

Interorganisational Relations and Sustainable Tourism in Canada: An Historical Perspective of Federal National Park and Tourism Agencies and Key Interest Groups

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Abstract

This thesis examines the role and extent of collaborative interorganisational relations in the operationalisation of sustainable tourism in Canadian national parks. A considerable body of work suggests that sustainable tourism development may only be achieved when sectoral fragmentation is overcome and collaborative planning achieved. This thesis describes the findings from research that identifies obstacles to and opportunities for collaboration between key stakeholders in a tourism policy domain.

The thesis adopts a case study approach focussing on the Canadian 'national park — tourism' policy domain. National parks in Canada are significant tourist attractions, however their tourism use is becoming increasingly contested, not only by some stakeholders (notably environmental groups), but also by a changing policy environment favouring enhanced ecological integrity. Notwithstanding the above forces for change, empirical evidence still points to a situation where tourism in many of Canada's national parks is ecologically unsustainable.

Utilising an interorganisational relations framework, the aim of this research is to describe the relationships between organisations in the above domain and to identify facilitating and inhibiting influences acting upon the relationships. Within the domain, five key stakeholders are identified, comprising the parks agency, the national tourism organisation, a tourism lobby group and two environmental groups. In-depth interviews with key informants in each organisation reveal the nature of relationships and key influences upon relationships. The research method also incorporates policy (document) analysis and archival research — approaches used to historically inform both the interview process and the resultant analysis, and to provide a context for the relationships in terms of broader societal processes.

The study revealed a number of significant findings. Key inhibitors to relationships within the domain were found to be primarily related to differences in institutional values and ideologies, and the linked attitudes and behaviour of individuals within organisations. Furthermore, by adopting an historical approach and a multi-levelled analysis, the study demonstrated the significant role of contextual influences — political, social and economic — on relationships within the domain. The recent influence of federal macro-economic policy in particular has been highly influential in both facilitating and inhibiting relationships. Not only does this policy act through the obvious ways such as reduced funding for some federal organisations, but also through the environment of change it generates, resulting, for example in unstable platforms for relationships. The study also revealed that macro policy is manifested in a number of less obvious 'micro' ways — for example in changing participants' foci from an organisational and external focus to an individual and internal focus — with implications for interorganisational relationships.

The historic and contemporary role of interest groups was also found to be an important aspect of the domain. In particular the extent to which environmental groups have dealt with issues of resource poverty and exclusion by adopting 'out-of-domain' approaches is significant. While co-ordinated policy making is widely accepted as a basis for environmentally sustainable tourism development, organisations may contribute more towards this goal by choosing not to be included, or by being excluded from, this framework of co-ordination.

There is little evidence from this case study, of widespread active co-operation or collaboration within the domain among stakeholders. Neither is there a clear unanimous adherence to or commonly accepted meaning of the concept of sustainable tourism. The co-operation that does exist is sporadic or focused upon narrow interpretations of sustainable tourism.