’ use to which particular places should be devoted (Bianchi, 2003). However, whether it be in the developed world or in less developed countries, tourism development has tended to be dominated by sectional interests and by an institutional ideology that inherently represents tourism as a ‘good’ form of economic development (Hall, 2003). Tourism’s role in regional development is often seen as positive, and tourism is identified as a promising solution to various social and economic challenges faced by rural, remote and less developed regions. In this context, regional development is usually evaluated in terms of tourism employment, tourism revenue and tourist flows. Tosun (2005) points out that central governments in many developing countries have accepted tourism as a relatively easy, effective and cheap instrument to achieve short term objectives and the opportunity to derive foreign exchange from tourism export and employment created by tourism are opportunities not easily ignored in developing countries. However, regional development (compared to growth) involves deeper and more qualitative goals, referring to an improvement in the quality of life and well-being of the people, which are not automatic results of tourism growth indicators. Thus, based on the original conceptualization of sustainable development sustainability in tourism development should primarily be connected with the needs of people—not a certain industry—and the use of natural and cultural resources in a way that will safeguard human needs and provide quality of life and well-being in the future (Saarinen, 2014).

The purpose of this paper is to review the barriers to sustainable tourism development faced by rural and developing regions and to explore the notion of tourism and its potential contribution to community well-being, with a focus on Flora’s community capitals framework. It will then provide a description of a case study focusing on the development of agri-tourism in the Can Tho region of the Mekong Delta. The results of the initial stages of a mixed method approach to the application of a community well-being framework to tourism development will be described. It will conclude by identifying the challenges of applying models of tourism conceptualised in developed western economies in a developing economy with a socialist republic political regime. In particular, implications for tourism development policy, planning and education to support more sustainable approaches in tourism governance and development will be highlighted.

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## Review of Literature

Unfortunately, the reality of tourism for many peripheral and developing destinations is that it rarely lives up to what is promised and often results in community conflict and concern. As Simpson (2007) points out, tourism is portrayed both as destroyer of culture by undermining social norms and economies, degrading social structures, stripping communities of individuality; and as a saviour of the poor and disadvantaged, by providing opportunities and economic benefits, promoting social exchange and enhancing livelihoods. Simpson advocates for changes in the business and management of tourism and in the roles and activities of stakeholders to embrace the complexities and multifarious issues of delivering benefits to destination communities.

The community-based tradition is connected to the idea that tourism can contribute to a better social, economic, and environmental future in a local scale by stressing the needs of local people. From the sustainable development perspective, the sustainable use of resources and the environment and the well-being of communities are goals to which sustainable tourism could and should contribute— if the industry's role is also seen to be beneficial to that process by groups other than the industry itself. From the community-based perspective, sustainability refers to the maximum levels of the known (or perceived) impacts of tourism that are permissible in a certain time-space context before the negative impacts are considered too disturbing from the perspectives of specific social, cultural, political or economic actors who possess sufficient knowledge and power over chosen indicators and criteria (Saarienen 2014). Therefore, as emphasised by Saarinen (2014), the issues of power and knowledge are key and the question of whether these changes are acceptable or not depends on specific societal and/or individual values, attitudes, knowledge and priorities concerning the role and impacts of tourism. Bianchi's (2003) suggests that the ability of the different interest groups and collective actors to control and influence the outcomes of tourism development needs to be examined in relation to their location within the hierarchical structure of social relations in the community through which they interact with wider social systems. It is evident that there is often a general lack of recognition at the community level of the complexity of the global tourism system, where much of the activity takes place outside of the destination. Further, as Bianchi (2003) observes, tourism is embedded within diverse capitalist formations and shaped by a variety of state agencies, ranging from the Anglo-American market-oriented variety to the more interventionist approach of several continental European and East Asian governments. Bianchi (2004) emphasises that, while considerable attention has been devoted to the evaluation of the relative merits of different policies and planning instruments associated with the implementation of sustainable forms of tourism, it is not often the case that they are considered in the context of either the distinctive political economies into which tourism is inserted, or the political environments and power struggles which shape and contest such policies.

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## Tourism and Communities

As noted above, tourism-led economic growth does not necessarily translate into benefits for the people in destination communities and their environment. Tourism can be a potential and fruitful tool for sustainable development, but it may not always be the most favourable use of resources, and locally “sustainable tourism” may in practice be unsustainable globally and/or locally in the long term (Saarinen, 2014). The challenge for researchers is to critically examine the links between tourism and community well-being in more detail in order to identify the ways in which tourism can make a positive contribution to regional and developing communities. Although political acceptance of a participatory strategy, decentralization of the public administration system, and enacting relevant legal measurements are essential to initiate a participatory tourism development strategy, these may not be enough to make this a reality without empowering local people to take an active role in tourism development (Tosun, 2005). But, as Bianchi (2003) rightfully cautions, if the basic needs for food and shelter are what concern people in local tourist destinations the most, do they have the motivation and are they ready to participate in tourism? Do people at the local level have the necessary skills and training to provide meaningful input? How will community participation be carried out under wide-spread political and economic instability? In addition, where tourism development in a particular locality is concerned, the different actors involved will be endowed with unequal capacities to exploit the economic opportunities which present themselves, depending upon their ability to conceive, appropriate, regulate, and control the means of tourist production (Bianchi, 2003). A high degree of community participation in the decision making process of development projects may exist, but if local elite or foreign interests own major industries and land, any participation by the broader community will mean little in terms of economic gains and inevitably fall under manipulation or pseudo participation. It is often assumed that the greater the degree of community participation is, the better development or planning will be. However, this may not be the case in reality due to issues such as paternalism, racism, lack of financial resources and lack of expertise, in addition to the other structural problems in many developing countries and peripheral areas of the developed world (Tosun, 2005).

According to McCool (in McCool, Butler, Buckley, Weaver and Wheeler, 2013), low income and emerging economies have little resilience when it comes to disturbances induced from forces and decisions exogenous to the system. Further, if a systems view is taken and tourism is conceptualised as one component of a social-ecological system, we can alternatively frame tourism development as an intervention (which holds economic, social, cultural and political dimensions) used to enhance the system’s resilience. In so framing tourism in this way, the focus becomes what the intervention will do to enhance the ability of the system to confront and respond to disturbances, and we may come up with innovative development initiatives that place prominence on learning. This view of sustainable tourism turns the question from one of how to sustain tourism activity to one of what it is that tourism should sustain. Sustainable tourism in this sense, according to

McCool, is not a type or physical scale of business, rather it is a strategy to build or maintain system resilience.

Moscardo (2011a) conducted a systematic review of case studies of tourism development in rural and peripheral regions to identify barriers to effective tourism development, while Aref (2011) provided a comprehensive review of the literature on barriers to effective community capacity building for tourism. The range of barriers identified by these reviews include:

- Limited market analysis or a reliance on external agents for limited market information;
- Limited control over, and involvement or participation in, tourism planning by community members;
- Lack of coordination of community stakeholders;
- Poor infrastructure development;
- Dominance of external agents in the development process;
- Limited or no formal planning;
- Conflict over tourism development within communities;
- Limited community awareness of potential negative impacts ;
- False expectations about potential benefits from tourism;
- Limited connections to tourism distribution systems;
- Financial barriers
- Lack of tourism leadership from within the community;
- Dependency on government and lack of effective and strong government institutions;
- Lack of recognition of local power as a component of community development; and
- Lack of skills (eg. lack of problem solving skills) and capital within destination communities.

The barriers identified are particularly problematic for rural and remote regions in developing countries. Bushell and Eagles (2007) emphasise that tourism, as a phenomenon of affluent contemporary societies, is a particularly difficult concept to grasp for people in developing countries and, as a result, tourism development may be more difficult to achieve than other development activities (Tosun, 2005). While local people have been working in traditional sectors such as agriculture and fishery, central governments have initiated tourism in their localities often at the encouragement of international tour operators and multinational companies that have aimed at opening more and more localities for tourism. The concept of a participatory tourism development approach appears not to have been fully considered in the context of developing nations who face many complexities, including and in addition to those identified by Moscardo and Aref, lack of transparency, political instability, lack of information and data about developmental issues, and undemocratic special circumstances, which make local participation in tourism development processes challenging. Other relevant challenges in many developing nations include growing income

inequality, inadequate human resources, low levels of capital accumulation, dependency on primary products and high levels of favouritism and nepotism (Tosun, 2005). In fact, Tosun (2005) believes that the emergence of a participatory tourism development strategy within the dynamics of developing countries is not probable in the foreseeable future owing to the prevailing socio-cultural, political and economic limitations.

Stemming from a lack of understanding of the tourism system many locals have a limited view of 'tourists' who are perceived on the whole to be pleasant, happy people often with good intentions, rather than tourism – of which tourists are actually only a small part. The focus for the communities tends to be on competing to attract more of the 'right type' of tourists to solve their economic problems - that is treating the destination as a resource for tourism rather than tourism as a resource for the destination community. If destinations see themselves only as resources, then the power over tourism resides outside the community – control gets given to the tourism experts and the distribution system and the destination changes to suit the needs and demands of what is perceived to be the wants of tourists. This may suggest that tourism growth in developing countries is beyond the control of these countries and, therefore, implementation of a participatory tourism development approach is largely at the mercy of foreigners such as the international tour operators and multinational companies. Tosun (2005) emphasises the need to recognise that it is difficult for developing countries to stop catering to these business interests given their limited options for attracting the much needed capital for industrialization. There is a need to move away from the often over-generalised nature of the political economy of tourism - which often places tourism destinations at the mercy of transnational capital, and to construct analyses which are sensitive to the specific features of local/regional/national capital formations (Bianchi, 2003).

### **Tourism and Community Well-being**

Mc Cool et al (2013) claim that the principal question facing tourism in the 21st century is the extent to which it can contribute to the resilience of communities in this era of integration and globalization. Researchers who study tourism impacts, especially in the social domain, have been challenged to develop stronger theoretical frameworks (Saarinen, 2006; Wall & Mathieson, 2006). In response to this challenge recent papers have looked to the literature on community well-being, the idea that well-being depends on multiple forms of capital, and the relationship between well-being, capitals and sustainability as a way to better understand the changes associated with tourism (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2010; Macbeth et al., 2004). According to both Moscardo (2009) and McGehee, Lea, O'Bannon, and Perdue (2010) a better way to understand tourism impacts is to identify the ways in which tourism and/or tourists affect the different forms of capital available to destination communities. While many have written about the various forms of capital, the framework for this paper utilizes Flora's (2004) depiction within the context of community development (Figure 1). Flora incorporated seven forms of capital in her model: financial, human, built,

natural, cultural, political, and social. The Destination Community Wellbeing (DCW) approach provides a new way of thinking about the relationships between tourism and destinations and identifies in more detail how tourism detracts from or contributes to sustainability for destination regions (Moscardo et al, 2013).

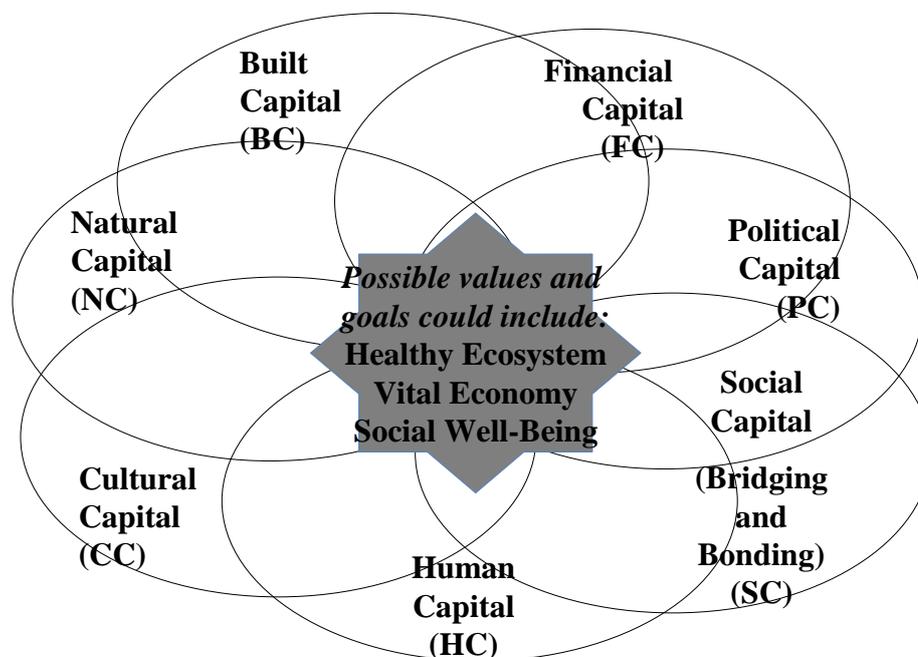
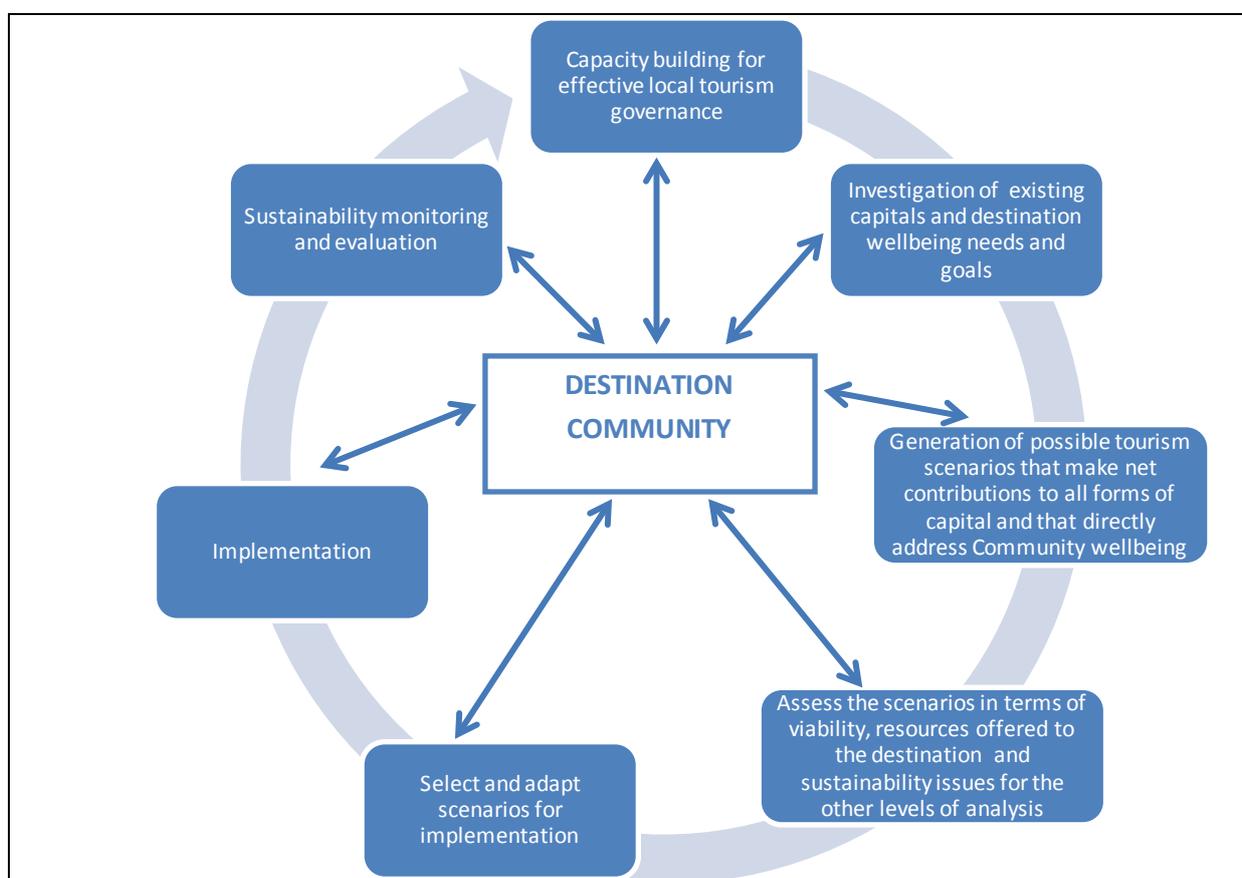


Figure 1: Flora's (2004) Framework of Community Capitals

Financial capital includes opportunities for loans and credit, numerous investment opportunities, and the existence of tax credits and other business-friendly structures. Human capital includes numerous opportunities for professional educational and skill-building. Built capital includes the physical structures of a community, for example, buildings, road and highway systems, mass transit, and public facilities. Natural capital includes diversity of plant and animal life, opportunities for interaction with nature, and high quality of air and water. Cultural capital includes the preservation of local stories, history, art and craft forms, traditional foods and ways of preparation. Political capital includes accessibility to power through channels of local, regional, state and federal government. Social capital, and in particular, tourism-related social capital, will be described in much greater detail below (Emery and Flora, 2006 and Fey, Bregendahl, and Flora, 2006).

Flora also argued that each community possesses a unique mix of the various forms of capital based on its residents. Together, the various types and levels within each form of capital create an overall economic environment, or climate. In order for communities to thrive, the residents should determine their overall goals (the centre of the model), and then work to match the various capitals with those goals in an iterative process. As destination communities develop their capacity for tourism governance the CW framework re-

conceptualizes tourism as a tool for destination stakeholders and sets the main goal of tourism planning as supporting improvements in wellbeing for destination communities and achieving improvements to sustainability at a number of levels (Figure 2). Instead of assessing the resources available for tourism, this approach argues for an assessment of the stock of the various capitals available to destination residents, and the major issues that face the destination. The aim being to determine the destination needs rather than tourist attraction potential. Once these needs are identified, the process moves to the generation of tourism options that might address these needs (Moscardo and Murphy, 2014). The development of agri-tourism in the southern Mekong Delta provides an interesting case study and opportunity to apply a community-wellbeing approach to sustainable tourism development.



**Figure 2.** A Community Well-Being Approach to Destination Tourism Planning (Moscardo and Murphy (2014).

### Can Tho and the Mekong Delta

Can Tho is located in the centre of the Mekong River Delta Region in Vietnam. The Mekong River Delta has an equatorial monsoon climate and is an inter-laced system of rivers, channels and ditches. Can Tho is situated on the Hau River, which is 65km long and has a population of 1.9m (854 people/km<sup>2</sup>). It is one of only five cities in the country to be acknowledged as a centrally governed city, along with Ha Noi, Ho Chi Minh, Da Nang and Hai

Phong. The administration units of Can Tho include five urban districts - Ninh Kieu, Cai Rang, Binh Thu, O Mon, That Not, and four rural districts – Phong Dien, Co Do, Vinh Tran and Thoi Lai, with 85 communes, wards and towns. The average annual income per capita in the region is \$US 1950. Over 155,000 hectares of agricultural area in the region is used for rice, vegetable and fruit cultivation. According to the tourist guide book produced by Can Tho Promotion, it has inherited the culture of the southern region and so its tourism focuses on eco-tourism in the form of visits to local gardens, orchards and channels to see local farming habits and cultural values. Wonderful food and fruits are identified as one of the most attractive things of Can Tho tourism. The region currently attracts approximately 1.1m domestic visitors per annum, and 190,000 international visitors, primarily from France, Germany and the United States. Length of stay in the region is usually 1-2 nights. Funding from Australia and Japan has resulted in the recent construction of two bridges across the Mekong River which has substantially improved road access to Can Tho from Ho Chi Minh City. There has also been recent upgrades to the airport, however, the only significant inbound connection is from Hanoi Airport. Once in the region, road infrastructure is problematic in facilitating access to the Phong Dien District, but of course the river itself provides direct access by boat, indeed some of the orchards are only accessible by boat, and the experience on the Mekong is central to understanding daily life in the Delta.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) evaluation study of the ‘Tourism Sector in the Greater Mekong Subregion’ (2008) identifies several important development challenges for the tourism in the Mekong regions of Lao, Cambodia and Vietnam which are consistent with those identified in the literature: inequitable distribution of tourism benefits, with relatively little impact on the poor and socially disadvantaged groups; and the weak national and subregional organizational and human resource capacity for tourism planning, development, and management. Other constraints focus at the subregional (local) level include weak capacity for the development of tour products and marketing programs; limited private sector participation in tourism development, management, and marketing; insufficient tourism-related infrastructure to spread the benefits of tourism more widely; and weak capacity for management of negative social impacts. The evaluation study further identified issues with the quality of service of small- and medium-sized tourism enterprises and the weak capacities of provincial and district tourism officials due to the lack knowledge to undertake basic tourism planning, marketing, regulatory, and monitoring functions and to mainstream poverty reduction into their plans. Managers of tourism heritage sites were identified as lacking the competencies needed to manage sites on a sustainable basis. Finally, it is claimed that the educational institutions responsible for improving the knowledge of tourism public sector officials lack the training programs and trainers required to strengthen capacities in these areas. Unless effectively addressed, these problems threaten the competitiveness and sustainability of the tourism sector (ADB, 2008)

Over the past decade, the ADB Greater Mekong Project financed (approximately \$8.5m) a range of tourism development initiatives in the region. In Vietnam, the focus was on two regions adjacent to Can Tho - An Giang and Tien Giang provinces. The project implementation was administered by the respective provincial people's committees - with a focus on infrastructure development of river tourism piers in An Giang and Tien Giang, and capacity building and pro-poor community based tourism initiatives, and by the National Administration of Tourism with a focus on cooperative programs across the Greater Mekong Region focusing on issues such as hotel classification systems, immigration and border checkpoints, and tourism statistics (ADB, 2013). The 2008 evaluation study revealed that asymmetric distribution of benefits and costs in the tourism sector remain a challenge, with the benefits of tourism largely bypassing the majority of poor in the GMS. The need for new models of tourism development that involve poor local communities and include the development of CBT products in areas attractive for tourists where the poor live, and the establishment of supply chains that increase the contribution of the tourism sector to the local economy was identified (ADB, 2008).

## **Methods**

Weaver (in McCool et al, 2013) claims that, to have any impact on tourism development, as academics we need to spend more time in the industries, communities and institutions that embody the tourism sector of the real world to be able to identify what people need and want, what positive and negative effects are resulting from tourism, etc. For this to be effective, he emphasises, the spatial scale has to be compressed whilst the temporal scale has to be expanded. That is, the academic must be willing to show commitment to a particular destination – perhaps just a single village – for an extended time. In line with this approach, the authors have developed a working relationship with staff in the School of Economics and Business Administration (SEBA) at Can Tho University who have signed an MOU with the Phong Dien District to assist in the development of the agri-tourism potential of the district by developing the capacity of farmers to connect to tourism and tourists. Agri-tourism was identified by the Central Government as the focus for tourism development in the Phong Dien District, which has many tropical fruit farms and is home to one of two floating markets in the Can Tho region. The focus of the involvement of the authors is on building the capacity of SEBA staff, who have strong skills in marketing, economics and quantitative data analysis, but not necessarily in understanding the complexities of the global tourism system and of sustainable tourism destination management, to apply a DCW approach to tourism planning, and to work with them to develop the capacity of local tourism stakeholders to implement this approach.

To date two workshops, meetings with key stakeholders, and site visits in the region to agri-tourism products at varying stages of development have been conducted. The initial workshop, with a focus on the sustainable development of agri-tourism in the Phong Dien district, was held on 28 June 2013 at Can Tho University with 25 stakeholders from tourism,

government and agricultural sectors. Participants included local government agencies (Can Tho Promotion; Center of Promotion, Commerce and Tourism – Phong Dien District; Can Tho City Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism), and Can Tho office of the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The workshop began with a presentation by two of the authors introducing the Destination Community Wellbeing Community approach to tourism development and sharing examples and lessons learned from analysis of tourism development in other regions and destinations, including a range of pathways for primary producers to connect to and benefit from tourism. Group discussions and a short questionnaire were then used to elicit responses from the stakeholders regarding priorities for improving quality of life in the region, perceptions on tourism's potential contribution to it, perceived barriers to sustainable tourism development, and priorities for community capacity building for tourism. On this visit a meeting was also held with key university staff to define the scope of the project and to identify opportunities to apply for government funding assistance.

During a second visit, from 28 November to 2 December 2013, two of the authors conducted a second workshop focused on developing the research capacity of staff and graduate students in SEBA at Can Tho University and a research agenda to inform decisions about the development of agri-tourism in the Mekong Delta. The objective was to work with local researchers to not only more systematically identify the key stakeholders in the process and the information required from them, but to discuss the most appropriate approaches to data collection in the local context. To this end, examples of qualitative and quantitative research projects focusing on similar information needs and stakeholders in regional tropical Australia were presented to the group, who then discussed how these approaches could be adapted and applied in the region.

Site visits conducted during the two visits include a tour of Phong Dien District and on site meetings with four orchard farmers at varying stages of development in terms of their involvement with agri-tourism, the Cai Rang and Phong Dien floating markets, Can Tho Ancient Market, and a visit to My Khanh Ecotourism Village, which is the most popular attraction in the Phong Dien district, particularly with domestic tourists. A day trip was also taken to adjacent An Giang province to experience a visit to the floating village.

## **Results and Discussion**

The results of the first workshop revealed that priorities for improvements to quality of life and tourism's contribution to this emphasised human, built and natural capitals and included; increased employment/income for locals, more and improved infrastructure, increased awareness of the need for environmental protection, and education and skill development (Table 1).

| <b>Table 1. Tourism’s potential contribution to quality of life</b> | <b># of responses</b> |
|---|-----------------------|
| <b>Increased employment/income for locals</b>                       | 8                     |
| <b>Improve/increased infrastructure</b>                             | 7                     |
| <b>Increased awareness of environmental protection</b>              | 5                     |
| <b>Increased education / skills</b>                                 | 5                     |
| <b>Improve local life</b>   | 5                     |
| <b>Sustainable (tourism) development</b>                            | 5                     |
| <b>Increased sales/market access of agricultural products</b>       | 4                     |
| <b>Community capacity / participation</b>                           | 4                     |
| <b>Pride in cultural traditions</b>                                 | 2                     |
| <b>Cultural exchange</b>  | 2                     |
| <b>Other</b>  | 9                     |

In an attempt to identify priority areas for capacity building, the main barriers to the sustainable development of agri-tourism were identified and were consistent with those identified in the literature but also included some specific to the local context and the focus on linking agriculture with tourism. The three most commonly identified barriers were problems with the supply chain to the tourism industry, seasonality of production, lack of understanding of tourist markets and availability of or access to suitable land. Primary producer’s lack of understanding of the tourism distribution system, problems with the tourism supply chain, and lack of training and education in the tourism industry were also identified as challenges (Table 2).

| <b>Table 2. Barriers to sustainable development of agri-tourism</b>             | <b># of responses</b> |
|---|-----------------------|
| <b>Problems with the supply chain</b>   | 20                    |
| <b>Seasonality of production</b>  | 12                    |
| <b>Lack of understanding of tourist markets</b>                                 | 12                    |
| <b>Availability of or access to suitable land</b>                               | 11                    |
| <b>Primary producers’ lack of understanding the tourism distribution system</b> | 9                     |
| <b>Lack of training &amp; education of primary producers</b>                    | 7                     |
| <b>Lack of training &amp; education in the tourism industry</b>                 | 7                     |
| <b>Lack of infrastructure</b>   | 5                     |
| <b>Other</b>  | 9                     |

The three most important strategies suggested to overcome these barriers (Table 3) focused on improvements to human, social and built capital:

1. Training in the tourism sector, including market knowledge, the distribution system, sustainable tourism development, and foreign language and communication skills;
2. Strengthening links (vertical and horizontal) between tourism operators and service providers and across regions/tourism business networks; and
3. Investment in infrastructure.

| <b>Table 3. Strategies for overcoming barriers</b>  | <b># of responses</b> |
|---|-----------------------|
| <b>Training in the tourism sector including market knowledge, distribution system, sustainable tourism development, foreign language and communication skills</b> | 15                    |
| <b>Strengthening links (vertical and horizontal) between operators and service providers and across regions / tourism business networks</b>                       | 9                     |
| <b>Investment in infrastructure</b>   | 7                     |
| <b>Training for primary producers including market access</b>   | 6                     |
| <b>Develop new attractions and unique tourism products including tours, food and cultural festivals</b>   | 5                     |
| <b>Develop community capacity</b>   | 4                     |
| <b>Develop government policy on tourism (all levels of government)</b>  | 4                     |
| <b>Improve community perception of tourism</b>  | 3                     |
| <b>Invest in tourism services</b>   | 2                     |
| <b>Consistent advice/order from management organization or tourism experts</b>  | 2                     |
| <b>Develop policy and environment to attract investment/resources (government)</b>  | 2                     |
| <b>Increase investment capital/budget</b>   | 2                     |
| <b>Improve and diversify supply chains</b>  | 2                     |
| <b>Other (eg. diversify products to address seasonality, increase distribution of profits to local community, organise farmers)</b>                               | 12                    |
|   |                       |

In addition, to begin the process of identifying possible tourism scenarios based on the strengths in existing community capitals and tourism successes, responses were also sought to help identify the unique features, key factors for success based on existing product/experience, and potential opportunities for the development of agri-tourism experiences in the district. A range of responses were provided by participants, with the opportunity to experience the local rural way of life and culture through experiences such as the floating markets and farm/home stays and visits identified as important opportunities. Food related festivals and markets were also identified. The responses emphasise the perceived importance of cultural capital to the tourism experience.

The site visits on on-site meetings provided further insight and identified some key issues associated with the existing approach to tourism development. Five tropical fruit orchards were visited in the district, with experiences which ranged from day excursions with minimal organised activities, to the inclusion of options for fishing and meals, to ones with one to many (My Khanh Village) overnight accommodation options and a somewhat eclectic mix of attractions and activities. There is a danger of replication of experiences not only within the district but across the broader Mekong Region. There is a lack of clarity around the labels attached to similar experiences and an inconsistency in the interpretation and use of terminology such as eco-tourism, ecological tourism, and agri-tourism with more broadly accepted definitions in international markets.

Much of the current product relies on organised tour groups from Hanoi and Saigon, many of whom are domestic day trip tourists. So not only does the market knowledge and power exist outside the region, the quality of the experience does not necessarily meet standards or expectations of international tourists. In fact there is a general lack of consideration of potential niche markets (eg. volunteer tourists, responsible travellers etc.) that might best suit the experiences the region is able to offer and who are more likely to contribute to initiatives to improve quality of life in the district. An opportunity also exists to take more direct control over distribution to niche markets by developing a cooperative booking system through the local tourism promotion bureau. There is variability in the style and standard accommodation provided, from basic homestays to purpose built cabins. A better understanding of expectations of international tourists with respect to home stays is needed to ensure that the limited capital available to farmers is not wasted on providing unnecessary luxuries and amenities based on assumptions of what international tourists demand. Issues around language skills and the ability to interpret and present the story of rural life in the Mekong Delta are ones that should be addressed through capacity building. This needs to occur with not only with the farmer's themselves, but also tour guides and with the tourism agencies who, for example, can improve the existing content, translation and distribution of travel guidebooks promoting the region. There is also evidence of an expectation of outside funding assistance (ie. foreign aid) to build desired tourism infrastructure, with little consideration of a thorough business analysis to assess the viability of the enterprises or consideration of the most appropriate scale of development to maximise ROI and minimise risk. This identifies the need to training and capacity building around business planning.

In order to achieve any success in the development of agri-tourism to contribute to community well-being in the district, the capacity building issues need to be addressed through targeted tourism research, training and infrastructure development activities. As emphasised by Moscardo (2011b), a critical element in community capacity-building processes is the enhancement of knowledge that destination residents have of tourism, its forms and its impacts, both positive and negative. In addition the ADB evaluation report identified the need to improve the knowledge and capacity of government agencies and

educational institutions to facilitate tourism planning and development. The focus of the second workshop in Dec 2013 was on working with the SEBA researchers to identify the following list of stakeholders: the farmers; the local community; local government agencies (eg. Dept of Sport, Culture, Tourism, Dept of Agriculture; Center for Promoting Tourism Development, People's committee, Finance Dept); the Southwest Management Board (regional linkages); tourism operators (eg. Cần Thơ industry, tour operators and agencies in Hà Nội and Sài Gòn, inbound tour operators, and tour guides); educational and training institutions (eg. Can Tho University and others in the region, colleges, high schools); tourists (actual and potential); tourism consultants/ experts; the travel media; street retailers and vendors; and tourism industry associations.

In particular, the discussion focused on the information needed from the farmers, communities and government agencies and the best approaches to obtaining this information. In-depth interviews with farmers and key community stakeholders, and focus group sessions with government and industry representatives were identified as viable approaches but specific issues around power and local political structures were also considered, such as: identifying and accessing relevant farmer and community stakeholders with the assistance, but not influence, of the people's party; interview techniques to gain the trust of stakeholders and encourage open and honest responses; neutral locations for conducting focus groups; and strategies for sharing information and results with stakeholders. Work with the staff at Can Tho university continues to develop cost effective approaches to conducting relevant research, which include focusing local graduate student research on relevant topics and using the project as a case study in relevant subjects of the authors' university with the aim of developing source market research to provide insight into tourist's perceptions and expectations of Vietnam and of agri-tourism experiences, particularly farm-stays.

To further develop the first four steps of the DCW approach, the next step will be to engage more widely with the local community, given that to date only the voices of those farmers who want to connect to tourism have been heard, to understand the priorities for improvements to community wellbeing and quality of life, and to explore the desired ways in which tourism can contribute to this improvement. This is particularly important given that there is no evidence of broad community consultation in the decision to identify agri-tourism as a priority for the district and that the individual farmers may not necessarily be making decisions that take into consideration the broader impacts on the community. This means that at the moment the power lies within the government agencies and those few in the community who have access to land and some capital to develop tourism. The challenge here is to not only ensure that the application of the destination community well-being framework reflects the way in which the locals interpret and value the capitals, but that the approaches to engagement work within, but are not inhibited by the political and social structures within the community. It is important to acknowledge that some of the accepted approaches to community consultation may be neither appropriate nor effective in a

communist country with a developing economy, and that western affluent notions of the community capitals and quality of life may not have the same meanings in this context. The partnership with local SEBA staff is critical to achieving this given their understanding of the local culture and power and governance structures with the district and communes, as well as to act as interpreters and translators.

The second step should then incorporate tourist market research to help identify and prioritise the tourism scenarios that best fit the needs and resources of the community and that will attract visitors who are more likely to make a positive contribution to its wellbeing, and to link the community through tourism marketing and distribution systems to these appropriate tourist markets. The challenge here is not to simply replicate what is already offered in the region and in other regions, but to focus on developing experiences that reflect the unique stories and ways of life of that community. This is a particular challenge in the Mekong Delta where there is a history of significant investment by government and external aid agencies in economic development projects in the various regions, but, due to existing management regimes for regional development which lack planning guidelines and fragile connections between provinces, there is inconsistency and overlap between, and within, regions. A second challenge is to develop the capacity and systems to provide the community with more control over the distribution of their product and more direct access to target markets.

It is hoped that the ongoing partnership with Can Tho University staff will provide better tourism outcomes for the region as a result of the conscious effort of the researchers to not simply apply existing development approaches from the western world in a one-off study, but to work with key stakeholders in the region to adapt the community well-being framework to the local situation. Working with the local researchers, who better understand the community structures and power bases, will hopefully facilitate the application of knowledge and expertise developed from experience researching and working with the regional tourism industry in tropical Australia. The opportunity through aid funding to expose those farmers who are interested in engaging with tourism to some best practice examples existing outside of Vietnam in terms of study tours to other regions and through training and education in region on the key areas for capacity building has been identified. Unfortunately, opportunities for international aid funding are diminishing as a result of changes to Australian Federal Government Foreign Aid Policy and shifts away from tourism in the priorities of government aid agencies and NGO's in the broader region. The path to enhanced DCW through sustainable agri-tourism development in the region will not be straightforward or short, and in the end may not be achievable at all. But if the community well-being approach is successful then better long term outcomes may result for both the farmers and their communities as a result of their ability to make more informed decisions about whether or not to engage in tourism development at all, and if so, then about what style and scale and with which target markets. The challenge is to assist the local community to articulate their priorities for improving community well-being and to make informed and

inclusive decisions about the most appropriate development opportunities to achieve these priorities. The time required to do this, particularly given the existing scarcity of grant/aid funding and the myriad of other commitments for all the academics involved will no doubt be longer than desired for the local farmers who are keen to improve their standard of living. This raises important issues for the authors as researchers in terms of making a commitment to working with a community, and to ensuring that realistic expectations and outcomes are set with stakeholders. The critical need is to be honest about both whether tourism can contribute to improving the destination community's well-being, and by how much, about what tourism realistically can and cannot do.

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