

'NEW PLANNING' APPROACHES FOR COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION: A CASE STUDY OF UCLUELET, VANCOUVER ISLAND, BC

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Communities across Canada are currently facing the challenge of transition from traditional resource dependency to alternative forms of local economies. For many such towns, tourism is frequently presented as the saviour of economically troubled communities. For traditionally resource dependent, geographically isolated towns that are part of the complex of 'rural, coastal, and/or mountainous' heartland-hinterland relationships, the development of tourism might appear as a fail-safe escape from the boom and bust cycle of resource dependency (Haider and Johnston, 1993). However, the particularities of communities in transition and the nature of the tourism industry itself present communities with a variety of challenges in the quest for a viable product. This paper draws on popular themes from recent tourism research and literature - sustainable tourism management (Swarbrooke, 1999), practicing responsible tourism (Harrison and Husbands, 1996), integrated forest management (Font and Tribe, 2000), and tourism planning (Bosselman, Peterson, and McCarthy, 1999; Jamal and Getz, 1994; Long and Nuckolls, 1994; Reid, Mair, Taylor, and George, 2000, Williams, 1998) - to present a case study of Ucluelet in British Columbia, a rural and coastal town that is successfully visioning and creating their 'new' community.

This is a descriptive study that employs the research methods of participant observation and field observations, in-depth interviews with the principal community planner, and archival research (see Berg, 1989; Kirby, 1989).

Ucluelet is a small rural community located on the west coast of Vancouver Island, BC. It lies in close proximity to world-renowned Clayoquot Sound and the Pacific Rim National Park. Over the past decade, Ucluelet has successfully made the transition from a small industry (logging and fishing), resource dependent community to a community possessed of a diverse economy with tourism as its leading industry. Ucluelet's successful journey offers important lessons for other rural and coastal communities facing similar social and economic transitions.

In the summer of 1993, Ucluelet and the neighboring community of Tofino provided the backdrop for the largest act of civil disobedience in Canadian history - over 900 citizens were arrested for blockading a main logging road and many thousands more stood on the "Battle for the Woods" blockade in Clayoquot Sound. The worldwide attention generated by this event, as well as the popular media's interest in the concept of sustainable development, propelled Clayoquot Sound and the communities of Ucluelet and Tofino into the international spotlight.

In the years immediately following 1993, the citizens of Ucluelet experienced abandonment by their major employer (multi-national logging company Macmillan Bloedel), and the effects of a massive deterioration in EC's coastal fishing industry. Facing a near collapse of its local economy, record unemployment rates, and an uncertain future, the community set about navigating through the inevitable social upheaval and economic transition. Today, almost a decade later, Ucluelet is a vibrant community that possesses a diverse economy and a strong and growing tourism and leisure industry.

Purposes

Many small rural and coastal communities across Canada - either as a reactive or proactive measure to stabilize their local economy - are attempting to diversify their economies, and many are looking to tourism as a main stay of their new economy. In this light, the purposes of this paper are (1) to present a case study of a community that has successfully navigated the shift from a resource dependent community to that of a diverse economy driven by sustainable tourism development, (2) to review and appraise the 'new planning' approaches that have guided this successful transition, and (3) to identify "lessons learned" and guiding principles that stem from Ucluelet's experience which may benefit communities facing similar challenges.

Leisure and 'New Planning' Approaches in Ucluelet

The paper addresses:

1. A descriptive history of the community of Ucluelet, including its geographical expression, changing community profile, and the new role of leisure-based industries in the community.
2. The critical role that 'new planning' has played in directing change and re-positioning Ucluelet during its socio-economic transition. This section includes:
 - a. the collaborative and integrative aspects of community planning that emphasize inclusive and citizen-driven processes,
 - b. the philosophy of 'community-ecological planning and design', including moving away from 'development at any cost', and 'spatial configuration as social landscape',
 - c. defining policy as a tool for implementation - Official Community Plan and zoning bylaws,
 - d. strategic negotiations with developers, including how small tax-based communities can utilize 'Other

- People's Money' (OPM),
- e. eco-planning for a new era of sustainable resource-based tourism, including transforming primary forest and fishing industries into sustainable tourism activities that encompass the land, ocean, river activities spectrum, and developing 'close to nature' leisure accommodations,
 - f. eco-planning for the new era of sustainable industry initiatives, including the Eco-industrial park, Island resort, BC Hydro "wave"-powered hydro generation, and subdivision design/location.

The paper concludes with a review of the 'lessons learned' and guiding principles for 'new planning' approaches.

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ABSTRACTS

of Papers Presented at the Tenth
Canadian Congress on Leisure Research

May 22-25, 2002

Faculty of Physical Education and Recreation
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta

Abstracts compiled and edited by
Edgar L. Jackson

CCLR-10 Programme Committee
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CCLR 10

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