Module 10 - Case Study: Sustainable Rural Tourism in Northern BC

University of Northern British Columbia

Objectives:

- Students will understand the global context of rural tourism.
- Students will understand the linkages between the rural tourism globally and the national and regional contexts in Canada and British Columbia.
- Students will have an awareness of the sustainable workings of rural tourism operators in British Columbia.
- Students will be able to identify the innovations that make British Columbia rural tourism operators sustainable.
- Students will be able to extrapolate the knowledge from this module to sustainable rural tourism in their nation/region.

Background:

The concept of sustainability is especially important for tourism in Canada’s rural areas since tourism products often rely on the sensitive natural and cultural resources found there. Many rural communities are hardest hit by economic shifts, and tourism development has become a common diversification strategy to assist in rural community survival. Despite often being deemed a “non-extractive” industry, tourism is still a resource dependent industry. It relies on natural surroundings, communities and the steady supply of products to create experiences for visitors (Ewert & Shultis, 1997; Nistoreanu, 2007). Advocates for the industry have pushed forward tourism agendas citing the benefits of economic growth without the same environmental impacts of resource extraction or manufacturing industries (Gartner, 2004). However, as the industry grew, it became apparent that tourism could in fact be unsustainable. Tourism, at its worst, can have a tendency to concentrate high volumes of people in sensitive eco-systems, place a population boom on communities without the infrastructure or development plans to handle it, and displace cultures in desirable destinations (Ewert & Shultis, 1997). Additionally, the industry is forever battling the indisputable fact that it is inherently linked to substantial “luxury” fossil fuel consumption.

The shifting economic base in rural areas is particularly pronounced in British Columbia where dominant resource-based industries like fishing, forestry and agriculture have undergone dramatic changes in the last two decades. These industries have shaped rural life in British Columbia and the transition to diversify has not been an easy one. Many rural residents want to learn from their previous reliance on a single industry. As business operators and community leaders explore the potential of tourism, many want to ensure that it is developed in a sustainable manner.

When assisting rural areas in the development of sustainable tourism strategies, questions arise about the relevance of the current literature on the situation found in small and medium sized rural businesses. Whilst cases of sustainable tourism practices are emerging in the literature, many profile the efforts of large businesses operating in urban contexts and usually in the hospitality sector. What would be helpful to rural businesses is to understand what sorts of strategies are being used by others of a more comparable nature in their pursuit of sustainability.
Required Readings (6 numbered readings):

Global Context:

1. Bramwell, B. (1994). Rural tourism and sustainable rural tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 2(1-2), 1-6. **This is the introduction to an entire special issue on development of rural tourism and of more sustainable forms of rural tourism, thus the entire issue may be of interest – particularly B. Lane’s article on ‘What is rural tourism (pp 7-21).**

**If your library has them – read portions of the following two books to assist with your background knowledge:*

Canadian Context:


British Columbia Context:


   Alternatively, or in addition, watch the accompanying video available at: [http://web.viu.ca/sustainabletourism/](http://web.viu.ca/sustainabletourism/)

Other Useful Resources:

- BC Rural Summit - [http://www.bcruralnetwork.ca/taxonomy/term/21](http://www.bcruralnetwork.ca/taxonomy/term/21)
- TRIP project - [http://www.trip-project.ca/](http://www.trip-project.ca/)
- REDTREE project - [http://redtree.tru.ca/](http://redtree.tru.ca/)
- BC Rural Tourism Conference 2010 (speaker presentations) - [http://redtree.tru.ca/Conferences/speakers.htm](http://redtree.tru.ca/Conferences/speakers.htm)
Fostering Innovation in Sustainable Tourism project - http://web.viu.ca/sustainabletourism/

- BC Regional Innovation Chair in Tourism and Sustainable Rural Development - http://web.viu.ca/vaugeois/Chair.htm
- Canada’s Rural Partnership - http://www.rural.gc.ca/RURAL/
- Forthcoming Journal of Rural and Community Development (http://www.jrcd.ca/): special issue on Rural Tourism and Recreation in Canada

Discussion Questions

1. How is rural tourism different from urban tourism?
2. How do policy and perspectives in Canada provide the ability for rural tourism to be sustainable?
3. With a rural lens, how have tourism operators in Northern British Columbia made practical innovations in order to address sustainability issues?
4. From all the operators profiled in British Columbia, what linkages can you make to rural tourism in your own country or region?

Evaluation

Students will write a five-page reflection paper answering the discussion questions.

Vocabulary

The rural lens
Sustainable tourism
Innovation

Faculty contact for Questions or Clarification

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