An evaluation of community-based tourism development: how theory intersects with practice

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Abstract: As Canadian rural communities respond to changes in their resource-based economy, many are increasingly considering tourism development as an option for diversification. Indeed, recent rural employment trends in tourism suggest the evolving importance of tourism in such places. Much research has examined the value of tourism in rural communities (Reid 2003; Jamal & Getz 1999; Reed 1997; Butler 1998), suggesting that community-based tourism development may provide an opportunity for a sustainable tourism industry. Subsequently, community-based tourism has come to be understood as a bottom-up approach to tourism planning and development that incorporates local individuals in the planning process, in a meaningful way. This paper critically examines the intersection of community-based tourism theory with practice, through an examination of an actual rural community-based planning process in Marathon, Ontario, undertaken by the author. What this examination illustrates is that although existing theory does reflect actual practice, there are several aspects of ‘reality’ that the sanitized literature on community-based tourism planning do not adequately reflect. Importantly, the role of the practitioner or researcher in influencing the process and the power structures at play within a community-based planning method must be fully considered.

Keywords: community-based tourism, community participation, rural, Marathon, ON.

Introduction

Many rural areas are looking for alternative economic development to replace a former reliance on agriculture, mining, or forestry. As traditional industries are challenged by mechanization, resource scarcity and international influences, economic planners are looking for new industries based on these same resources, but which are not facing the same challenges (Butler et al. 1998). Often tourism is considered as an option because its development relies on an area’s cultural, historic, ethnic,
geographic, and natural uniqueness (Reid 2003). Rural areas provide a special appeal to tourists because of the mystique associated with a rural environment, its distinct culture, history, ethic and geographic characteristics (Butler et al. 1998). This is largely due to the fact that in Canada, approximately 70% of the population lives in urban environments, though this average varies within the provinces (Mendelson & Bollman 1998).

It is valuable to examine the trends in Canadian rural tourism to illustrate the importance this industry has for rural Canadian economies. In 2000, 1% of all domestic overnight trips were spent in rural areas (primarily in resorts) and although this is a small percentage, it contributed $360 million to the national economy (Beshiri 2005a). Nearly half of all international tourist visits to Canada were to predominantly rural areas, though approximately half of the visitors remain in rural areas adjacent to urban centres while the remaining percentage visits more remote rural areas. In particular, 4% of all USA visitors travel to northern rural areas. When comparing the number of tourist visits to the number of rural residents, we find that for every rural resident, there are 11 tourist visits compared to 6 tourist visits for every urban resident. In other words, there is greater intensity of tourism in rural areas than urban.

The total employment figures attributed to tourism within Canada was 490,000 jobs in 2003 (Beshiri 2005b). Between 1996 and 2003, employment in the tourism related sectors (air transportation, all other transportation, accommodation, food and beverage, recreation and entertainment, travel agencies) grew by approximately 15%. In rural areas, tourism employment accounts for 3% of all jobs, while in northern areas, it is 4%. In fact, tourism has been the strongest employment sector across Canada for rural regions. The accommodations (40%), food and beverage (27%), and recreation and entertainment (16%) sectors account for the greatest employment.

Despite its relative importance within rural economies, tourism should not be considered a panacea to alleviate the de-development of rural areas. Much research has examined the value of tourism in rural communities (Reid 2003; Jamal & Getz 1999; Reed 1997; Butler 1998), and increasingly, criticisms have been leveled at traditional tourism development and planning, including: the seasonality of the industry and low paying jobs that do not offer sustainable employment (Jamal and Getz 1999; Butler 1998; Reed 1997; Troughton 1995); the entrenchment of power structures and hierarchies within communities through exclusionary practices in planning and non-local development and ownership (Reid 2003; Gunn and Var 2002; Belsky 2000), and; the reactionary framework within which
tourism is often chosen, without a full understanding what tourism is or how it can and should be managed (Draper and McNicol 1997; Joppe 1996). As result, several authors have advocated for a community-based approach to tourism development suggesting that it may provide an opportunity for a sustainable tourism industry (Reid 2003; Murphy 1985; Murphy and Murphy 2004). As a result, community-based tourism has come to be understood as a bottom-up approach to tourism planning and development that incorporates local individuals in the planning process, in a meaningful way.

Although several authors (Murphy 1985; Murphy and Murphy 2004; Gunn and Var 2003) have advocated for the importance of community-based planning, Reid (2003) and Reid, Mair and George (2004) have provided a model and process for undertaking a community-based approach to tourism development. Their model has been applied in several case study areas (British Columbia, Kenya and Bermuda), but has not been implemented or evaluated outside of that research team. Further research is required to critically examine the practical and theoretical elements of this model in light of criticisms of community-based tourism which question the usefulness and suitability of such processes (Joppe 1996; Blackstock 2005). The objectives of this paper are to critically examine the intersection of community-based tourism theory with practice, through an examination of a rural community-based planning process in Marathon, Ontario, based on Reid’s (2003) model. As such, the paper begins with an assessment of community-based tourism, followed by an examination of Reid’s (2003) community-based tourism model. After a brief description of the case study (Marathon, Ontario), an account of the process is provided, followed by an evaluative discussion on the experience of conducting strategic tourism development planning based on Reid’s model.

The methodology employed in this research is qualitative, and is based on my reflections as a facilitator and participant in the process and implementation of Reid’s community-based tourism model. By request of the Tourism and Economic Development Officer (EDO) for Marathon, I facilitated the development of a strategic plan for the development of Marathon’s tourism attributes, with the Tourism Action Committee (TAC) agreeing to utilize Reid’s Community-based Tourism model as the framework for conducting the strategic planning process. I facilitated meetings for the TAC over a 6-month period (January to August 2006), during which time I kept field notes of my observations of the process and its implementation.
Community-based Tourism

The tourism industry broadly is understood to be growing at exponential rates and is continually permeating different locales around the globe. Much literature has discussed its benefits and costs to the areas in which it exists, but as Harrill (2004) points out, there is a relative dearth of literature regarding planning for the industry. As indicated earlier, tourism developments have been criticized on several fronts, and many authors would argue that these criticisms are a result of a lack of planning, and importantly, a lack of involvement of local people in that planning process (Reid 2003; Ryan 2002; Hall 2000; Joppe 1996; Inskeep 1991; Murphy 1985). Given the levels at which the tourism industry pervades a community (employment, land use, environment, social structure and infrastructure) obtaining the perspective of residents should be integral to any tourism planning (Harrill 2004).

Community-based tourism is premised on the inclusion of local people in the development of the industry. In fact, its characteristics include local control of development, community involvement in planning, equitable flow of benefits, and incorporation of resident values (Tosun 2006; Blackstock 2005; Reid 2003; Hall 1996; Pearce 1992; Haywood 1988; Murphy 1985).

Reid (2003) argues that traditional tourism planning is conducted from a social reform and or policy analysis perspective. These theories of planning are primarily top-down in approach, leaning heavily on government intervention, expertise and investment. These perspectives involve experts who analyze the situation in a scientific, rational way and determine an appropriate course of action to be administered at the local level. Although these types of approaches may be appropriate from a corporate point of view and in certain contexts, Reid (2003) argues that social learning and mobilization theories are more appropriate perspectives to apply to community-based tourism development, as they reflect the perspectives of the local community residents who live with the repercussions of tourism development on a daily basis. Social learning is based on utilizing local collective knowledge linked to action (social mobilization) and accounting for the political context in which planning is taking place. The approach is based in commonly held values and the transformative power of utilizing these community values and knowledge in constructing solutions to local problems (Stankey et al. 1999).

According to Reid (2003) employing a community-based approach to tourism development, based on a social learning/mobilization framework, can aid the implementation and sustainability of the development as often such projects have greater community support and buy in from an inclusive
list of stakeholders. Figure 1 provides a graphic representation of Reid’s (2003) community-based tourism development planning model. As is evident from the model, the process begins through an individual catalyst that provides initial leadership to the planning process; often times this requires the inclusion of an outside expert to facilitate the community group. A task force (or action committee) is then struck, comprised of individuals who have technical expertise, vested interests in the eventual products of the plan and are concerned about the interests of the community more broadly.

The next phase of the model is important, as it involves raising community awareness about the issues of tourism development and to seek the involvement of the community in determining the essence of the final product. It is this stage that deviates from traditional entrepreneurial approaches to tourism planning as it integrates community residents in visioning and planning for their community’s future in relation to tourism developments. This phase requires, “great skill in the subject areas of community development and group facilitation. The implementation of this stage of the process demands time and energy in organizing the community to take charge of the process” (Reid 2003: 133). The skills that are learned by community members during this process should be
transferable to other community development projects (thus contributing to the social learning and transformation process previously discussed).

The planning phase then involves several stages – product development and marketing, system building and program evaluation. The focus of the Marathon case study strategy was on product identification and development, as discussed below.

In order to complete a tourism development plan in keeping with the community-based philosophy and approach outlined above, a series of steps must be undertaken, which include the following:

Step 1: History - Utilize past strategic plans and surveys to determine what is already known about tourism in the community;

Step 2: Objectives - Based on what is learned from past research, determine a vision of what the community might look like in the future in relationship to tourism;

Step 3: Strengths and Weaknesses of Existing Tourism Product - Examine what currently exists with regards to tourism (current/past tourism statistics and potential tourism developments);

Step 4: An Inventory - Undertake an inventory of current tourism and recreation related attributes in the community and immediate region;

Step 5: Action Items - Identify what needs to be done and what the priority areas are. This should include the identification of partnerships and existing community groups and organizations that can potentially be involved. Action items and implementation strategies should be determined, along with a time frame for development.

Step 6: Develop a Planning Document - Create a document that outlines the process, the priority areas, partnerships, actions & implementation strategies and potential time frames. This document should be shared with the community more broadly through a variety of venues and Reid (2003) suggests that public meetings are the least preferred method and advocates for smaller venues and multiple meeting times. The final document should be approved and accepted by local government.

As this discussion illustrates, community-based tourism development has arisen from a desire for a more inclusive approach to tourism planning which are thought to provide greater benefits and control to the local community and ultimately, aid in the transition towards a sustainable future. An examination of Marathon, Ontario as a case study provides an opportunity to examine the application of Reid’s (2003) community-based planning model.
The Case Study: Marathon, Ontario

Marathon, Ontario is located between Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie, on the north shores of Lake Superior (Figure 2). The community is located within the dominant boreal forest that covers the Canadian Shield. This forest cover and underlying geology have resulted in a town that is “Built on paper, laced with gold”, a motto speaking to the dual economic base of gold mining and the pulp industry, which have sustained the community for the past forty years. However, the soft wood lumber crisis, global competitiveness and the limited life span of the gold mine require that the community investigate a number of economic diversity options, one of which is tourism.

Given its relatively small population of 3,863 (Statistics Canada 2006), Marathon has a remarkable diversity of services and amenities. The community has both a public and Catholic school system, along with a French school. A regional full emergency service hospital, eleven physicians, chiropractic clinic, optician, and a dental office provide a full range of health care. In addition, Marathon has a extensive array of retail, service, entertainment, accommodation and recreational facilities. This range of amenities not only makes Marathon an attractive place of residence but also provides opportunities for tourism, an economic development option not lost on the planners and businesses in the community.

Figure 2: Location of Marathon, Ontario.
A Brief Examination of Marathon’s Past and Current Tourism Situation:

There have been a variety of important and useful studies completed that concern tourism development in Marathon, including: Marathon and Area Tourism Strategic Plan: Critical Area Development Plan (1997); Marathon and Area Tourism Strategic Plan: Residents Survey Summary Document (1997); Marathon Visitor Information Centre Statistical Reports (1995 to 2005), and; Marathon Business Retention and Expansion Report (2005). These studies of Marathon’s tourism potential and future clearly identified many of the naturally occurring features (both physical and cultural) as attractions worthy of development. In addition there has been recognition that other community assets and infrastructure needs to be addressed in order to support tourism development.

One of the unique features of the community is the fact that it has a Visitor Information Centre (VIC) that has collected visitation data since 1995. A summary of this data is provided in this section to present a picture of visitation patterns to the community and region. The Marathon visitor information is based on four months (May through August) of data collection. The statistics reflect only those people who are surveyed by VIC staff, which represent approximately 70 per cent of total visitation to the centre. The data for 2004 do not include statistics for the month of June, so this data set is incomplete. Although the types of data collected remain relatively consistent each year, the method of data collection and the people collecting the data do not; the data for 1995 illustrates the problems associated with inconsistent data collection methodologies as these numbers are completely out of sync with all other data years. As such, these data can only be used for illustrative purposes and no conclusions can be made with certainty. Despite such limitations, the data provide a clear indication of visitation patterns and the interests of visitors to Marathon and the region. When these patterns are compared to those available for northern Ontario as a whole, it is evident that Marathon’s tourism experience mirrors the trends for this portion of the province (Rogers 2003).

As Figure 3 illustrates, the largest number of visitors to Marathon are from Canada, with approximately 65% being from Ontario. Given the large geographic size of the province, it is expected that there would be a large percentage of domestic visitation. The American market makes up about 25%, with visitors coming from the border states of Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan. The number of international travelers is relatively low, but given the relatively peripheral location of Marathon within Canada, this number is higher than anticipated.

The total number of visitors to Marathon has remained relatively steady between 8,000 to 10,000; what is important to note is that this
amount of consistent visitation has been achieved or maintained with relatively no product development and marketing. This suggests the untapped potential of Marathon to attract tourists (both domestically and internationally) once suitable products have been developed and marketing strategy has been determined.

Although there are a variety of reasons for visiting Marathon, an examination of choice for this destination illustrates that the top three reasons centre on recreation opportunities, and when combined with where people chose to stay, it is clear that camping is a key attraction in the region (Figure 4).
Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) is also a key reason for visitation to Marathon – again a trend to be expected given the mobile nature of the baby boomer generation and their children. However, Gunn and Var (2002) suggest that this is a major market segment that should not be underestimated. Indeed, the VFR segment is an important component of rural tourism as it provides a positive word of mouth channel (Clarke 2005).

As previously indicated, camping is an important reason to visit and a source of accommodation for visitors to Marathon and the region. Perhaps more significant however is the fact that hotel stays have grown significantly since 1995, as indicated in VIC data. Hotel stays are important as they directly support local businesses in terms of accommodation owners, restaurateurs and other service-based retailers. The “other” category signifies the accommodation of visiting friends and relatives who stay with family.

Table 1 provides a summary of the length of stay of visitors. As we might expect, around half of all visitors stay one or two nights. What is surprising is that the next largest grouping stays more than 6 nights. The important trend in these statistics is that the length of stay is increasing. An examination of the trends in rural tourism expenditure indicates that the average expenditure for a domestic (i.e. Canadian) single overnight visitor in rural areas is $100 per tourist-visit\(^1\), while the average is significantly higher for International visitors ($300)(Beshiri 2005a).

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(Source: VIC)

\(^1\)Tourist-visit is a unit for measuring tourism participation, by counting each census division that a tourist visits as one destination.
The visitation data for Marathon and region indicates that there is a strong domestic market traveling to the region for its recreational opportunities, taking advantage of a variety of accommodation sources. In addition to a strong provincial market, Marathon receives a significant number of Canadian and American visitors. Much of the visitation to Marathon has been based on limited product and virtually no marketing, indicating the untapped nature of Marathon’s tourism potential and the need for planning.

**Undertaking Community-based Tourism Development in Marathon: Method and Process**

This section provides a detailed explanation of how Reid’s (2003) model was applied in Marathon. It does not provide the specific elements of the final strategic plan, as this paper is primarily concerned with analyzing the process associated with Reid’s model.

Following the elements of community-based tourism development as previously outlined, the Marathon Tourism Action Committee (TAC) was struck in January 2006. A variety of individuals were invited to join the committee, including businesses, teachers, students, physicians, industry (mill and mine), Chamber of Commerce, Town Council, Ontario Parks, Parks Canada, and seniors. The resulting TAC was comprised of 13 community members with all aforementioned groups having representation excluding youth and seniors, who chose not to join. A chair person was selected from the group, and my role was the facilitator and research expert for the project. Monthly meetings were held February through June. The Editor of the *Marathon Mercury* (the local newspaper) attended each meeting and subsequently published articles about the TAC and its work. The TAC felt this would be an important way to keep the community informed and to invite additional participation of residents. As a result, several different individuals attended various meetings, though they did not continuously participate.

The TAC held its first meeting in February, at which time the Terms of Reference for the project were finalized and the Reid framework for tourism development was discussed. During this meeting, I provided the group with a distinction between market and product led approaches to tourism development. A market-led approach to tourism development is based on providing whatever attractions, facilities, and services the tourist market may demand (Inskeep 1991). Placing the emphasis on matching tourist products and appropriate markets is not always appropriate for rural areas, as it may not reflect the interests or needs of the local community and may
not be sustainable (both financial and over the long term) (Reid 1998). Such an approach could result in environmental degradation, loss of socio-cultural integrity of the tourism area, and may not provide even short-term economic benefits. Generally, market-led approaches are led by outside experts and do not reflect the interests or capacities of local people.

In contrast, a product-led approach is based on developing only those types of attractions, activities, and services that the community believes can best be integrated with minimum impacts into the local development patterns and society (Inskeep 1991). Often potential attractions are currently available and naturally existing within the community and only require infrastructural or informational development, varying in cost magnitude. The development of such attractions generally benefits both local people and potential visitors, and as a result support for such initiatives is often greater from local residents, making it more sustainable over the long term. Marketing is then developed based on attracting those tourists who find the available products of interest to them (Gunn and Var 2002; Reid 2003). Once tourist numbers warrant, additional infrastructure and ‘fabricated’ attractions can be constructed, on the basis of solid visitor numbers and research. The result is a tourism industry that is viable and sustained by visitation to the region, thus reducing dependence on primary industry and government programming. Such an approach requires time – it is not a quick fix, but rather one that is based on naturally occurring attributes within the community and region; acknowledges financial commitments and capacities of local governments; addresses the interests of local residents; finds ways to support local entrepreneurial initiatives; seeks to engage local businesses and attractions that are currently developed, and; plans for future developments that will be undertaken and sustained through visitation, not local expense.

This information provided an opportunity to discuss the philosophical basis for the types of development the TAC wanted to explore. Although there was one member who felt the committee should ‘think big’ and create an attraction to draw large markets, the remainder of the group were interested in product-based development, capitalizing on the tourism attributes present within Marathon for both resident and visitor enjoyment.

The March meeting provided the opportunity for the committee to review the previous tourism related studies conducted for Marathon. The studies were primarily concerned with Marathon’s tourism potential, the identification of naturally occurring features (both physical and cultural) worthy of enhancement, and prioritized development options. Based on these previous documents, the committee discussed what had been accomplished, what was remaining and if these projects were still important. By the end of the meeting, the group had agreed on several general priority
areas that remained uncompleted from past reports and had identified some new opportunities. Each committee member left with a community inventory that they were to complete by the next meeting. The inventories were structured to identify various tourism related attributes (nature-based, recreation, heritage and culture, special events, community organizations and businesses) in the community, where they were located and what level of development was required.

Once the committee members had completed the inventories, I compiled the information and compared it against the priority areas that had been identified as a result of the past studies and emerging opportunities (Table 2). This comparison aided in the identification of existing and potential tourism attributes and what was required to facilitate their development.

By the April meeting the community inventory analysis and statistical data on visitor information were presented to the committee. The list of possible tourism developments was quite large, so committee members undertook to determine the most important aspects, utilizing a ‘dotting’ methodology (Reid 2003). In this exercise, participants are given a limited number of dots and are asked to place their dots on the items of most

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<tr>
<th>Priority Level – Short Term</th>
<th>Plan in Place</th>
<th>Plan Required</th>
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<td>Pebble Beach</td>
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<td>Highway Signage</td>
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<td>Recreation Activities</td>
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<td>Prisoner of War</td>
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<td>Mink Creek Signage and Trail Development</td>
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<td>Partnership Building between organizations</td>
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<td>Tourist Train</td>
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importance to them. Those receiving the most dots are considered to represent the groups’ collective priority. This exercise results in a smaller number of development projects, which the committee then categorized as short, medium and long term goal categories (Table 2).

During the May meeting, the committee reviewed the previously determined prioritization, this time linking each “project” area with existing community groups, provincial government ministries, Lakehead University or individuals that would be involved in implementation. The group felt that it was important to clearly identify such groups and to outline an implementation strategy to ensure that the strategic plan could be carried out. The fear was that because much of the implementation could fall to volunteer groups, the plan could falter.

The subsequent months of June and July were spent by me drafting the strategic plan and sharing drafts with the committee. After several revisions, the final draft was put on to Marathon’s website <http://www.town.marathon.on.ca/>, and copies were provided at the recreation center and at the public library. A newspaper advertisement was placed in the Marathon Mercury, announcing a public meeting and inviting residents to view the document and attend the meeting to provide their input. An email address was also provided, inviting people to send their comments. During the week of the August 28th meeting date, several radio interviews with the TAC chair and announcements were made, informing listeners about the plan and reminding them of the meeting. The public meeting was held on August 28th, which no Marathon residents attended. The Marathon Mercury subsequently ran a story explaining the work of the TAC and the elements of the strategic plan. Residents were invited again to view the document and submit their comments to the TAC. No additional comments were received and the final draft was completed and submitted to Town Council in September, which approved the document and its recommendations in October 2006.

**Discussion: How Theory Intersects with Practice**

As the preceding account illustrated, Reid’s planning model provided a ‘user-friendly’ structure to develop tourism in a bottom-up fashion. As the arrows in Figure 5 indicate, the Strategic Plan developed by the TAC focused on the ‘Gearing Up’ and ‘Community Assessment and Organizational Development’ phases. The intent of the planning exercise was to identify the tourism attributes present within Marathon and develop an implementation strategy for their development. The actual product development and marketing strategy will be conducted at a subsequent
One of the primary recommendations was to have the TAC established as a Committee of Council, which would give it a reporting structure and responsibilities within the Marathon Town Council. This recommendation was approved by Council and as such, the TAC can now undertake the planning and marketing strategies recommended in the report. In addition, the TAC identified the importance of ongoing monitoring of progress and impacts of development on the community, as stated within the strategic plan.

The ‘Gearing Up’ phase certainly reflected Reid’s model, with the EDO acting as the catalyst of the project. His recognition of the importance of economic diversification in the community, combined with a lack of available time to conduct the strategic planning exercise himself and the need for some outside expertise to legitimize the process, resulted in his contacting me as facilitator. He was interested in having someone who

*Figure 5: Areas of focus for the Marathon Planning Process. (Read, 2003)*
understood the importance of community involvement and the realities of rural communities in terms of limited funds and a strong reliance on volunteers. As a result of work I had completed for him in the past, he contacted me and we discussed how we would proceed to develop the ‘task force’. He undertook a ‘shoulder tapping’ exercise, personally inviting a number of different people representing a variety of organizations and agencies in the community, along with open invitations to the residents at large. This resulted in the formation of the Tourism Action Committee (TAC), as previously described.

The ‘Community Assessment and Organizational Development’ phase also closely mirrored that expressed in Reid’s model. An examination of previous studies helped in determining historical views towards tourism and what the developmental priorities had been. This allowed the committee to envision what types of tourism development they viewed as appropriate within the current context. In addition, an analysis of the visitor statistics helped the committee to understand the present state of their tourism industry, which illustrated that despite any development of product or marketing, visitation was fairly significant. Subsequently, the TAC undertook an inventory of current tourism and recreation related attributes in the community and immediate region. This exercise served the dual purpose of aiding the committee in prioritizing development areas, and perhaps more importantly, the exercise engendered a sense of pride as it indicated the extent of options available. As a result of this work, the TAC was able to identify actions that needed to be undertaken, they were able to prioritize these project areas, and they also identified potential partnerships with existing community groups and organizations. In addition, the TAC determined general implementation strategies for each prioritized project area along with a time frame for development. All of these steps were concluded with the development of a planning document entitled ‘Strategic Planning for the Development of Marathon’s Tourism Attributes’. As indicated, the document was shared with the community more broadly through a variety of venues and was approved and accepted by local government.

According to this assessment, the process should be considered successful as it was not difficult to implement Reid’s model and it did provide a satisfactory outcome for those involved (i.e. the TAC). However, when the process is examined through a community participation lens, the analysis is less favourable. Blackstock’s (2005) assessment of community-based tourism resulted in three criticisms: she contends that despite the rhetoric, there is limited transformative learning; communities are assumed to be homogeneous, and; there is limited acknowledgement of the external constraints to local control. These criticisms provide a framework for
evaluation in this case study, excluding the homogeneity criticism. Reid (2003) spends considerable time in his book discussing the complexities of community, cautioning against ever assuming uniformity of opinion, goals and objectives.

Certainly Reid’s focus on social learning and mobilization has at its core, the intent for transformative learning. Although this was not prevalent in my mind during the process, reflection and discussions with committee members reveals that there were degrees of learning that did take place for the committee members (and certainly for me as the facilitator). One of the challenges of rural tourism is the lack of embeddedness of the industry (Koster 2005). Rural communities built on extractive industry understand how that industry works, but rarely do they comprehend the complexities associated with the service industry and tourism. One of the outcomes of this strategic planning process was increased understanding of how tourism operates, how the community can harness its benefits and that monitoring of the outcomes to manage any negative impacts is necessary.

However, because tourism is not an embedded industry within the community, I believe this contributed to the lack of wider community participation in the consultation phases. Because Marathon still has a profitable mill and mine, residents are not concerned with economic diversification, especially in terms of industry that they know little about and which does not appear to offer the economic windfall that extractive industries do. The economic situation or where the community is at in their resource based economy life cycle likely influences participation - tourism is not part of their current economic thinking.

Blackstock’s (2006: 44) concern regarding the external constraints to local control and participation centre primarily on external interests limiting decision-making participation due to fears of it increasing the ‘costs of doing business’ and instead, “public participation is often reduced to a legitimizing process of approval”. As indicated in the case study of Marathon, there was no broader community participation in the evaluation of the strategic plan, beyond that of the TAC members. No comments were received regarding the document and no one attended the meeting held to discuss the final draft of the document.

Although somewhat disappointed by the lack of attendance and comments on the document, committee members were not surprised. The general sentiment was that it was typical of Marathon residents as generally, unless the topic of discussion is contentious or has the potential to bring in multiple jobs, people do not attend meetings. The EDO echoed this sentiment, indicating that when he held a meeting to discuss the potential for expanded mining exploration, they ‘filled the house’. From his perspective, every opportunity had been provided for people to provide
in put on the plan, so he was not concerned about the lack of participation from the wider community.

As the facilitator and self-proclaimed ‘community-based researcher’, I was less sanguine. I felt that there could have been more attempts at community consultation and involvement, but our time lines were restricted by the impending municipal election in October of 2006 which determined the period within which the planning process had to take place. It was important to the committee to have the document approved by council before the election so that their work would not be disregarded by a new government. As a result, the length of time to conduct small group meetings with various members of the community as suggested by Reid (2003) was not feasible.

Acknowledging that community members may participate in tourism development to varying degrees, Tosun (2006) has developed a typology of participation with three categories. The first is *spontaneous participation*, representing an ideal type in which full managerial responsibility and authority lies with the host community. The planning is completely bottom-up and transformative learning is paramount. The second level is *induced community participation* in which the community is “allowed to hear and be heard” (Tosun 2006:495) but theirs is only one voice of other and often more powerful interests, such as government or industry, resulting in participation that is often passive and which could be considered as tokenism. Finally, *coercive community participation* is a manipulative and contrived form of input, where power holders are merely interested in educating the local community. Some decision making may be given to local leaders, but only insofar as to prevent outright hostility towards tourism developers and tourists. Tuson (2006) concludes that participation in tourism by different interest groups varies with differing groups’ power, objectives and expectations from community participation.

The participation received in the entire process (from developing the TAC to evaluating the strategic planning document) would fall between spontaneous to induced participation. Despite a rather cavalier attitude at the lack of broader community participation, both the EDO and the committee members had hoped for interest in and comments on the strategic plan, believing that such participation would aid in building a strong diversified tourism product and by extension, local economy. However, as discussed previously, a lack of perceived need for economic alternatives at this time likely decreased the desire to give summer hours over to analysis of a tourism project.

There are some additional questions that this process raised, from a facilitators perspective. Had this been a research project, dictated by my time lines as a Primary Investigator, it may have allowed me the time to
more fully engage community members in a ‘spontaneous participation’ format. However, given the committee members views, it is hard to say how or if this would have made a difference. Indeed, research by Vernon et al. (2004) suggests that various factors including available time, concerns over how contributions will be utilized, and flow of information can affect membership and participation.

As the ‘external expert’ in a community-based approach to tourism development, I witnessed the establishment of a TAC with a membership that was largely skewed to the interests of tourism (retail, accommodation, food and beverage, attractions) with limited representation from other potential community interests. In fairness, a larger number of individuals, representing these other areas, were invited and encouraged to attend. However, I was plagued with wondering what role or right I had in dictating the membership content of the committee. In addition, I struggled with my role in the committee and process. Did my presence influence how much of the process was still ‘top down’? How much did my own inexperience influence the way things went?

Korf and Oughton (2006: 284), in discussing Participatory Rural Appraisal methodologies, suggest that participatory processes are played out in arenas of negotiation, which are, “contested space[s], where power differentials play a key role in various negotiation lines, within community as well as between different agents in the community and outsiders”. In my case, much of the negotiation occurred between myself and the EDO, though we shared similar philosophies regarding the direction the project could (and should) take. It is unclear how much his vision was shared by the larger group or the community. What is clear is that my own ideas reflected his, and it is very likely that this resulted in a power position for me as facilitator and so-called expert over the group. Korf and Oughton (2006) in citing the work of Cooke and Kothari (2001) suggest that one of the arenas of tyranny associated with participatory approaches is in decision-making; often development approaches are imposed from the outside and facilitators tend to dominate the process. Certainly it would appear that although most suggested project areas and implementation strategies came from within the committee members, the framework for undertaking the project and its product-led approach were largely a result of my ‘information provision’ and negotiations with the EDO.

In their evaluation of collaborative policy making for sustainable tourism, Vernon et al. (2004) found that academic researchers involved as ‘partners’ in the collaboration ended up having greater power over other partners due to their expertise, the realities of research pressures which did not provide adequate time to get reports to committee members for their review, and the responsibilities of report writing. They suggest these
veracities point to the difficulties of making theories of collaboration a reality. My own experience in the case of strategic planning in Marathon would echo these sentiments.

**Conclusion**

Through this analysis it is apparent that Reid’s (2003) model for community-based tourism planning is an effective way to undertake tourism planning that is inclusive of community members. However, as several authors have indicated through experience or critique, it is the community participation portion of such methodologies that is challenging. Indeed, Reid does not minimize the difficulties associated with community inclusion in the planning process, but written texts somehow diminish the realities of the challenges.

The important question to ask is if these challenges warrant a disregard for the method, or are there positive outcomes, albeit limited from what theoretical models purport, that make the process worth while? Certainly those participating in the TAC felt the group had accomplished a task worthy of implementation. The ratification of the document and its recommendations by Marathon Town Council legitimized their efforts. The accomplishments of the TAC, though guided by an outside expert, were achieved through their own inspiration, vision of possibilities for their community, and a desire to share their uniqueness. Though I may have been their scribe, the committee members provided the content. As such, I would argue that despite the challenges, community-based approaches to tourism development, like the model presented here, are a positive step towards sustainable community development. What this research points to is the need for continued research into how we can effectively engage community members and how, as researchers we can integrate ourselves as part of the process on an equal level.

As a prologue, the TAC has continued to function and have begun implementing two of the projects (creation of a community map and the development of Pebble Beach) with hopes of completion for the 2007 tourist season.

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