

Group E: Sustainable Tourism in Hawaii



Policy Issue Brief:

“Sustainable Tourism in Hawaii” by Denise Eby Konan

Members:

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Summary of Work Sessions:

Session I. Preferred Futures and Public Policy Strategies

The discussion of preferred futures for sustainable tourism in Hawaii began with a discussion of Prof. Denise Konan’s paper and emphasized several themes. One recurrent theme was that increasing diversification in the forms of tourism would allow the industry to become more resilient to changes in external economic forces, and at the same time provide higher quality employment opportunities to a broader array of Hawaii’s people. The discussion emphasized the need to find alternatives to the sun and surf attraction to large hotels of current tourism.

Session II. Public Policies and Recommendations/ Next Steps

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The group agreed on the need for economic and policy research to generate and evaluate tourism options for economic sustainability, employment, environmental and cultural implications. There was also discussion of the possible need for changes in land use and other policies to limit existing trends in tourism.

E. Sustainable Tourism in Hawai`i

Denise Eby Konan

Background

Tourism has been the mainstay of Hawai`i's economy. The number of visitors has grown steadily, increasing from 686,314 in 1965 to 4.8 million by 1985. With a resident population of 1.2 million, nearly 7 million people presently visit Hawai`i each year. Visitor expenditures account for \$11 billion, one-sixth of total expenditures in the state. They generate nearly a billion dollars in State and County tax revenues. About one-third of jobs in Hawai`i are related to the visitor industry.

Visitors are attracted to the beauty and uniqueness of Hawai`i's natural and cultural environment. Yet, excessive tourism growth may pose a threat to the very environmental and cultural assets that visitors seek. Visitors contribute to congestion on our beaches, trails, and roadways. They consume scarce water and energy and generate pollution, sewage, and solid waste. They create a demand for expansion and development of transient accommodations. This is particularly important as visitors are attracted to near-shore and pristine areas, where the environmental impacts of hotel and resort development are likely to be particularly high. Other impacts include increasing stress on public infrastructure including parks and recreation facilities. Conservation of Hawai`i's natural and human environment is critical not only to preserving the quality of life of residents but also of the visitor experience. Thus, a balance is sought between economic prosperity for residents, environmental preservation, and social well-being. Although the visitor industry has been an economic engine for the State, its growth must be carefully managed so as to offset or mitigate negative impacts.

Sustainability means different things to different people. Among economists, sustainability tends to refer to the preservation of a quality of life for future generations of consumers. Natural resources have an economic value in that they may be an input into production (lumber, petroleum) and may provide direct amenities to households (scenic views, clean air). A significant component of economics involves the valuation of non-market natural resources and the environment (hedonic pricing, travel cost analysis, contingent valuation). Sustainability thus involves an appropriate passing along of natural assets to future generations such that an appropriate quality of life may be maintained. To the extent that natural resources are extracted or degraded, human made capital or innovations may compensate to maintain acceptable levels of economic prosperity for future generations. In terms of the visitor industry in Hawai`i, the loss of a shoreline or deterioration in a hiking trail may be substituted with built amenities that would continue to attract visitors.

From the viewpoint of natural scientists, sustainability refers to the preservation of ecosystem quality. Ecosystems naturally evolve over time. Species evolve, land forms shift and change, environments respond to changes in temperature and climate. Yet, human interferences in natural areas have rapidly, and in some cases irreversibly, changed ecosystems. Sustainability thus involves the preservation of an acceptable quality of the natural environment. A pristine state of nature may be compared to various levels of ecosystem degradation that are associated with human interactions. Particularly relevant for Hawai`i are the uniqueness and the fragility of various micro-ecosystems of

the islands. Be it endemic and endangered species, delicate shorelines, or scenic vistas, Hawai`i's ecosystems are precious. In this view, the focus is on how infrastructure might be used to offset the negative aspects of visitor industry growth. Important infrastructure demand elements include water, waste water, solid waste and energy. The role of open space in preserving environmental quality is relevant. Land-use planning becomes a particularly important tool of sustainable policy as certain environmentally fragile areas may be designated as unsuitable for development.

Another perspective on sustainability becomes one of culture. Traditional ways of life may be eroded with the introduction of foreign influences. Traditional gatherings or practices may become difficult to maintain if development interferes with access to culturally important public spaces. In adapting to the presence of outsiders cultural influences, both positive and negative, may alter cultural traditions. In Hawai`i, this is of particular concern to the indigenous people of the land whose way of life and values have been required to respond quickly to Western influences.

Tourism industry experts focus on the sustainability of industry demand and output. The visitor industry in Hawai`i is a mature one, well developed with an extensive inventory of assets including hotels, restaurants, retail, transportation, and entertainment amenities. Hawai`i's reputation is well-established and widely recognized worldwide as an exotic, romantic, exciting, and yet comfortable destination. Alternative destinations are increasingly becoming available as competing destinations enhance investments in the visitor inventory. Travelers are also seeking new, exotic, and increasingly remote destinations. Many middle income and developing countries are able to provide attractive holiday packages at relatively low prices. Sustainability of the industry involves continued enhancements in the quality of the visitor experience through public and private investments. Environmental quality and cultural quality become important in that they provide amenities that tourists demand.

Issues

There may be other concepts of sustainability, and this working group will be involved in formulating such concepts. The group will discuss the degree to which alternative paradigms of sustainability complement are in conflict. Additionally, this working group will jointly identify the various pathways and linkages by which the visitor industry contributes to or distracts from sustainability in Hawai`i. We will work to categorize these pathways. We will seek to identify the choices and tradeoffs that our society faces in relation to tourism. In addition to articulating the issues and concerns, we will prioritize the opportunities and threats facing our community.

E. Sustainable Tourism

Work Session I: Preferred Futures & Policy Strategies:

- well-diversified tourism that is resilient to market, demographic, cultural and economic etc. shifts
 - High quality market research and strategic playing
- A tourism industry that is well integrated with the community and the community is deeply involved in decision-making
 - Structured community decision making
- Tourism in Hawaii that respects and builds on the culture and the land and the spirit of Hawaii
 - Involve the Hawaiian community as much as possible in plans.
- Tourism that provides economic well being and high quality of life with resident.
 - Bring high-spending visitors to the state
- I would like to see that every island has not only one tourism center (i.e. Waikiki in Oahu) but some more. However, this new center should be contained in a limited area of development.
 - Allowing new resort or small hotel development in new area with height constraint, etc.
- Food and energy self-sufficiency as visitor attractions. Doc Berry
- A state limit on the number of visitors we will accept and support, forcing us to diversify our economy.
- A renewable tourist industry that continues to be a major economic engine that respects our natural resources.
- Create a paradigm shift from selling sun and surf to selling a protected beauty of this "place" and its culture
 - Emphasis in promoting this culture and de-emphasizing real estate.
 - Informational data base that tracks tourism impact on our Eco-system
 - Resource philizations, pollution, etc.
- I would like to see the tourism industry develop programs to inform tourists about
 - a) the fragility of Hawaii's environment (e.g. endangered and threatened species which in some cases exist no where else in the world)

- b) the natural hazards that exist in our state and that they will encounter for example on state trails.
- A portion of the Hotel Room Tax should be set aside to maintain the Na Ala Hele Trails
 - Need an analysis of the carrying capacity of the island
 - An industry which shares agreement with the community on a clearly stated set of values that both differentiates Hawaii's tourism product and also helps preserve the natural and cultural assets most prized by residents.
 - HTA sponsorship of ongoing industry/community review of goals and related indirectors.
 - Hawaii is a model of sustainability
 - Continually preserving a quality of life for its future generations
 - Conserving precious environmental resources and culture
 - Supporting a visitor industry that does not compromise the quality of life of residents or environmental assets.
 - Education of workforce to support high end tourism
 - Tourism concept expanded to build and preserve uniqueness
 - educational tourism
 - cultural tourism
 - Adequate infrastructure investments to mitigate damages
 - Water
 - Sewer
 - Solid waste
 - Energy
 - Other:
 - Preservation of pristine locations
 - Appropriate land-use regulation
 - Hawaii will have very different and varied visitor industry. The mainstream resort-type of tourism or traditional tourism, and alternative tourism, which would be more sustainable. It would include visitors coming for Elderhosted-type vacations or educational tourism; volunteer vacations which would help restore the natural

resources as ecotourism, experiences with people of the host culture and ethnic groups of Hawaii or cultural tourism. People will have choices of places to stay from resorts to bed and breakfasts and home stays.

- a permitting system for trails and natural areas in order to keep the number of visitors below 15 at a time.
- the City and County of Honolulu needs to change rules and regulations to allow bed and breakfasts and small inns.
- funding must be found to control and eliminate invasive species.
- Increased energy efficiency--fast track "green" architectural structures
- Public/tourist education
 - on variety of experiences--older, female
 - in sustainable tourism policy issues clarification
 - 1) Local education/information on complexity dilemmas in sustainable tourism
 - 2) TAT money into enforcement develop additional source of * money for sustainable natural resources, product protection and improvement.
 - * Economy at UH "what is optimal size of TAT"
- Web site for policy issues clarification
 - Web sites:
 - World Tourism Organization: www.world-tourism.org
 - Business Enterprises for Sustainable Tourism: www.sustainabletravel.org
- Identify 6 funding mechanism TAT to improve/protect the product (resources, infrastructure), not just promotion alone.

Work Session II. Public Policies and Recommendations/Next Steps

- WHAT SHOULD HAPPEN NEXT TO ADDRESS THOSE PRIORITY POLICIES?
 - Communities need to be educated about the difference between traditional tourism and sustainable tourism
 - Niche markets need to be better defined
- WHO ELSE SHOULD BE INVOLVED?
 - Legislators
 - DBEDT
 - DLNR
 - HTA
 - rule makers and decision makers
 - rural communities
 - Luciano Minerbi, DURP, UH-Manoa
 - Barbara Natale, DURP, UH-Manoa
 - Curt Cotrell, DLNR
- HOW CAN THE PUBLIC POLICY CENTER HELP?
 - Research that can be provided to decision makers and the community