

**TOWARDS A THEORY OF REMOTE AREA PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT:  
COMMUNITY BASED BIRD WATCHING TOURISM IN THE ARFAK MOUNTAINS,  
WEST PAPUA.**

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines community based bird watching tourism in the remote village of Siyoubrig, within the Arfak Mountains region of West Papua. There are two levels of planning that influence the intensity of tourism development within the village. One process is undertaken by the destination community and represents the site development planning process and the other is the over arching planning framework that governs development within the region. Remote areas are becoming increasingly popular as tourist destinations that provide for experience based stays. These experiences are related to the attributes of the setting and can be dependent upon the cultural and/or natural values of the destination. This research showed that bird watchers seek experiences that are related to the natural values of the setting as opposed to seeking destinations to participate in the activity of bird watching only. The intensity of development at the destination has the potential to impact upon the quality of the experience sought. Therefore the intensity of development must be commensurate with market demands in order to provide the opportunity for tourists to realise the range of desired experiential outcomes. The challenge for destination communities in remote areas is accessing information about market demands, and balancing the economic aspirations of the community with the perceived market and accessing a formal property system to secure ownership of the land title and the future growth of these enterprises. A formalised land use planning process is dependent upon a well established and accessible property system. Contemporary planning theory applied by western nations does not address the characteristics of remote areas and presumes that a formalised and accessible property system is in place. The paper reviews contemporary planning theory and concludes that a fresh approach to both the theory of planning and planning practices is necessary to enable the delivery of sustainable tourism development outcomes in remote areas.

**Keywords:** Community based tourism, Theory of planning, planning practices, remote areas, bird watching.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many non urban communities particularly those located in remote areas are highly vulnerable to economic dislocation which is in part due to a small population, a highly specialised economy and a geographically isolated location (Slack et al 2003).

Communities in these areas are particularly vulnerable to external economic conditions for example the commodity markets and in many instances lack the capacity (human and capital) to rapidly adapt to external economic shocks. Communities have responded in many ways to meet changing market conditions for their staples such as improving their competitiveness and considering the possibility of entering new markets (Walter 2003) such as tourism.

Communities in remote areas are natural resource dependent. That is, they depend upon the utilisation of the natural attributes as the basis of economic development. These natural attributes include soil and water for agricultural production, forests for timber production and mineral deposits for the extraction of precious metals and minerals.

This research examines how a community in a remote area plans for tourism in the village locality and the level of interactions the village decision makers have with external influences upon plan outcomes.

#### **CHARACTERISING REMOTE AREAS:**

Research in health (Dixon and Welch 2001, Singh 2004), education (Bryceson 2002, Schollar 2001), business development (North and Smallbone 1996) and tourism (Buckley 2007, Beyer et al 2005) refer to the concept of remoteness. However, very little attention has been paid to either differentiating the characteristics of urban to remote or measuring how the socio economic attributes of remote areas differ from those present in many urban areas (Copus and Crabtree 1996). Remote areas according to Slack et al (2003) are characterised by sharing some or all of the following:

- their small size, in terms of population, market and labour supply;
- their physical isolation from other, and particularly larger, urban centres;
- their lack of economic diversification;
- a weak and declining economic base and limited employment opportunities;
- limited range of public and private services;

- high production and servicing costs; and
- a small, low-density and often declining rural service hinterland.

Remote areas are becoming increasingly popular as places that enable people to connect with real life experiences (Williams 2008). These experiences are derived from getting outside the comfort zone and being physically or mentally challenged from interactions with the natural and cultural values of the area. What remains unknown is how communities in remote areas plan for tourism and what the relationship is between the plan outcomes and what the tourists are seeking in order to derive these experiences.

### **WHAT IS PLANNING?**

Planning as a general term refers to an activity done by individuals, groups or organisations that involves deciding on a desired future and implementing actions to achieve it (Harper and Stein 2006). The word planning can be prefixed with the descriptors such as community development, financial, corporate and operations.

Land use planning according to Dredge (1999) refers to a statutory process which aims to identify a vision for the spatial development of an area and to pursue this by designating a preferred pattern of land use. These designations are placed on titles of land which in turn influence its relative economic value. The owners of the titles are able to access the implicit capital value associated with the land use designation to create additional production (de Soto 2000).

### **PLANNING THEORY**

Land use planning theory and practice within the urban centre is essentially related to and has evolved from the management of change within complex urban and industrial systems and the political and legislative processes that govern the change in land uses (Selman 1995). The rural and remote areas by comparison have been neglected in

relation to planning theory and practice. This may be attributed to a less complex and competitive economic structure associated with local primary industries. However, Selman (1995) maintains this is largely as a result of the rural and remote area being outside the scope of statutory planning, and being treated as little more than a conduit for urban activity systems. Planning theory and practice in rural and remote areas has experienced a range of applied schools of thought such as rural sociology, agricultural economics, anthropology and economic development theory.

According to researchers (Harper and Stein 2006, Wadley and Smith 1996 and Selman 1995) the planning profession in western liberal democratic societies have been struggling with the paradigm shift from modernism to post modernism. Modernism is characterised by its dependence upon value free, scientific and rational decision making and plan formulation. Post modern on the other hand is based in normative theory i.e. values of what ought to be guide the process.

This change from modernism to post modernism has created a rift between planning theory and planning practice. Planning theory is the domain of the academic planners, and planning practices the domain of practitioners who a) practice within the established statutory and institutional frameworks; and b) practice within a specialised field (eg transport, economics, environmental, tourism and social planning). This has led to a duality in planning theory and practice theory whereby practitioners have rejected the relevance of the theory of and about planning in favour of theories relating to planning specialisations.

## **TOURISM PLANNING**

Tourism planning as a specialisation suffers from two fundamental inadequacies. The first of which relates to a lack of theory related to tourism development and the other is a lack of theory relevant to planning practice (Costa 2001, Reid 2003). This may be attributed to the way in which tourism planning is defined (Campbell and Fainstein 2003). Accordingly, the field of planning can be divided among those who define its

object (the land use patterns of the built and natural environment) and those who examine its method (the decision making process).

The object approach to tourism planning follows on from the 'systems' perspective (Getz 1986, Inskip 1991, Boyd and Butler 1996, Galagoda et al 2006), and applies a range of quantitative methods to derive a site land use plan based on the suitability of the site for tourism development. This approach incorporates business development, project management and land use planning concepts.

The decision making approach applies normative theory to plan process and follows on from post modernism to evolve in to the 'alternate tourism' paradigm within which the community based approach is embedded.

Neither of the two approaches to analysing tourism planning has considered the extraordinary natural and cultural attributes as the features that attract tourists to remote areas. Tourism planning has applied post modern philosophies to the theory about planning, normative theories related to the theory of planning and either the systems based or community based planning approaches to the practices. Tourism planning in rural and remote areas however, has no relevant theory of, or about planning, or planning practice to guide the spatial development of an area.

This research examines the real life community based planning practices undertaken by a community in a remote area in the absence of state intervention.

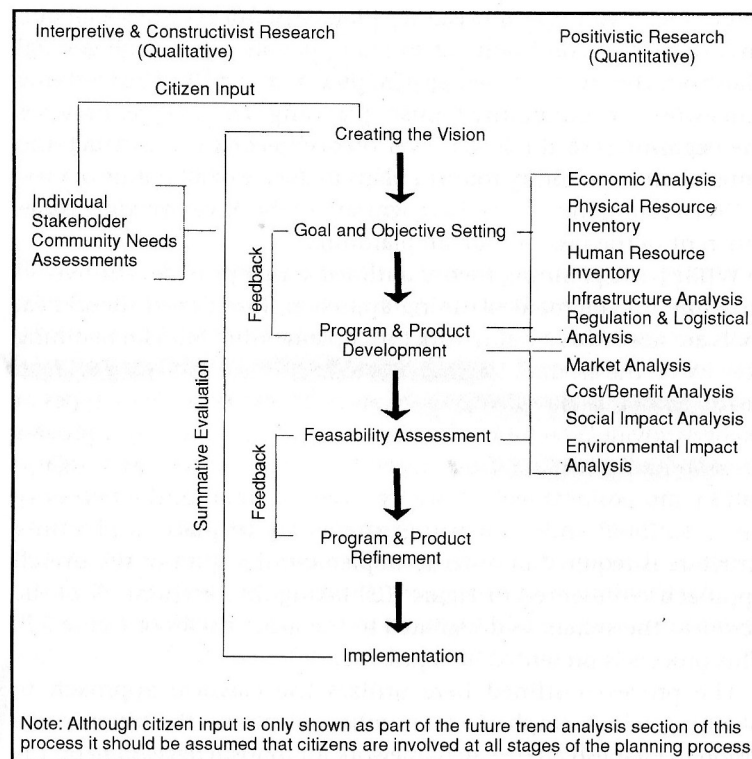
## **COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM**

Community Based Tourism (CBT) has been described as a sustainable and alternate form of tourism development and is positively contrasted to the unsustainable form of mass tourism (Weaver 2007). Community in this sense describes a 'grass root'

approach to tourism or an alternate to the top down approach (de Beer and Marais 2005). CBT focuses on the involvement of a community in the planning process to guide the intensity and location of tourism development (Reid 2003). Once the community have made these decisions they will then own, operate, manage and control tourism development within their community (Blackstock 2005).

Reid (2003) has developed a process for tourism development that applies normative theory to formulate a plan that is 'community friendly and people centred' (2003:121). Moreover Reid's process is based on the premise that tourism will be sustainable when a community reaches a collective decision. This decision is reached through the identification of commonly held values and aspirations for development. The corresponding level of development will be commensurate with the community circumstances. CBT therefore applies the normative theory of planning to describe the decision making process as is illustrated in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1 Reid (2003:146) Community Tourism Planning Process



## **METHODS:**

This research applied the single case study research method to provide an in depth analysis of the community based tourism phenomenon within its real life remote context. The village of Siyoubrig in the Arfak Mountains of West Papua was selected because of its remote location, and the range of services and development related to bird watching tourism are planned, owned and operated by members of the community. There were no other villages within West Papua at the time of the research that share these characteristics to undertake comparative research.

## **STUDY AREA: SIYOUBRIG**

The Indonesian province of West Papua was previously known as Irian Jaya and is the most eastern part of Indonesia and is the western half of the island of New Guinea. West Papua was declared a province in its own right in February 2007, and is comprised of eight (8) regencies and one city. Manokwari is the capital of the Province and is both a City and Regency. Siyoubrig is approximately 62km from Manokwari (3.5 hour drive) and falls within the Regency of Manokwari. The Regency is lead by a democratically elected *Bupati*.

Siyoubrig is seasonally accessible by road from Manokwari and is comprised of 17 houses and one church. Farm lands surround the village and these areas are enclosed by montane forest and steep topography. The people of the community all speak *Hatam*, the younger generations speak *Bahasa* Indonesian and only one person (tour guide) speaks limited English. The Arfakans are Melanesians and as such have a strong affinity with the land and a marked sense of belonging to a place (Sillitoe 2000). Customary land tenure depends on kin relationships, individuals do not have freehold title to any parcel of land and the rights to use the land are given by the 'landowner'. The landowner inherited the Siyoubrig territory from his fore bearers, and allocates use rights to specified areas for his kin to live, farm and hunt. Notwithstanding this fact, the land is legally owned by the 'state', which invariably means that should the state want access to the resources of Siyoubrig such as its timber, they are legally able to take these without consulting or compensating the community.

At present 80% of the village community are involved in tourism and are dependent upon tourism for 100% of their cash income. The remaining 20% of families are dependent upon agriculture of which they sell 50% of their produce and consume the remainder (interview: tour guide). All families have a house in the main village area, a farming allocation to grow their own food, and are able to access the forest to supplement their diet and timber for firewood or construction.

### **TOURISM PLANNING IN SIYOUBRIG:**

The Arfak Mountains area was first explored by European scientists in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Since then many expeditions have taken place to learn more about its unique forest values. It was on one of these expeditions in 1990 that the tour operator – who was working for a scientific expedition team – met the tour guide who was then based in Old Mokwam (2 km by road from Siyoubrig). The tour guide moved from Old Mokwam to Siyoubrig in 2004 after conflict occurred between members of the Old Mokwam community, and the tour guide/tour operator over the fees demanded by members of the community for the provision of tourism related services. The two parties were not able to reach an amicable agreement and as a consequence the tour guide moved from Old Mokwam to Siyoubrig in 2004.

The people of Siyoubrig had relatively little prior experience with tourism in 2004 as only a small number of bird watching tourists (groups between two and 4 visiting three times per year) were visiting the Arfaks and consequently minimal interaction occurred between members of the community and tourists. As more bird watchers became aware of the area, the number of tour operators interested in providing for tours to the Arfaks increased and so too the number of tourists. In 2006 a second tour operator approached the tour guide to ask for his guiding services to cater to larger and more frequent numbers of tours. In 2008 the number of companies wanting to visit Siyoubrig increased to 4 in total. The guide realised that he was no longer able to cater to demand from his home and has since constructed 3 guest houses and a kitchen to cater to up to 12 persons at any one time.

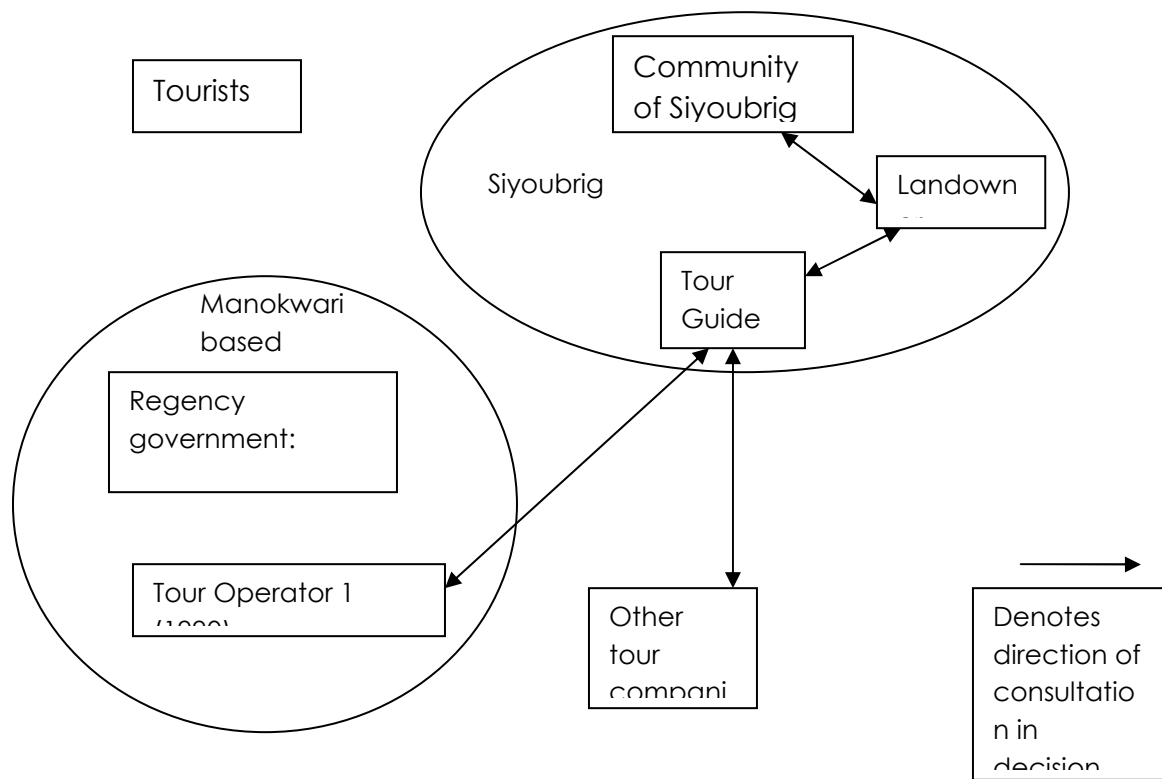


The community, land owner and tour guide have not held public meetings to discuss tourism development. All decisions regarding land use within the village is approved by the land owner as it is his land. Since 2004, all tour companies pay land owner fees to access the site. This is the land owners' only form of cash income.

The tour operators deal directly with the tour guide and have minimal interaction with the land owner. This may be due to language barriers as the land owner only speaks *Hatam*. The decision making roles of both the tour guide and the land owner are well defined within the community. Should members of the community have an issue relating to service provision, that member can access an informal dispute resolution process centring around the land owner. The community member may make a representation to the land owner on service provision issues but not on land use and development decisions.

There is no community endorsed plan for future tourism development in Siyoubrig. The tour guide does not have a 5 year plan, but is '*striving to be better every year*' (interview Tour Guide). Tourism development in Siyoubrig has responded to demand from tour operators.

Diagram 2. Planning for tourism development in Siyoubrig



### INFRASTRUCTURE AND TOURISM PLANNING BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Unbeknown to the Siyoubrig based land owner, tour guide or the tour operator(s) the local government have a 5 year plan to construct and surface a circuit road from Manokwari through the Arfak mountains to the coast at Ransiki and back to Manokwari. In addition the local government have also developed a tourism plan. The details of which are not able to be accessed by members of the public – local or otherwise.

Despite the lack of information about the number of tourists coming to Manokwari, the Regency Bupati (Mayor) said *‘that he knows more and more tourists are coming to Manokwari and that he is planning to promote the area’*. He also said that tourism was *‘one of the reasons that they built the road through the Arfak Mountains – to open the remote area by both airports and the road so that tourists will see the culture in Arfak as they are the original people here’*.

It is neither a statutory requirement nor a practice to involve members of the public in infrastructure planning specifically or planning generally. Planners and government officials are not required to consult with the wider community '*because the government planners think this [town plan outcomes] is good for a reason. So the citizens cannot say no*'. (Town Planner Manokwari).

## WHAT ABOUT THE TOURISTS?

Carson and Harwood (2007), maintain that successful remote area tourism destinations are those with markets that have highly specialised interests and where there is lower substitutability of both activities and their settings. It is these special interest markets that can form a basis for a viable tourism economy in a remote area. Further research by Harwood (2008) in to the setting preferences of UK bird watchers found that the most important reason for deciding where to take a bird watching holiday was to 'experience the sights and sounds of nature'. The three most important reasons were related to the physical attributes of the setting as opposed to the activity itself (Table 1). When the market is segmented according to the skill level possessed by the bird watcher the most important reasons varies. Not all activity markets are homogeneous in their reasons for visiting a destination. Providers of tourism services must be cognisant of the consequences of intensifying development within a setting and the impact that this may have upon the market that would be interested in visiting the location.

*Table 1. Most Important reason for deciding on bird watching destination*

<b>Motivation</b>	<b>Overall sample</b>	<b>Beginner</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Advanced</b>	<b>Expert</b>
To experience the sights and sounds of nature	4.24	4.07	4.25	4.24	4.54
View the natural scenery	4.13	4.04	4.17	4.07	4.46
To experience peace and quiet	3.79	3.64	3.93	3.66	3.77

To improve birding skills	3.78	3.54	3.73	3.92	4.00
To promote the conservation and preservation of birding habitats	3.66	3.37	3.65	3.68	4.23

\*Measured on a scale of 1 to 5. 1 being Not at all important and 5 being Extremely important

Moreover, these providers should understand that 'improving birding skills' is important to some segments, but overall the quality of the setting is far more important. Providers would need to understand at what point the level of development impacts upon the experience sought and actively manage the growth to ensure that the tourism product keeps within these parameters.

## **CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A THEORY OF REMOTE AREA PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

This research has demonstrated that there are many factors that impact upon development opportunities in remote areas. Planning theories related to development in remote areas must consider:

### 1. Planning for business survival in a highly competitive market place

This research examined tourism. Other projects may examine agricultural intensification or processing and manufacturing. Each of these are specialisations in their own right and their success is inextricably linked to the resources available at the location (labour, land and capital) and the governance strategies that prescribe how these can be used and in what circumstances.

### 2. Land use planning (spatial allocation of natural and built environment)

Land use development is an economic concept and functions within a neo liberalist market economy. The very basis of the economy is underpinned by the relationship between supply and demand for products. Land uses must be located, secured and

spatially distributed to ensure that the supplier can meet the needs of the consumer. If the consumer needs are not met then the supplier will not remain within the market place.

### 3. Decision making processes

Planning is a process of decision making. The modernist approach to decision making centres on experts and rational arguments. The post modernist perspective centres on being 'community friendly and people centred' (Reid 2003). According to Burroughs (1999), the primary currency of public participation is knowledge. If the public are representative then they will not be trained experts in every field of enquiry. Therefore to plan for community involvement in remote area development requires that the community possess the knowledge in order to make informed decisions. There needs to be more emphasis on increasing knowledge to enable informed decision making. Such as in this case understanding the market preferences for development, accessing information on those externalities that have the potential to deleteriously impact upon the plan outcomes. All decision making processes must acknowledge the impacts of institutional frameworks upon plan outcomes. Changing these is not the role of planning, rather this needs to be addressed in policy frameworks.

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