

**The Challenges of Sustainable  
Community Cultural Heritage Tourism**

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## **PREFACE**

This paper was originally delivered as the keynote speech at the UNESCO Workshop on Culture, Heritage Management and Tourism in Bhaktapur, Nepal on April 9, 2000

## INTRODUCTION

In this paper I will briefly examine cultural heritage resource management, the state of tourism today and the bringing together of cultural preservation and tourism in the form of cultural tourism. I will conclude by presenting a series of challenges for those involved in ensuring that the quality of life in heritage areas can be enhanced through tourism development.

When one considers the combination of tourism and cultural preservation there are a number of challenges to be addressed:

- Maintaining and conserving the cultural heritage.
- Achieving a better state of economic and social well being for all sectors of a community.
- Providing the tourist with a quality experience.
- Achieving sustainable tourism development.

## CULTURE

There has been a great deal written about culture and I do not propose in this paper to repeat that analysis. However, it is important that we begin to think about the many dimensions of culture in order to assist us in developing a better understanding of cultural heritage tourism. First, culture can be tangible in the form of buildings or artifacts or intangible in terms of people's values, attitudes and way of life. We can see culture in many forms including buildings, areas, dance, food, dress, events, values, lifestyles and handicrafts.

Secondly, culture can also be significant at varying geographic dimensions from the international to the local level. It is managed and owned by a number of different actors, thereby creating the need for various interest groups to work together.

Thirdly, the re-use or utility of culture in both tangible as well as intangible forms can be at times economic, whilst at other times it is not economic. It is the situations where there are insufficient resources to maintain a culture from a market perspective that present a challenge in cultural resource management.

Fourthly, at times culture can be well preserved and well managed, whilst at other times it may be faced with extinction.

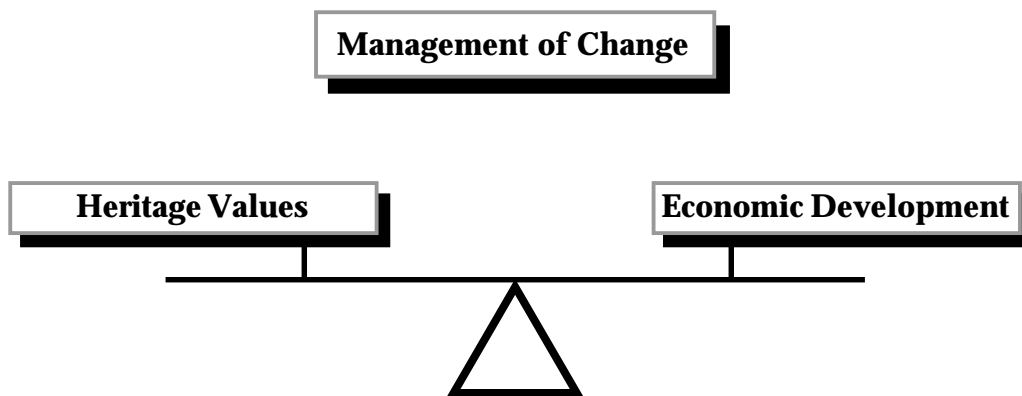
There are many reasons why culture is maintained and preserved. Some of the different motives for maintaining and preserving culture include:

- Community renewal, revitalization & development
- Education
- Pleasure/recreation
- Nostalgia/fear of the past
- Tourism
- Increased quality of life
- Economic development
- Continuity
- Patriotism
- Diversity
- Identity
- Profit

It is important to note that tourism and economic development are only two of many motivations. When examining different forms of cultural preservation it is important therefore to assess and define the objectives that support a process or set of beliefs in order to understand the policy and management directions that have been adopted.

There are a series of forces working on the preservation of cultural heritage. They include declining government resources devoted to heritage preservation, pressure to exploit the tourism potential of heritage resources and pressure to see heritage as a commodity. The success or failure of many preservation initiatives is often a function of the influence of these forces.

Present practice has clearly identified that the preservation of a culture and heritage cannot be seen as the process which attempts to stop change and freezing culture. Rather, it is the practice of managing change as can be seen in figure 1.



**Figure 1: Management of Change**

## TOURISM

As the largest industry in the world, tourism employs 192.3 million workers. It has been identified by Bill Gates of Microsoft as one of the main growth industries for the next century, along with education and health. International tourism arrivals will grow by an estimated 4.3% per year and spending will grow by an estimated 6.7% per year, providing communities and tourism interests with both a problem of managing such growth and the possibility of sustainable economic development.

In Asia, tourism plays a number of important social and economic roles. It is commonly seen as an important form of community economic development with the pace and scale of tourism placing significant pressure on heritage resources. Managing and planning for cultural tourism in Asia is compounded by the incredible growth and problems that exist in many cities. The level and rate of poverty in both urban and rural areas presents a management challenge. The lack of funding is an important issue that has a significant influence on how and where tourism is developed within the region.

### Positive Impacts of Tourism

Tourism can be seen to have a number of positive impacts that make it an important form of community economic development. When properly planned for and managed, tourism can:

- Enhance the amenity of a region
- Build community pride
- Enhance the sense of identity of community
- Support the community economy
- Provide new employment opportunities
- Maintain community stability
- Broaden community horizons.

### Negative Impacts of Tourism

When poorly managed, tourism can have the following negative impacts:

- Lead to culture commodification
- Create a higher cost of living for the residents (rent, food services)
- Displace traditional residents
- Increase crime
- Undermine local traditions & ways of life
- Increase pollution
- Put pressure on services and facilities.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM

Cultural heritage tourism has a number of objectives that must be met within the context of sustainable development. They can be seen to include:

- The conservation of cultural resources.
- Accurate interpretation of resources.
- Authentic visitor experiences.
- The stimulation of the earned revenues of cultural resources.

We can see therefore, that cultural heritage tourism is not only concerned with the identification, management and protection of heritage values but it must also be involved in understanding the impact of tourism on communities and regions, achieving economic & social benefits, providing financial resources for protection, as well as marketing & promotion.

One of the significant challenges facing cultural heritage tourism is to ensure the successful involvement of a wide range of actors concerned with tourism development and planning. These actors include:

### Public Sector:

- Planning Agencies
- Preservation Agencies
- Marketing Agencies
- Police/Fire Departments
- Attractions
- Transportation Departments

### NGOs:

- Tourism Groups
- Attractions
- Preservation Interests
- Environmental Groups
- Poverty Groups
- Community Banks

### Private Sector:

- Hotels
- Restaurants
- Transportation
- Travel Agents
- Tour Operators
- Attractions
- Retail Sector
- Suppliers
- Service Sector.

### The Community:

- Community Groups
- Building Owners
- Tenant

Each urban heritage area should be viewed as a destination with a large number of interdependent activities and concerns. This provides the community, as well as the many stakeholders involved in planning and management, with a more interdisciplinary and comprehensive form of tourism development.

There are a number of obstacles to achieving sustainable heritage tourism destinations. Some major obstacles include the lack of financial resources, poor forms of governance, inappropriate project management processes, ineffective enforcement of regulations, corruption and lack of support for heritage conservation.

## THE CHALLENGES

Sustainable tourism development presents many challenges. Meeting these challenges is a major task of policy makers as well as communities if they are to achieve comprehensive and sustainable heritage tourism development.

### Integration

Communities and historical and tourism interests must ensure that cultural heritage tourism plans are integrated with the larger processes of policymaking and planning.

### Cooperation

All interests within the tourism planning process, especially those at the community level, must learn to work together in a co-operative manner. Sustainable development requires that all those concerned learn to deal with conflicts and to explore the creative use of partnerships as a way of sharing knowledge, as well as risks, in tourism development.

### Impact Assessment

If communities are to develop plans and policies that will meet their needs and respect their tangible and intangible heritage they must begin to measure the potential impacts of new tourism developments. In the impact process, the use of indicators is essential if communities are to be in a position to assess how well plans are meeting their objectives. While it is often difficult to find resources to carry out this work, it is essential for the community to know how well it is doing in its efforts to preserve cultural heritage as well as improve the quality of life for all of its residents.

### Interpretation/Presentation

If the community is to be in a position to define its culture and tell its story to its own residents as well as visitors there must be a creative use of various interpretive and presentation techniques. These techniques can range from visitor centers, reenactments, first person interpretation, audio visual shows, interactive computer programs, signage and various forms of print media.

### Creative Financing

Given the scarcity of government funding in much of Asia and declining resources from international development agencies, it is essential that communities begin to look at various forms of creative financing.

## DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

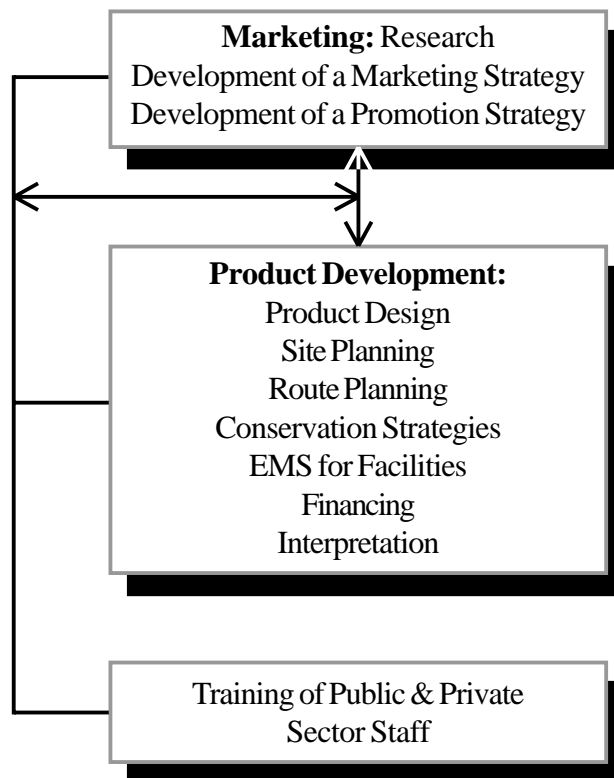
The last challenge I wish to present is the need for destinations to begin to think in a coherent way not only about everyday municipal concerns but also about the cultural and heritage dimensions of a community. The destination management model suggested in Figure 2 starts with four formal areas of activity and concern.



**Figure 2: Tourism Destination Management**

### Marketing and Product Development

If tourism development is to be successful, the product market and development process is essential in developing a destination strategy. Figure 3 identifies the product/market matching activities that are essential in developing sustainable products based on market realities.

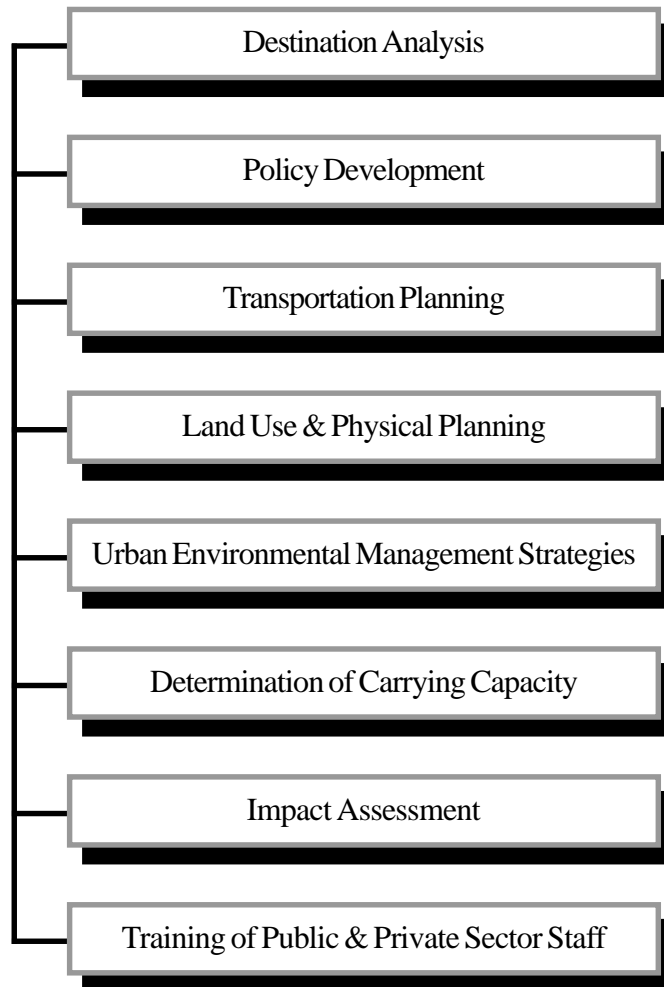


**Figure 3: Product Market and Development Process**



## Destination Planning

There are a number of steps in developing a tourism plan and unless the process considers the range of factors outlined in Figure 4 the chances for sustainable tourism are reduced.



**Figure 4: Destination Planning**

### Organization and Management

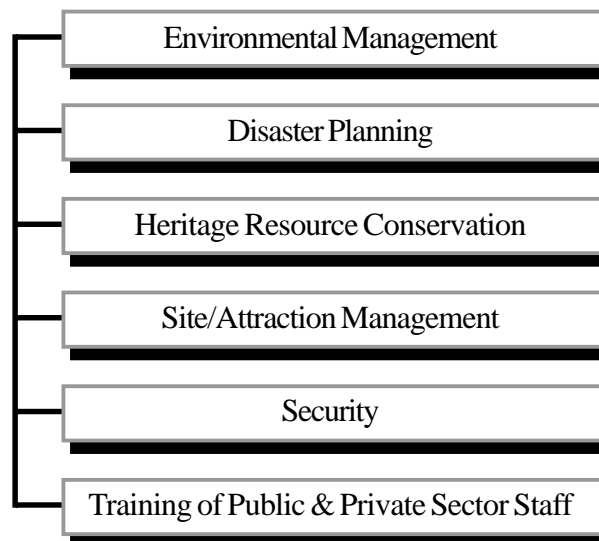
Establishing the right organizational and management structure is often a key to success. While each situation will require a distinct organizational structure, the importance of stakeholder involvement cannot be over emphasized. Figure 5 illustrates the issues that must be addressed in the development of an organization and management structure.



**Figure 5: Organization and Management**

### Destination and Site Management

Figure 6 identifies the range of community as well as site specific issues that must be addressed in a successful tourism destination.



**Figure 6: Destination and Site Management**

## CONCLUSION

Planning and managing cultural heritage tourism requires a number of issues to be dealt with. For those involved in heritage preservation the challenge is to understand and work effectively with the tourism industry. For those in the tourism sector there is a need to understand the needs of host communities as well as the principles and concerns that are part of preserving cultural heritage.

Tourism will not go away and poorly managed cultural heritage destinations will not only negatively impact local communities but also the industry when heritage resources and values are degraded. The challenge is not to stop tourism but rather for all stakeholders to work together in achieving sustainable planning and management.

## ENDNOTE:

The Canadian Universities Consortium Urban Environmental Management Project at AIT is in the process of developing the following manuals:

- Interpreting Your Community
- Monitoring Tourism In Your Community
- A Primer in Community Tourism Destination Management
- A Primer in Community Tourism Design

It is also producing a workbook on “Sustainable Community Tourism Destination Planning and Management”.

Please contact the Project if you would like more information.

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