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Constructing partnerships for protected area tourism planning in an era of change and messiness

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Management of sustainable tourism in protected areas requires trade-offs between two goals: (1) protection of the key values that form the basis for preservation and (2) allowing access to visitors to enjoy and appreciate those values. These trade-offs occur within a context of lack of societal agreement on goals and lack of scientific agreement on the relationships between causes and effects; two conditions needed to identify and implement effective tourism management actions. While much tourism protected area planning has been dominated by a rational–comprehensive model, this approach is increasingly unsuccessful. In such “messy” contexts, partnerships are important tools in constructing the public interest, because they can provide the consensus and learning needed to develop and implement informed actions. Such partnerships do not just happen, they must be carefully engineered. Protected area tourism planning partnerships are characterized by certain attributes: representativeness, a sense of ownership, a learning focus and attention to relationships. However, these attributes are not easily attained, for they are facilitated by several contextual factors and processes such as trust, political and economic power and equitable access to knowledge.

Keywords: partnerships; protected areas; collaborative planning; tourism planning

Introduction

Management of tourism and visitation in natural protected areas has always been challenging, involving trade-offs between preservation of natural heritage and allowing access for visitors. However, the rapid growth in international travel experienced in the last decade of the twentieth century and projected through the year 2020 (UNWTO, 2001) and the resulting increase and diversification in demand have raised the stakes for decisions about tourism planning in protected areas. “Players” in the tourism industry – operators, lodging, restaurants, services, guides, destination marketing organizations, communities, local residents and protected area stewardship agencies – all now expect to be at the planning table as they often facilitate, and in some cases provide, opportunities for visitors to experience the heritage values contained within these places.

Access to natural and cultural heritage requires infrastructure – lodges, trails, bridges, signs, roads, parking lots, cable cars, visitor or learning centers, administrative facilities and so on – that may also negatively impact the heritage values preserved in the areas that serve as the basis for a viable tourism industry. The visitors themselves, through sheer numbers or inappropriate behavior, may also adversely impact heritage values. Even though tourists benefit from visits to protected areas, the negative consequences of their visits can

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leave lasting impact on the area and on future visitors' experiences (Eagles & McCool, 2002; Leung, Marion, & Farrell, 2001). Thus, tourism planning in protected areas involves addressing two partly competing and partly overlapping goals: preserving heritage and providing access.

Resolving potential conflicts between these two goals is particularly challenging at the intersection of natural heritage protected areas and tourism development. Not only are competing goals involved, but professional cultures (e.g. protected area managers, tourism marketing specialists) and paradigms of management often conflict. Of course, the extent to which these goals are incompatible is a function of the kind of area established. Planning is directed toward resolving these incompatibilities in order to not only sustain the values protected (e.g. outstanding scenery, opportunities for challenge, biodiversity, tangible culture), but also to provide opportunities for economic development and enhance the quality of life of local residents. Such planning involves compromising on one goal to achieve another (Cole, 1995; McCool & Cole, 1998), for example, making trade-offs among competing values and interests.

Protected area tourism planning partnerships represent a vehicle for addressing these issues, that is responding to increasing demands and conflicts while protecting heritage values so that the public interest is safeguarded. This paper presents the conceptual underpinnings of successful, informal partnerships designed to organize societal action to shield protected areas from the threats facing them and provide opportunities for high quality visitor experiences. In so doing, the author's personal experiences with tourism and visitor planning in protected areas are integrated with relevant literature from the fields of sustainable tourism, natural resources management, organizational learning and publicly administered protected area planning, all areas where partnerships increasingly occur. These fields have much to contribute to understanding of why partnerships are formed, how they can be critically examined and what factors contribute to their success or failure. This paper recognizes the goal of sustainable tourism development as a fundamental rationale for protected area tourism planning partnerships (Bramwell & Lane, 2000). Partnerships covered in this paper include the arrangements, both formal and informal, to engage various constituencies in developing policies and proposing actions to manage tourism and public use at formally designated protected areas.

The paper begins by briefly examining the notion of the "public interest", as that concept underlies the most fundamental goal of protected area management, and thus the partnerships developed to facilitate tourism and visitor opportunities. It then turns to reviewing the context within which protected area tourism planning occurs, one characterized by dramatic, in some cases spectacular, social and political change, which challenges conventional methods of planning and thus requires new paradigms that incorporate public engagement. Next, basic considerations in the fundamentals of partnerships are noted. The paper then turns to what could be termed "design criteria", considerations in constructing a planning partnership. This section is followed by a brief discussion of more fundamental conditions needed to implement these design criteria. A brief discussion of the benefits of protected area tourism planning partnerships concludes the substantive part of the paper. This paper is deliberately interpretive and impressionistic, reflecting not only relevant literature, but the author's experience in working with a variety of protected area planning partnerships across a diversity of settings, purposes and scales. It draws, in particular, on traditions of public engagement in the context of natural resource management, particularly, but not solely, concerning management of visitation. The paper specifically focuses on the informal, and often temporary, alliances and groups that are frequently established by public protected area agencies to address tourism planning issues.

Conflicting goals, the public interest and partnerships

Protected area managers have responsibilities to ensure that the public interest in these areas is sustained; however, constructing such interests in contentious, complex settings often require negotiation among multiple voices expressing goals that are partly shared and partly conflicting. Partnerships can be viewed as mechanisms that provide the venues needed to accomplish this task. Conflicting goals are not only characteristic of many natural resource planning situations in which this author has engaged, but also form the core of the arguments about constructing sustainable tourism policies and actions. Sustainable tourism has several contested meanings, similar to protected areas, but all share a characteristic of complex trade-offs. For example, making tourism sustainable may mean that current generations give up income for the benefit of future generations; it may mean that some individuals in the current generation give up income for other individuals in the current generation; it often means that planning must ensure that options available for the current generation remain for those living in the future, even though the value preferences of those living in the distant future are unknown. These are challenging issues to resolve, demanding a move beyond the simplistic missives to “practice sustainable tourism”, “buy locally” and “think green”.

At one level, it would seem that resolving conflicts in goals requires simply identifying and clarifying the public interest (briefly, the emergent benefits that accrue to civil society) in protected areas and the role of tourism in them. Although the language contained in the legislation or administrative decree establishing the protected area offers clues to this interest, its suitability for providing guidance to management is limited by two factors. First, such language typically is vague and abstract, lacking detail and explicit definition about the conditions deemed appropriate to or the values protected in the area. For example, the U.S. National Park Act of 1916 requires national parks to be administered in part for the “benefit of future generations”. What specific benefits to be secured for which generations are questions that are not addressed in this legislation, and thus left for site managers to resolve. But managerial resolution alone privileges expertise at the cost of other perspectives and value systems which may be more consistent with the notions behind the legislation.

Second, the idea that such legislative language provides insight into *the* public interest is flawed because there is no single, unitary voice in societies that are as pluralistic as those of today (Pierce, Steger, Steel, & Lovrich, 1992; Rothman, 1979; Schubert, 1960). Management is left with the question of determining which voice represents *the* authoritative directive. Indeed, such legislative language itself often represents the results of societal deliberation and a compromise among competing interests. In reality, the “public interest” is a transitory phenomenon, shifting in response to changes in the power and importance of contending interests (Schubert, 1960). For example, McCool (in press) describes several interests in wildlife viewing management as follows:

Destination marketing organizations are normally charged with the mission of enhancing tourism visits in order to increase expenditures that have positive impact on the local economy. The managing agency normally holds a mission of protecting (and enhancing) wildlife populations and habitats. At the setting, wildlife managers are concerned about controlling and informing visitor behavior to minimize impacts on wildlife. The visitor is seeking the opportunity to view and appreciate various species of wildlife.

In other words, there is no *single* public interest; this proposition thus requires a search for planning direction driven by the need to frame a working approximation of consensus not only among plural interests, but among multiple, often dissenting, scientific perspectives as well.

The context

Constructing public interests and sustainable tourism goals and determining methods to achieve them have traditionally been approached through the rational–comprehensive planning process. This planning process, developed to remove politics from governmental decision making through the use of “neutral” experts using scientific data, seeks to provide a systematic reproducible process for identifying desired futures and the pathways to them. By using scientists and experts, the appearance of bias in decisions is avoided. Unfortunately, rational–comprehensive planning assumes that the world is ultimately knowable and the future predictable, marginalizes experiential and traditional knowledge, privileges the scientific elite, and often excludes those affected by decisions in the planning process (for a significant critique of rational–comprehensive planning, see, for example, Fischer, 2000; Friedmann, 1973; Williams & Matheny, 1995).

Technically, expert-driven planning processes are not particularly well suited, when used alone, for constructing the public interest, particularly in a context such as protected area tourism planning, and thus call for a different approach. A substantial number of value judgments come into play, for example, what should be the goals of tourism development, what market segments should be attracted, what standards of impact will be acceptable, whose (among the public) values are privileged (Krumpe & McCool, 1998)? In other words, the issue of public interest is one that is a function of preferences, values and ideals, often expressed vaguely, but passionately, in social discourse and deliberation. These are important considerations because of the many groups that now collaborate and cooperate to ensure preservation of a place’s natural and cultural heritage. One important role of protected area tourism planning is that it establishes not only which values will be acknowledged, but interprets the rules and guidelines by which both industry and individuals will engage and interact with heritage values in particular protected areas.

Protected area tourism planning occurs within a context that could only be described as messy, that is an environment characterized by three large scale forces: change, complexity and uncertainty (see Ackoff, 1974; Hall, 1999 for technical discussions of messy situations and implications for tourism planning). First, *change* is a result not only of the rapid growth in travel and visits to protected areas (particularly in places like east Asia), but of the broadening social-demographic of visitors, accelerating interest in green travel and rising expectations of experience quality. There is also a widening diversity of expectations about the services and functions that protected areas are expected to deliver or provide. For example, many protected areas were originally established to preserve outstanding scenic values, maintain or recover species of wildlife or protect important historical, cultural or spiritual events and places. Protected areas now are expected to serve as gene banks, deliver ecosystem services such as clean air and pure water, play a role in alleviating poverty, serve as engines of economic development and provide examples as models of democratic governance (e.g. Bushell & Eagles, 2007; Naughton-Treves, Holland, & Brandon, 2005; Sandwith, Shine, Hamilton, & Sheppard, 2001).

Second, the context within which protected area tourism planning occurs is often *complex* and nonlinear (Roe, 1998) and thus much more difficult to understand, making prediction of consequences even more challenging because small changes in one factor may lead to large changes in another, and unexpected direction. Actions identified in plans are based on explicit assumptions about the consequences that will occur when they are implemented, an assumption that is frequently questionable given the lack of knowledge connecting causes with effects.

Third, the broader spatial and longer temporal contexts of decision making increases the acknowledged level of *uncertainty* in decisions, since the science of the past has been focused on understanding ecological processes at smaller and shorter scales. Greater consideration of the preferences of and consequences for people and communities in planning has also increased the uncertainty associated with decisions because of a convergence between the desire to consider such consequences and the lack of science that underpins such understanding. Ultimately, of course, the world is not completely knowable so decisions will always be made under conditions of uncertainty. Regardless, protected area constituencies continue to expect accountability for management decisions.

Planning has tended to be reductionistic, based on Descartes' arguments that by breaking down problems into their component parts we can understand the problem as a whole, a proposition that is difficult to accept in an era of sustainability and complexity. An example of reductionism in tourism and public use planning is the continuing drive to establish numeric tourism carrying capacities for protected areas (see, for example, Haas, 2002; Saveriades, 2000). Such capacities not only assume a linear relationship between use levels and impacts and that visitor use is the sole cause of effects, but also assume the larger context is stable, if not static. It has been long known that such relationships in either the biophysical or social domain, are not linear (see Cole, 1987; Stankey, 1973) and that there are many factors influencing the extent and intensity of effects. Despite the common image of science as the source of clarification and truth, in reality, conflicting interpretations always exist about system interactions and effects, making implementation of "sound, scientifically rigorous" policies problematic at best.

These three characteristics – change, complexity and uncertainty – form the backdrop against which planning for tourism is developed, tested and implemented. Additionally, the broadening and diversifying expectations of publicly administered protected areas mean that society's goals about these places are often, if not always, in conflict with each other. These conflicts are based in varying social values and preferences concerning access to and protection of cultural and natural heritage, which can only be resolved through deliberation and negotiation. For example, the conflict over use of snowmobiles in Yellowstone National Park in the United States is more about differing perceptions of what a national park is rather than the technicalities of pollution from snowmobile exhaust or of disturbance to animals (Dustin & Schneider, 2005). And, the uncertainty about cause–effect relationships means that science cannot provide a "correct" answer.

Finally, while many goals are in conflict, there are many shared goals and interests as well. In fact, partnerships are built upon shared goals, common visions or mutual concerns. It is precisely this tension – between things that are shared and those that are in conflict – that not only creates impetus for creative solutions to pragmatic problems but also makes both the study and implementation of partnerships challenging and rewarding.

Considerations in forming protected area planning partnerships in messy situations

Conventional approaches to tourism planning decisions have generally ignored the contextual factors mentioned in the previous section, in particular assuming that society holds agreement on goals of protected areas and scientists agree about cause–effect relationships. These assumptions lead to a definition of planning issues as "tame" (Ackoff, 1974). For tame problems, conventional rational–comprehensive planning, when well done, is an appropriate and effective approach. However, in the twenty-first century, tourism planning is conducted in a context of "messiness", a situation where goals conflict, and cause–effect relationships are uncertain (Thompson & Tuden, 1987). Planning must then be focused

on building a consensus about appropriate direction and emphasize learning to deal with uncertainty.

Achieving these outcomes in the context of messiness requires new paradigms of tourism planning for protected areas. One such paradigm is the creation of tourism planning partnerships, an approach that has been increasingly used over the last quarter century. Planning partnerships include formal as well as informal, but coherent, arrangements involving a variety of interests (managerial, economic, local, environmental, cultural, recreational and so on) that develop to address issues centered on management of publicly administered protected areas. Such partnerships are known by many terms: taskforces (McCool, Ashor, & Stokes, 1986); collaborative groups (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000), advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1987); consensus forums; working groups and, of course, partnerships. They are formed at different scales with a variety of functions for varying purposes (Selin, 1999). This paper focuses on partnerships fashioned to develop and implement policies for managing tourism and public use in protected areas. Thus, one primary rationale for partnerships in protected area tourism planning situations is to construct a *consensus* about the desired future and the methods to arrive there (Innes, 1996). In a sense, this means accommodating varying public interests (because such areas are in the public domain) in such a way that partners construct a consensus on what the future should be like.

There are of course a variety of definitions of what is meant by consensus: unanimous agreement, majority vote or grudging agreement (McCool, Guthrie, & Kapler-Smith, 2000). Consensus defined as “no one blocks an agreement” or as “unanimous agreement” places a heavy burden on the partnership, in that it would require that all interests express unreserved agreement, something difficult to achieve when discussing complex and controversial tourism planning topics when the stakes are high and the consequences largely unknown. While unanimous agreement may be desirable, the variety of competing interests operating in any given situation may render such a goal unrealistic. Working toward a majority agreement through voting is also not necessarily the best approach to defining consensus for two fundamental reasons: (1) voting reduces complex tourism planning issues to simplified “yes” or “no” decisions and (2) voting is inappropriate in a partnership where the partners share burdens, risks and benefits, and where only negotiation can lead to accommodation or integration of concerns.

Consensus may be best approached through the notion of “grudging” agreement. In any decision situation, there are multiple perspectives or levels of agreement among the partners: some are strong advocates, others have sincere or deep reservations and some may need to process information before arriving at a decision. Building a consensus in this situation will mean moving away from positions and discussing interests and resolving them in ways so at the minimum partners may not necessarily like the action, but they are willing to “live with it” (McCool et al., 2000). Living with an action means that it is not necessarily preferred, but is acceptable given other dimensions or characteristics of the setting. It means that people are willing to make trade-offs because they share common interests and goals.

Achieving this type of consensus requires certain conditions to be satisfied: partners share in the definition of the problem, they agree that the problem can be resolved through a partnership or public engagement process, and they have equitable access to knowledge (McCool et al., 2000), a point that is discussed later. It also means that partners hold a common vision or share at least some goals for the protected area. A large part of a planning partnership discourse may be devoted to creating, maintaining and reinforcing this mutual vision.

In messy situations, consensus-building is integrated with collaborative *learning* processes, where an understanding of multiple interests joins a basic scientific understanding of relevant conditions (Daniels & Walker, 1996). In seeking sustainability in complex tourism situations, the importance of human concerns and integration of scientific, anecdotal and procedural knowledge in identifying visions and methods for their attainment have been well-established in the literature (e.g. Conley & Moote, 2003; Hall, 1999). Such planning requires a partnership composed of planners/managers, scientists and various constituencies representing different tourism players (Kusel, Doak, Carpenter, & Sturtevant, 1997; McCool & Ashor, 1984). Protected area managers and planners bring to the partnership the mandate for planning as well as certain technical and procedural expertise. Scientists contribute specialized knowledge about ecological or sociological processes and conditions, the effects of management actions and the presence of unique or valuable species or values. Members of the public demand that socially important questions be addressed, force higher quality research and provide emotional, anecdotal and political knowledge that defines the acceptable decision space.

Thus, a secondary rationale for partnerships is to facilitate learning. Learning is a process where there is an accumulation of knowledge, there is deliberation about the meaning of that knowledge, new insights are gained about the interactions between people and their environment and there is action based upon that knowledge. In acting upon this knowledge, errors and surprises occur and are evaluated and lessons are learned. Such adaptiveness is an important component of planning and management.

The deliberation that results from the integration of different forms of knowledge and perspectives leads to an enhanced understanding of the tourism system and ways to solve the challenges confronting it. The learning that occurs in protected area planning partnerships is of several types: involving the content or substance of the planning issue (e.g. how to integrate visitor recreation opportunities into a situation with high biodiversity values), the technical planning process itself (e.g. which steps or elements are involved, when they occur and their rationale), and the backgrounds and perspectives of varying other partnerships (such personal knowledge is fundamental to social interaction according to Friedman, 1973).

Learning in the context of planning partnerships thus is a complex endeavor itself and requires attention to secure it. This learning is based on dialogue among the diverse interests and perspectives involved, and thus at a more operational level, venues and agendas need to be designed to encourage dialogue and active involvement in learning (Daniels & Walker, 1996).

In summary, planning must then be focused on building a consensus about appropriate direction and emphasize learning to deal with uncertainty. Building consensus is a fundamental condition to mobilizing societal resources to protect values or secure goals of public interest. In addition, since there is considerable uncertainty in cause-effect relationships, partnerships must be focused on creating venues that encourage dialogue and learning.

Design criteria for successful tourism protected area planning partnerships

Designing a partnership in messy situations is not an easy task. Of course, one wants it to be successful, yet there is frequent confusion about what is meant by the term *success*. It is often, at least implicitly, defined in terms of inputs: so many meetings were held, so many organizations or stakeholders are involved and so many people attended the meetings. In some cases, outcomes are also assessed: a plan was written and (sometimes) implemented, funding was obtained, policies were developed. And, while these are indeed

measures of success because they result from identifying the public interests involved, their accomplishment is dependent on how a partnership is designed and operated. Partnerships are very much about the processes they employ to secure the outcomes for which they are designed.

The factors that make for successful public engagement and protected area planning partnerships have received some research attention at both the operational level (e.g. Shindler & Neburka, 1997) and at the systemic level (Conley & Moote, 2003; McCool & Guthrie, 2001; Selin & Chavez, 1995; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 1994). While much of this research deals with public land management issues, it maintains saliency for tourism development issues as well. The focus here is on the more systemic level design criteria because they are often overlooked and without proper attention, the operational level actions cannot address shortcomings occurring at the systemic level.

There appear to be four major attributes (McCool & Guthrie, 2001) to successful partnerships operating in messy protected area tourism planning contexts: representativeness; ownership; learning, and relationships.

Representativeness

Constructing the public interests involved in provision of tourism and public use opportunities requires a carefully engineered and explicitly deliberative process. As noted earlier, protected area tourism planning occurs within a context of contested goals and values; developing a consensus requires that the process be inclusive and representative of the interests and beliefs affected and involved in contested situations (Conley & Moote, 2003). While planners and scientists can bring to a partnership certain technical information and expertise, various constituencies bring beliefs about the values the area contains, preferences about the goals and means of achieving them and experiential knowledge that is based in reality, not in abstract science.

In a sense, a successful protected area tourism planning partnership will attend to the diversity of values and beliefs about a particular protected area; the process becomes a “microcosm” of the political marketplace (Caulfield, 1975), encouraging dialogue among often conflicting groups (including protected area agencies). By being inclusive, the partnership transforms the power relationships in a setting, changing the role and reducing the influence of technocratic expertise and strengthening the authority of experiential knowledge and public preferences. Representativeness also means including those in the political marketplace who hold “veto” power over implementation of plans.

Ownership

Ownership in this context means a sense of caring and responsibility, not only for the protected area but for the plan and the actions it contains. Lachapelle and McCool (2005) argue:

This concept of ownership refers to a shared sense of problem and process necessary to address the precarious world of wicked situations. It requires ownership in the process (whose voice is heard), ownership in the outcome (whose voice is codified) and the ownership distribution (who is affected by the action). Ownership involves the association of citizens and agencies to collectively define, share and address problem situations with an implicit redistribution of power.

By constructing such a sense of involvement, caring and responsibility, partners have an intrinsic interest in the outcome and thus are motivated to ensure the implementation of agreed-upon actions. In addition, ownership means that the plan (as a document or process) is not the “government’s” plan, but a plan put together, sometimes literally, by the people affected by and who have an interest in the area. This investment pays off in terms of the political support that is fundamental to the funding and implementation processes necessary to manage tourism and public use in protected areas.

Learning

While learning is an essential consideration for the design of partnerships as noted above, it also plays a role as an attribute of successful partnership processes. Creating opportunities for learning is an important component of partnership design. Tourism is part of a larger complex social–ecological system, one that is characterized by a variety of influences occurring at larger scales, some of which could be termed major disturbance factors (e.g. floods, fires, earthquakes, SARS, political turmoil). Such disturbances often arise as “surprises” – unpredictable events – that have significant and unexpected consequences. The possibility of such surprises requires continuous attention to learning.

Normally, learning is characterized as understanding links between causes and effects, evaluating them and responding accordingly. Because protected area tourism planning is a “messy” problem, the mental models (Senge, 1990) used to organize learning and behavior in the real world not only have to change, but must remain adaptive in response to social change and new knowledge. These mental models are not only the methods for learning how to behave in the real world, but within them lie the seeds of failure when confronted with new and uncertain situations.

As Argyris and Schon (1978) argue, there are two results here: (1) the linkages between causes and effects can be confirmed and/or (2) there are unintended consequences (surprises). In tame situations, there would be no surprises (because there is an implicit assumption of decision making under conditions of certainty), so learning is focused on understanding what causes lead to which consequences. However, messy situations are loosely coupled (e.g. effects are not tightly linked to causes) and thus this “single-loop” learning is not adequate. To Argyris and Schon (1978), learning involves the “detection and correction of error” and they contend that learning must be “double-looped”, focused not only on understanding cause–effect relationships but also the variables that govern the operation of the system:

Double-loop learning occurs when error is detected and corrected in ways that involve the modification of an organization’s underlying norms, policies and objectives.

Single-loop learning is acceptable and appropriate in situations where there is agreement on goals and policies, but where disagreement or uncertainty exists, partnerships must focus on understanding how the larger system functions. Creating an environment for encouraging double-loop learning in the partnership then becomes an enormous challenge, but can be facilitated by sharing control of learning processes and by participation in design and implementation of actions (Argyris & Schon, 1978).

Relationships

Successful partnerships involve mechanisms that build relationships so that partners focus their energies on framing and resolving issues rather than taking positions (Fisher &

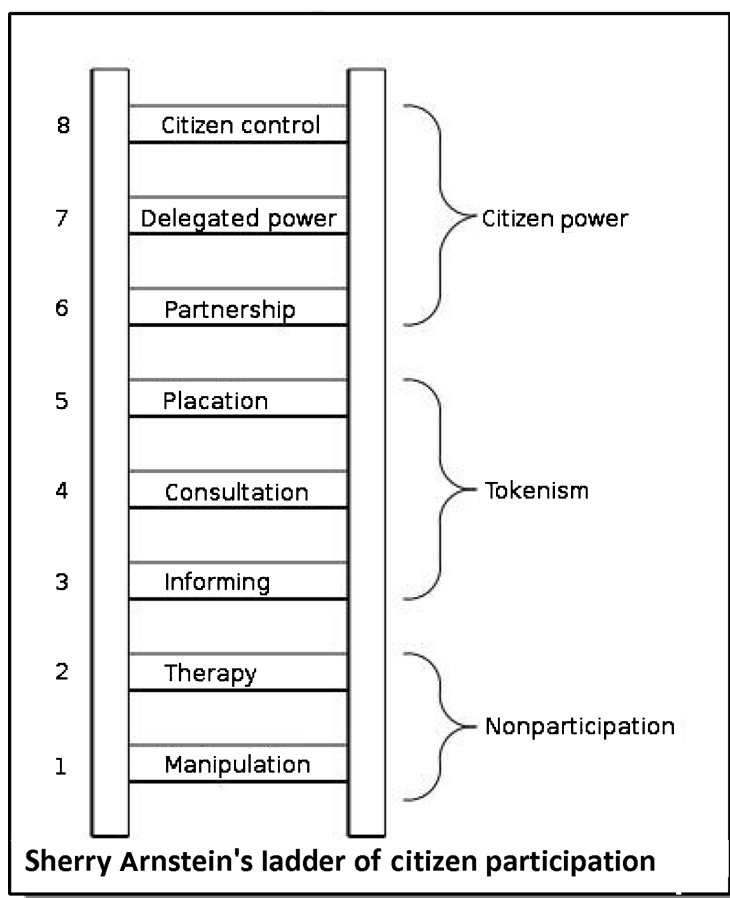


Figure 1. Sherry Arnstein's "ladder of citizen participation". Partnerships come high on this hierarchy, suggesting a more equitable distribution of power and engagement.

Ury, 1991). Good relationships are characterized by a quality of openness, the lack of "hidden agendas", understanding of others beliefs (if not agreement with them) and a focus on authentic communication. Relationships also involve clear understanding of roles and responsibilities. For tourism planning partnerships involving protected area agencies who hold a legal responsibility, an explicit statement of *who makes the decisions* is needed, for often partners may not understand the focal point of decision-making authority. Arnstein's (1969) hierarchical ladder of citizen participation, a classic in this literature, suggests several approaches to engaging the various partners depending on the degree of power sharing and control over decision making (see Figure 1). The notion of a partnership certainly implies the use of approaches from the upper levels of this ladder. In some cases, this means that decisions are made jointly and publicly by the partners, in others it may mean that partners arrive at a consensus that is then recommended to the responsible official who makes the actual decision. This separation may be legally required in some situations.

Another aspect of relationships in partnership situations is mutual respect. Mutual respect means that partners listen to what each other has to say, respond to others as individuals without prejudging their values and beliefs and act on discourse in a way that is

courteous and considerate, regardless of the statements articulated. Mutual respect means that comments are acknowledged and responses made with the shared goals in mind.

In summary, representativeness, ownership, learning and relationships are essential components of effective, successful protected area tourism planning partnerships. In designing and implementing partnerships, they are the four characteristics that must be attended to and continually managed. Sometimes, such management, because of prior existing relationships, is a relatively minor task and occurs almost implicitly. At other times, particularly in emerging partnerships constructed around contentious issues of access and preservation, these characteristics need much more attention.

Conditions needed to implement design criteria

The attributes identified above can only be successfully implemented when partners are mindful to the presence of certain conditions as they provide the context within which the partnership operates. These conditions deal with fundamental ideals of effective governance, and in this sense, protected area tourism planning partnerships represent a type of governance system. Building effective partnerships mindful of these considerations is a challenging endeavor, and requires at least three conditions: trust, power, and access to knowledge.

Trust

Trust is an important foundational condition to any partnership. Fukuyama (1995) defines trust as “regular, honest, and cooperative behavior, based on commonly shared norms”. Trust involves a belief that another will faithfully act upon promises made. Trust is something that is difficult to construct, but easily lost, and lack of trust is one of the most fundamental barriers to implementation of protected area plans (Lachapelle, McCool, & Patterson, 2003). In messy situations, where a variety of actors engage in a purpose with multiple objectives holding a diversity of views, trust is not only enormously important, but it is also something that must be continuously monitored and attended to over time (Liljeblad, Watson, & Borrie, 2007).

Trust includes both organizational and interpersonal dimensions (Moore, 1995). Organizational trust involves fairness of the process used to develop a plan: people being treated fairly, with the process containing rules to ensure this treatment. Interpersonal trust includes honesty, benevolence and reciprocity. Protected area tourism planning partnerships lead to planning documents which may be viewed as a type of social contract between governments and those affected by government decisions (in a broader sense, between a democratic government and its citizens). Ideally, the contract (plan) outlines the actions that will be taken by partners who have collaborated in the planning process. It also contains agreements about the processes by which it will be modified and amended.

Power

Power is the ability to influence people to behave in ways that may not be in their own immediate self-interest. It is one of the most frequently discussed and contested concepts in sociology. The purpose here is not to take a position on conceptualizations of power (e.g. see seminal pieces by Foucault, 1982; Habermas, 1981; Lukes, 2004) but rather to raise attention to it because it is always present, and its use may or may not be beneficial. Of course, alternative conceptualizations may lead to differing interpretations of a partnership situation.

Political power is not distributed randomly or equally in societies. The legal authority and power to develop a plan and the (practical political) power to implement the plan are often distinct and held by separate groups. In many protected area planning settings, certain groups or interests, because of their political power, hold virtual “veto” authority over plan implementation. Power in relationships is always present, but often ignored, in planning situations with frequent devastating consequences. Forester (1989) argues:

If planners ignore those in power, they assure their own powerlessness. Alternatively, if planners understand how relations of power shape the planning process, they can improve the quality of their analyses and empower citizen and community action.

Partnerships can provide an opportunity to renegotiate power arrangements within the group as well as empowering the group to accomplish certain actions. Thus, partners must address the notion of power. In a very real sense, Arnstein’s ladder of citizen participation (Figure 1) is actually a hierarchy of power relationships. Moving higher up the ladder results in greater empowerment of the partners (both individually and as a collective) in a planning situation. Such empowerment leads to incorporation of a wider diversity of knowledge in the planning process, greater potential for constructing consensus and more ownership in the plan and the protected area.

Access to knowledge

Typically, protected area agencies have access to or hold specialized knowledge about the area: ecological, biological and climatological data, species and habitats, disturbance processes, spending and economic impact information and visitor use levels, patterns and preferences. Some protected areas have lots of such information, others have little. Regardless, access to the knowledge represented by such information is often limited, either as a matter of policy or as a result of lack of technical proficiency among partners to understand and assimilate it. The variety of specializations involved in any partnership means that access will be affected by the varying capabilities to communicate technical information by the various partners. This limitation will always occur, so partners need to develop strategies to address these ad hoc reasons for misinformation (Forester, 1989).

However, there can be structural distortions in knowledge access, and such distortions are counter to the notion of a partnership, where all partners must be involved in decision making. For example, a relationship may be deceptive, with one or some partners willfully withholding knowledge. Some partners may feel others do not “belong” and thus are unwilling to share information. Access to knowledge is often limited, either operationally (e.g. someone is not a good communicator, a shortage of meeting “handouts”, not everyone received a message about a meeting time), or systemically, as a result of holding specialized knowledge, or a strategic unwillingness to share assumptions and data. Such issues arise in situations of multiple competing goals and conflicting interests. Acknowledging that they might occur allows partnerships to address processes to deal with such situations.

Such distortions in knowledge access create situations where not all partners are acting with similar understandings. This inequitable distribution leads not only to debate founded on probably inappropriate understandings, but also in some partners accruing more power than others.

Benefits of protected area tourism planning partnerships

Well-constructed protected area tourism planning partnerships are difficult to operate and maintain, but the benefits can be significant. One such benefit is *identification of socially*

acceptable actions. Such actions must have legitimacy in the eyes of important constituencies. Partnerships can play a significant role in not only identifying social acceptability but also in creating it, for by engaging scientists, managers and constituencies in deliberation, a significant amount of learning can occur, which would lead to enhanced understanding of the need and appropriateness of management actions.

A second and closely related benefit is construction of social agreement about the character of a desired future (see, for example, Wildavsky, 1973). Constructing and achieving such agreement is a fundamental goal of protected area tourism planning (Eagles & McCool, 2002). While there remain many such desired futures in pluralistic societies, partnerships can build a *shared vision* that is at least acceptable, if not preferred, to a protected area's constituencies. Such shared vision is a prerequisite to allocation of resources, and indeed, often serves as a motivation itself for securing resources for implementation.

A third advantage of planning partnerships is that in contentious, democratic contexts (which have a number of legal checks and balances), plan development and implementation may be *more efficient*. This is counter to a popular belief that public engagement adds to the costs of plan development and often interferes with implementation because of protests and litigation. That belief may have some support in tame situations, but in the messy environment of twenty-first century protected area management, partnerships and public engagement, by identifying early in the planning process social preferences, political feasibility and shared goals, the pursuit of objectives and actions outside the range of acceptability is avoided, thereby increasing efficiency.

Finally, planning partnerships help fulfill expectations that protected areas provide a *model of governance* that is more sensitive to people's needs, and better integrates conservation with sustainable tourism development. Often these two objectives are portrayed as inherently competing, but with the creative energy of partners and an understanding of the values contained within a protected area more informed and intelligent trade-offs can be made. Governance is a complicated and challenging arena of human life; planning partnerships provide one approach to governance that can develop social capital applicable to other types of social issues.

In the face of change, complexity and uncertainty, plans must be resilient and responsive, even if the goal remains the same. Tourism protected area planning partnerships provide two distinct advantages to securing these attributes. First, the variety of perspectives and interests involved ensures that the agency has a diversity of "monitoring mechanisms" that will sense broader social and political changes that may lead to surprises in implementation of the plan. Second, partnerships, because they represent a "microcosm" of the political marketplace (Caulfield, 1975) can provide managers with needed information about shifts in public values and preferences, information that protected area managers need, but often they lack technical proficiencies in securing them.

Conclusion

Partnerships have become an important strategy in enhancing the stewardship of protected areas. They are formed out of a recognition that neither protected area agencies nor the tourism industry can any longer "go it alone". They come in many forms with a variety of purposes and functions. Tourism protected area planning partnerships are a particular kind of consortium designed to identify desired futures and develop pathways to those futures. They exist within a complex, dynamic and uncertain political and social environment and are mechanisms to deal with that environment. Constructing planning partnerships is based upon shared goals and visions and requires attention to the rationale for the partnership

as well as the attributes that make for success: ownership, learning, representativeness and relationships. Such attributes will be successful only when partners attend to the distribution of political power within the partnership, access to knowledge, and trust among the partners.

Action in a messy society requires multiple actors in varying roles working in a coordinated and cooperative manner. Reductionist and functionally oriented approaches, where expertise is supreme and problems are compartmentalized, are simply inadequate to deal with issues such as tourism in protected areas. Partnerships provide the opportunity for more realistic, more integrative and more effective protected area tourism planning. Understanding the conceptual foundations and conditions for partnerships is important for their success.

Notes on contributor/s

Stephen F. McCool retired from The University of Montana as Professor Emeritus in March 2007, after more than 35 years in academia. His research, education and service has emphasized stewardship of protected areas, particularly management of visitors and tourism, public engagement processes and new approaches to planning. He currently serves as a lecturer and speaker on a variety of protected area challenges and opportunities.

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