

Sustainable Tourism Development and Rural Community Values in Australia's Forest Regions

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Certification

I Stephen Schweinsberg certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Synopsis

Background

The purpose of this inquiry is to assess the role of tourism as an agent of sustainable change in rural Australia. In many parts of rural Australia, tourism is a relatively new economic activity. Traditionally regional economies have relied on primary industries, such as agriculture, fishing and mining to sustain their populations. For a host of reasons many of these activities have been in decline or have ceased altogether in recent years. This may be due to the depletion of the resource, changes in the environmental ethic of the broader Australian population, or government policies such as Regional Forest Agreements (RFA). Whatever the reason, the consequences of a decline in, or loss of a region's economic base may have a profound impact on a rural community. There is thus pressure to find an alternative or supplementary economic base so that the community can be sustained.

A review of the literature pertaining to sustainable tourism, tourism planning and the socially constructed nature of "place" illustrates some of the complexity in using tourism as a means of societal renewal in rural Australia. Rural Australia is not a homogenous entity. The existence of complex/ localised landuse histories, combined with a diverse range of environmental ethics amongst residents mean that community members can variously accept or reject economic arguments made in favour of nature tourism development. While governments and other regional tourism stakeholders often position nature tourism as a more environmentally, economically and socially sustainable use of rural Australia's unique natural environments; the fact that nature tourism development often necessitates a fundamental re-organisation of a community's economic and social structure means that it can be both positively and negatively perceived by local community stakeholders.

Research Design

This thesis explores new ways of assessing a rural community's response to a tourism development scenario in their area. The inquiry uses psychological values theories to interpret the attitudes and economic valuations of tourism development. The foundations of this new approach to values assessment, which is considered in this thesis is the contingent valuation method and the *Personal Construct Theory* (PCT) repertory grid. Contingent valuations are an economic survey based technique for eliciting preferences for non-market goods. Along with cost benefit analyses they provide tourism assessors with a means of determining the total economic value of a development proposal. Recently a number of authors have considered that a personal and diverse range of human values may underpin a willingness to pay (WTP) estimate in a contingent valuation survey. Various authors have made the connection between attitude and contingent valuation on the grounds that contingent valuation surveys are a form of economic consumerism where individuals make choices that are dependent upon their attitudes and beliefs.

The links that this thesis has made between contingent valuations and PCT repertory grids are built on this established body of contingent valuation attitude behaviour literature. Ajzen and Driver (1992a) who proposed a *Theory of Planned Behaviour*/contingent valuation model where beliefs about the consequences of an action were seen as directly influencing contingent valuation WTP. This thesis has utilised the principles of this model to the context of nature based tourism in a rural national park context. It then seeks to extend Ajzen and Driver's (1992a) model to include reference to existing landuse attitudes and their social context. Repertory grids, which have their basis in PCT principles, are used to provide a tool whereby social context can be interpreted.

The thesis research design and methodology involved the use of independent contingent valuation and repertory grid research instruments. Contingent valuation surveys and follow-up repertory grid interviews were distributed and undertaken in the Eden community on the NSW south coast, which functioned as the sole case study for analysis. Primary industries such as forestry have long been identified as being intrinsically connected to the working class character of the Eden area. Recently, however, in response to the effects of government RFA policies, local and regional stakeholders have come to investigate the potential role for nature tourism to contribute to Eden's future. This multifaceted landuse history has positioned Eden as an ideal exemplifying case with which to test a new economic psychology approach to tourism values assessment.

Research design was organised around three main research questions:

- 1. What is the non market economic value the Eden community ascribes to a hypothetical increase in the area allocated to national parks in their locality?**
- 2. What are the values the Eden community ascribes to the various forest based industries that exist around the Eden Township?**
- 3. How may *Personal Construct Theory* based repertory grid methods aid our understanding of the attitudinal underpinnings of contingent valuation willingness to pay estimates?**

Key Findings

Research Questions 1 and 2

One hundred and ninety eight Eden residents took part in the contingent valuation survey, which represented approximately 18 percent of the total resident population of the Eden Township. Of the 198 respondents, 24 accepted the premise of the contingent valuation scenario and provided a WTP payment amount (1 respondent was unable to provide a payment amount). The mean WTP was \$93.54 per annum, which translates into a mean WTP of \$1216 per individual over the 13 year lifespan of the Eden RFA. The legitimacy of this data was discussed with respect to various content validity, criterion validity and construct validity measures.

While there was a majority opinion amongst the sampled population regarding their disinterest in the survey scenario, there was a plethora of rationales put forward to justify responses. Developing an understanding of these contingent valuation response justifications was an important concern in this thesis, given the focus on understanding the ways that resident attitudes may underpin contingent valuations. Amongst the 25 respondents who accepted the contingent valuation scenario, concerns for environmental protection were predominant. 83 percent of respondents who supported the scenario noted that they wanted to preserve native forests and national parks, and felt that reserve areas are an appropriate means to achieving this. Some 70 percent of the sample population also felt that Eden residents have a responsibility to be proactive in the area of environmental preservation. Amongst the residents who rejected the contingent valuation scenario, approximately 40 percent refused to provide a WTP on the grounds that they were satisfied with the existing land use balance in the Eden RFA area. This satisfaction with the existing land use arrangements in the Eden area does not assume negativity towards tourism but rather recognises the effect that higher exogenous factors such as government policy can have on tourism development.

Research Question 3

Attitudinal questioning in the community contingent valuation survey was used in this inquiry to present generalised themes in landuse perception for the whole sample population. In a bid to consider ways in which the attitudes of individual community members can be better understood, this thesis has also completed personal repertory grid interviews with 22 Eden residents. Construct elicitation was designed to focus on cognitive dimensions associated with the residents' perception on the sustainability of a range of forest landuse elements. The primary industry and tourism landuses that were considered were bushwalking, 4 x 4 wheel driving, camping, woodchipping, plantation forestry and dairy farming. An untouched forest landuse element was also included.

As per the core principles of PCT, the constructs developed by Eden residents to describe the seven landuse elements varied from individual to individual. While there were some common themes across the different interview grids such as environmental sensitivity and potential for income generation, the way interviewees interpreted different forest landuses varied. In spite of this, the results that are presented in this study do illustrate that PCT techniques potentially have application in the field of landuse valuation.

In reference to the 3rd research question it was found that PCT repertory grid methods may aid understanding of the social context of WTP contributions in three ways. Firstly, repertory grids have been identified as providing an opportunity for researchers to observe how land use attitudes develop over time as residents gain more experience and knowledge of environmental debates. This is significant given that it has been illustrated that the opinion a community member attaches to forest usage is not static. Rather resident opinion will change over time based on the constantly evolving makeup of a community's social base. Secondly, it has also been shown that the generation of repertory grids around a set of resident formatted constructs has the potential to allow for the values of different residents to be given equal weight in land use discussions. PCT repertory grids conventions state that

interview participants, rather than investigators, are commonly responsible for defining the scope of the inquiry through construct development. Thus the chief advantage of PCT repertory grid methods is that no values position can be prioritised because the researcher does not come to a debate imposing his/her own hypotheses on a sample population. Rather, through the generation of cognitive constructs it is up to the individual respondents to define the issues that are relevant to them as they discuss sustainable landuses in the forests of Eden. Also, repertory grids allow researchers to see the extent to which the views of others in the community are likely to influence or be influenced by a contingent valuation decision. This is achieved through reference to the PCT sociality corollary. Understanding the power relationship between community members and other stakeholders in the Eden “community” has implications for the involvement of local residents in tourism development decisions.

Conclusion

The central argument to emerge from this thesis with respect to the attitude behaviour relationship between contingent valuations and PCT repertory grids is that repertory grids can help provide an explanation of the various social context issues, which influence a resident’s contingent valuation WTP estimate. This thesis has proceeded on the assumption that *‘evaluative judgements [such as WTP] should be sensitive to features of proposed transactions that the respondents consider to be relevant’* (Welch & Fischhoff, 2001, p. 209). With this in mind; repertory grids, with their foundation in individually constructed interpretations of reality have been proposed as a structured methodological tool, which may, if properly implemented, allow researchers to avoid interpreting WTP responses on the basis of their own personal opinion and prejudice. Opportunities for future research in this area will focus on the development of adaptable repertory grid research tools, which can be employed across different rural populations.

List of Publications Arising from the Thesis

Since research commencement the following papers and presentations have been published on different aspects of this study:

- Schweinsberg, S., Darcy, S. & Wearing, S. Resident Opinion of Increasing National Parks and Forest Reservations on the NSW Far South Coast: a Contingent Valuation study, *Journal of Environmental Management*, SUBMITTED
- Schweinsberg, S. (2007). Contributions to Economic Social Impact Assessment Methods from Psychological Values Analysis: a review, *Australian Planner*, vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 44-51 (Peer Reviewed)
- Schweinsberg, S. & Wearing, S. (2007). Exploring Community Sustainability Potential in Nature Based Tourism: The Far South Coast Nature Tourism and Recreation Plan, Proceedings of the 17th CAUTHE Annual Conference, McDonnell, I., Grabowski, S., March, R., (eds.) CD-ROM, University of Technology, Sydney (Peer Reviewed)
- Schweinsberg, S. C. (2006). Regional Forest Agreements as Catalysts for Change: Protected Areas, Rural Communities, Woodchips and Nature Tourism Development, CAUTHE 2006 Conference Melbourne, 6-9 February 2006

Glossary

For the purpose of this thesis the following definitions are used.

- **Contingent Valuation**

'A research methodology used to estimate the economic value of a ... resource not sold through conventional markets. It produces an economic value for a good by asking subjects to respond to a scenario describing the current amenity or resource, plausible changes to the amenity or resource ... and how much they are willing to pay for it' (Crofts, 2000, p. 108).

- **Community**

'Those [people that are] immediately adjacent to forestland or those with a high economic dependence on forest-based industries, including tourism as well as timber (sic)' (Kusel, 1996, p. 367)

- **National Park**

The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service defines a national park as *'a natural area of land and/or sea, designated to: a) protect the ecological integrity of one or more ecosystems for present and future generations; b) exclude exploitation inimical to the purpose of the dedication of the area and c) provide a foundation for the spiritual, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities all of which must be environmentally and culturally compatible'* (New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service, 1997, p. 15)

- **Nature Tourism (NSW Far South Coast Stakeholder Definition)**

'All [sustainable] tourism in natural areas...[focusing on] the natural and cultural features of a site and education rather than just the activities undertaken' (Shepherd, Dodds, Robinson, Moore, & Department of Lands, 2004).

- **Personal Construct Theory (PCT)**

PCT is a theory of individual and group processes that takes a constructivist position in modeling human knowledge but bases this on a positivist scientific position (Shaw, 1992). It provides a fundamental framework for both theoretical and applied studies of knowledge acquisition, attitude measurement, personality trials and cognitive mapping. George Kelly conceived this theory, explaining that a person is capable of applying alternative constructions or meanings to any events in the past, present and future (Mena, 2001).

- **Regional Forest Agreement**

'Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) are 20-year plans for the conservation and sustainable management of Australia's native forests. There are 10 RFA's in four States: Western Australia, Victoria, Tasmania and New South Wales. Each of these agreements provides certainty for forest-based industries, forest-dependent communities and conservation' (Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, 2004b).

- **Repertory Grid Method**

Repertory Grid Method represents the technique George Kelly, the founder of *Personal Construct Theory*, developed to identify and map an individual's personal experience constructs in a grid setting (Borell, Espwall, Pryce, & Brenner, 2003; Coakes, Fenton, & Gabriel, 1999; Hankinson, 2004).

- **Social Impact Assessment:**

'A tool that, through the systematic gathering and analysis of social data, can be used to assist in predicting the impacts of alternative courses of action on human societies' (Hough 1991, p. 274 in Fortin & Gagnon, 1999, p. 203)

- **State Forest**

Forests NSW's goal is to provide best management of forest areas and ensure the widest range of benefits to future generations of people in NSW. At present 9 percent of forests in NSW are managed as multiple use forests (allowing for both timber harvesting and recreation). Approximately 16 percent are managed as conservation reserves (Spencer, 2008). Performance success for State Forests is defined in terms of:

- **Commercial efficiency** - the returns generated from the marketing of forest products
- **Environmental care** - ecologically sustainable management of native and planted forests to protect and enhance environmental values including flora and fauna, water and soil quality and scenic attraction , and;
- **Social contribution** – helping to generate social and economic benefits for the people of NSW, including recreation and regional employment opportunities. (Department of Primary Industries - Forests, 2005)

List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full Description
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
ESD	Ecologically Sustainable Development
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
NSW	New South Wales
NPWS	National Parks and Wildlife Service
PCT	<i>Personal Construct Theory</i>
RFA	Regional Forest Agreement
SIA	Social Impact Assessment
STCRC	Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre
WTP	Willingness to Pay (in a contingent valuation)

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