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**VISION 2020 FOR NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR TOURISM:
UNCOMMON POTENTIAL OR UNABATED OPTIMISM?**

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In early 2006, a group of public and private stakeholders began developing a vision and strategy for the Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada) tourism sector. Released in 2009, the document entitled *Uncommon Potential: A Vision for Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism (Vision 2020)* is the culmination of this effort. It includes seven strategic directions and sets as its main target a doubling of annual tourism revenues by 2020. According to the ‘step zero’ analysis, questions about whose idea it was to develop the document, how it was put together and who were included and excluded in the process are critical in determining its potential in achieving set goals. Drawing from 18 key informant interviews and a review of secondary sources, we learn that the processes involved in creating *Uncommon Potential* may have helped to enhance the influence of private industry tourism stakeholders in formal decision making processes, while marginalizing other relevant groups. The paper suggests that certain decisions, particularly those made at the very beginning, may need to be reconsidered in order to increase the likelihood of fulfilling the document’s overarching vision.

Keywords: Step zero analysis; sustainable tourism; pre-implementation stage; Vision 2020; Newfoundland and Labrador.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism planning occurs in a number of forms, structures, scales and timeframes, and for the most part, has extended beyond economics to include broader environmental and socio-cultural concerns (Hall, 2001). Yet, despite general agreement among tourism scholars about the importance of understanding the processes involved (Hall, 2000; 2001; Nunkoo & Smith, 2013; Richins & Pearce, 2000; Romeril, 1988; Smith, 1994a; 1994b), literature on what happens before and during the ‘development’ stages of a process is relatively limited. However, the ‘path dependency’ theory suggests that what happens at the early phase generally determines the outcomes of the process (Kay, 2005). Thus, Chuenpagdee and Jentoft (2007) argue for a critical examination of the ‘step zero’ or the pre-implementation stage of governance decisions, such as the promotion of co-management of natural resources or the establishment of marine protected

areas. Because potential strengths and weaknesses of a particular strategy may be understood by examining the processes that led up to its establishment, the analysis of the pre-implementation stage might help to determine what could have been done better and pinpoint what may need to be adjusted in order to achieve set goals (Chuenpagdee et al. 2013).

The step zero analysis aligns closely with the ‘interactive governance’ perspective (Kooiman, 2003; Kooiman et al., 2005), which promotes understanding the dynamic nature of policy formation processes paying particular attention to how stakeholders interact among themselves, in certain environmental settings, and within the context of rules, regulations and other institutional arrangements that frame their interactions. By understanding how stakeholders interact with other groups, and with governing actors, synergies can be created that would help to enable stakeholders to work in concert towards a common goal. In tourism, interactions and relationships exist between various public, private and non-profit volunteer institutions which cut across numerous policy domains (Bramwell, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). Examining these interactions becomes increasingly important, and potentially more complex, when a strategy aims to enhance the sustainability of a tourism destination because stakeholders are likely to have diverse views about what should be addressed and prioritized.

Throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, the broad global direction of policies related to sustainability was set at international summits, such as those held in Rio (1992), Kyoto (1997), Johannesburg (2002), and Copenhagen (2009), with the role of tourism recognized in several non-binding international agreements (UNWTO, 2012). The overarching theme linking international agreements on sustainable tourism is that it may be best achieved by striking a balance between economic benefits and minimizing the negative environmental and societal impacts of tourism (UNEP, 2003). In line with this global trend, Newfoundland and Labrador

has recognized the increased demand for sustainable tourism approaches that aim to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of a destination. For instance, Overton (1996) explains that the promotion of a 'new' form of tourism began by the province during the 1990s, which marketed not only its natural beauty, but also a combination of its cultural heritage and traditional way of life. Followed from that was a milestone document outlining the vision of the province with respect to its efforts toward developing a sustainable tourism industry with "far-reaching economic, social, and cultural benefits" (TCR, 2009: 17).

Entitled "Uncommon Potential: A Vision for Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism", the document was developed over a three year period by stakeholders from the provincial government's Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation (TCR) and the province's tourism industry association, Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador (HNL). Released in February 2009, Uncommon Potential provides a ten-year blueprint to help transform how "government and industry work together" (TCR, 2009: 25) and sets as its main target a doubling of annual tourism revenues from \$790 million to \$1.6 billion by 2020. However, a general review of tourism statistics, studies and media conducted for this study raised questions about whether the vision and its goals can be achieved. For instance, based on projections made by the Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism Board (NLTB), in 2010 revenues were 5.2% lower than needed to reach the 2020 target (NLTB, 2010). In addition, severe labour shortages in the province's tourism sector are forecasted with an estimated 2,054 tourism jobs (11% of all tourism jobs) to be unfilled in 2020 (CTHRC, 2012).

By employing a step zero analysis, the authors are interested in understanding how the potential for achieving the overarching goals of the document could be increased and to suggest possible reasons for why some of its aims may have fallen short during the first 3 ½ years of

implementation. The following section provides an overview of interactive governance as a theoretical grounding for the study. Thereafter, the methods are described, followed by a brief overview of Newfoundland and Labrador tourism. The findings of the step zero analysis are presented, with discussion. The authors then conclude with some suggestions to improve the implementation of Uncommon Potential.

THEORETICAL GROUNDING

Governance is a concept that has been promoted as an alternative to resource management (Chuenpagdee, 2013). Although no single accepted definition of governance exists, there is broad agreement that governance reaches beyond government and management by encompassing the level and manner in which power and authority is exercised, not only by governments, but also non-governmental institutions, including the private sector and civil society (Berkhout et al., 2001). This implies a shift in governing efforts from problem solving to institutional arrangement and principle setting. Interactive governance, in particular, recognizes diversity, complexity, dynamism and scales as key characteristics of both the system that is being governed, and the governing system, which need to be properly understood in order to design appropriate institutions and successfully implement them (Jentoft & Chuenpagdee, 2009). It also places a strong emphasis on understanding interactions among public and private stakeholders involved in various governing roles, who may hold a broad range of interests and levels of authority (Kooiman, 2003; Kooiman et al., 2005).

As per the definition, “the whole of interactions taken to solve societal problems and to create societal opportunities; including the formulation and application of principles guiding those interactions and care for institutions that enable and control them” (Kooiman et al., 2005: 17), the concept applies well to the tourism industry, which cuts across numerous policy domains

with stakeholders who hold a variety of interests and priorities (Bramwell, 2011; Bramwell & Lane, 2011). In addition, the argument made by Chuenpagdee (2011), that interactive governance emphasizes and captures a worldwide “shift from centralized, top-down management to co-management and community-based approaches” in natural governance (197), resonates with the phenomenon observed in tourism. As noted by Hall (2011), citing Beaumont & Dredge (2009), Greenwood (1993), Hall (1999), and Yuksel, Bramwell, & Yuksel (2005), “since the 1990s, there has been a gradual shift in approach in tourism policy literature from the notion of government to that of governance” (1).

One key aspect of governance relates to how goals are set, and by whom, as much as how plans are drafted and implemented. Chuenpagdee & Jentoft (2007) argue that many things happen prior to goal setting, which can determine the outcome of any planning exercise. Their argument is partly based on the theory of path dependency, which asserts that early decisions can influence the direction of a process, and that initial moves in one direction can elicit further moves in that same direction (Kay, 2005; Mahoney, 2000). Referred to as a ‘step zero’ analysis, Chuenpagdee & Jentoft (2007) call for an examination of the state, conditions and drivers at the time an idea was introduced, the inspiration and conception of the idea, its initialization and communication, the participants that were engaged (and not engaged), and the processes involved in its preparation and adoption. In addition to revealing factors that may foster or prohibit the planning process, an account of what occurred before and during the development stages as told by different stakeholders also provides insights into their perception of the vision and of their role and involvement. Any difference in perceptions among stakeholders groups, if exists, invites further investigation since it may be a source of contention preventing the vision from succeeding.

METHOD

The step zero analysis was conducted in two steps. First, a variety of secondary sources about Newfoundland and Labrador tourism, and more specifically sources related to the Uncommon Potential document, were examined. These included media and advertisements, newsletters, meeting summaries and workshop outcomes, industry and government reports, statistics, and other related documents. Second, key informant interviews were conducted from January to February, 2013. The interviewees included four groups of people, i.e., members of the vision steering committee, consultants involved in the drafting of the document, tourism stakeholders who participated in the consultation process, and other stakeholders not involved in the process. According to the province's industry association, the first group comprised of ten members, nine of which were successfully contacted and invited to participate with eight agreeing to be interviewed. Two consultants were involved in the drafting of the document at different stages and both of them were interviewed. Several tourism stakeholders participated in industry consultation workshops and meetings, but were not involved in the drafting process. Four of them were interviewed for the study based on recommendation by key informants in the first two groups. Similarly, the snowball technique was used to identify four other tourism stakeholders not involved, either in the consultation process or at all in the drafting of Uncommon Potential. Of the total 18 interviews, 13 were conducted in-person while five were conducted via teleconference. A funnel structure was employed to organize the interview questions, by starting from general questions and gradually progressing toward more focused questions specific to the research (Hay, 2005).

BRIEF HISTORY OF NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR TOURISM

The recognition of tourism as potential generator of economic development in Newfoundland and Labrador can be traced back to the late 1800s (Seymour, 1980). Ashworth (2004) explains that the construction of the railway and the opening of the scheduled ferry routes to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia in the 1890s allowed for the expansion of tourism on the island. Prior to Newfoundland and Labrador's Confederation with Canada in 1949, visitors ranged from the upper middle class to the very wealthy. After that period, however, the province marketed itself to a middle-class market, which had grown in the aftermath of World War II (Higgins, 2012; Overton, 1996; Seymour, 1980).

Newfoundland and Labrador's first premier during the post-Confederation period was Joseph R. Smallwood. During his premiership (1949-1972), Smallwood's policies focused on the modernization of education and transportation for the purposes of attracting foreign investment (Overton, 1980). As part of these efforts, tourism was embraced as a means of diversifying the province's economy (Higgins, 2012). For example, in 1950, Smallwood's government invited the Canadian Government Travel Bureau to review and recommend ways to expand the province's tourism industry. The report envisioned the province would become a "mecca for travellers from all parts of the world" (in Overton, 1996: 27) in five to ten years, if it could develop tourism infrastructure, an effective advertising campaign, and a tourist consciousness among Newfoundlanders.

In 1965, motorized tourism became possible on the island of Newfoundland with the completion of the Trans Canada Highway (TCH) (Higgins, 2012). Coinciding with the opening of the TCH, in 1966 the provincial government invested in a 'Come Home Year' for expatriate Newfoundlanders to return home and witness the developments that had taken place (Sparkes, 2012). By 1968, a regular summer ferry service began operation between Argentia and Nova

Scotia, and Air Canada provided services from St. John's, Gander, and Stephenville, with regular flights to Halifax, Sydney, Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton and Vancouver. A year after the Smallwood era ended, a provincial department of tourism was established in 1973 (Higgins, 2012), and by the mid-1980s non-resident visitors to the province had surpassed 250 thousand, spending approximately \$100 million annually (TCR, 2012).

In 1992, a federal moratorium on the cod fishery brought about further attempts to diversify the province's economy. As one of the sectors considered for helping to create jobs after the moratorium (Duff, 2009), the provincial government provided financial support to large-scale cultural tourism events, such as Cabot 500 (1997), the 50th anniversary of Confederation (1999), and the Viking Millennium (2000) (Higgins, 2012). In addition, the province's tourism industry association, HNL, invited renowned tourism planning expert, Clare Gunn, to lead a series of workshops in the province. Gunn's report highlighted several strengths and weaknesses of the tourism sector, noting that the province had a solid foundation for the industry to grow in the areas of natural, cultural, and human resources, but needed greater resource protection, better information and promotion, and improved transportation (Gunn, 1994).

Based on provincial government data, these efforts appear to have helped the tourism industry become an increasingly significant economic sector for the province after the cod moratorium. From 1992 to 2005, annual non-resident visitation nearly doubled from 264,000 to 470,000 arrivals and non-resident expenditures more than doubled from \$135 million to \$336.7 million per year (TCR, 2013). However, despite these gains, Newfoundland and Labrador tourism continued to face several of the same challenges it had in the past, including long travel time and high cost, a short peak season, and the insufficient amount and poor quality of tourism infrastructure in the province (TCR, 2008).

As a way to address the situation, a tourism strategy steering committee of representatives from the TCR and HNL came together in 2006 to, “create a vision for the industry for the long-term” (Tourism Times, Fall 2006: 4). The group’s main aims included to set the province’s tourism vision towards 2020 and quantify the financial resources required to grow the industry in a sustainable manner (TCR, 2007). Their effort resulted in Uncommon Potential, which was released in February 2009. Among other things, the document sets as its main target a doubling of annual tourism revenues from \$790 million to \$1.6 billion by 2020.

STEP ZERO ANALYSIS OF UNCOMMON POTENTIAL

State, conditions and drivers

Initiatives involving multiple stakeholders coming together do not arise in a vacuum (Chuenpagdee & Jentoft, 2007). Typically, such decisions are made based on an issue or concern that needs to be addressed. In the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, the state of the province’s tourism industry could be described as possessing economic momentum in 2006 given the gains in visitation numbers and revenues in the years following the cod moratorium from 1992 to 2005. In addition, TCR’s tourism marketing budget increased for five consecutive years, from \$3.9 million in 2001 to \$8 million in 2005 (TCR, 2013). Clearly, then, the industry was not in any major trouble and thus the Uncommon Potential document was not driven by a particular crisis.

Further examination revealed, however, that the tourism industry was considered by public and private tourism stakeholders to be in a precarious situation, with persistent overarching challenges. As one vision steering committee member described:

It was a constant challenge to get here and (*air*) transportation was an issue... The other challenges that were there is the human resources factor, one being the number needed and the second was the skills and leadership training needs and that was reflected... Looking at

leadership, that is still very much a challenge. Looking at the product development side of it...you have to be constantly improving them.

On the whole, three reasons were identified as possible sources of vulnerability for the tourism industry, i.e., the lack of a vision for the future, absence of an investment plan that quantified the financial resources needed to develop the industry, and private industry's frustration concerning their marginal influence with respect to overarching issues in decision making processes.

Interestingly, when asked specifically about how and why the steering committee came together, several members of the committee referred to the Newfoundland and Labrador Marketing Council (marketing council) as a forerunner. Formed in 2003, the marketing council was described by the tourism minister at the time, Julie Bettney, as an "opportunity to work cooperatively and enhance decision-making in promoting and marketing our province" (TCR, 2003, September 25). However, although the marketing council was the most significant tourism public private partnership (PPP) in the province, the council's mandate frustrated its private industry members because it did not grant the authority to address the broader concerns and problems facing the province's tourism industry. For instance, a steering committee member recalled:

It wasn't that there was anything wrong with the council, the problem became over time that most of the industry people that had been sitting on that committee felt that its mandate needed to be broader because this committee was only mandated to deal with marketing.

Indeed, of the aforementioned reasons, several of the key informants who sat on the steering committee emphasized the latter reason as a main driver for the initiation of the process that resulted in the Uncommon Potential document. The understanding was that increasing their role in the governance of the province's tourism sector could facilitate discussions about solutions to other overarching issues.

People behind the idea and its conception

Dialogue regarding the tourism industry's need for an overarching long-term vision began in early 2006 (Tourism Times, Fall 2006). According to key informant interviews, Newfoundland and Labrador's premier at that time, Danny Williams, and the director of HNL held a meeting during which HNL leadership expressed frustration over private industry's lack of influence in broader decision making processes and called on the premier to increase investments in the tourism sector in recognition of its importance. As described by one committee member:

Industry made a presentation and had a conversation with the premier. And, there was no concrete plan to give to government to show what they wanted to do, here's what is needed and here is the money required. Basically, it was Williams who said that, 'when you got a plan come back to me'.

Thereafter, a tourism strategy steering committee of leaders from TCR and HNL was assembled, with four HNL representatives and three officials from TCR. Key informants who sat on the committee noted that members were invited by TCR and HNL leadership based on their reputations as innovative and influential operators within the province's tourism industry. As one committee member explained, "It wasn't inclusive in the sense of making sure that there was someone from that sector and this sector. It was bringing together those in industry and government who were the best in the tourism sector." However, as will be later elaborated on, questions were raised by some members of the committee from private industry about how much authority the group had to fulfil its mandate. For instance, one committee member from private industry explained, "I didn't represent anything or anybody other than my business."

The expectations surrounding the potential outcomes and opportunities to be created by the strategy planning process were laid out in a request for proposals (RFP) document created by the tourism strategy steering committee and finalized in February 2007. Goals outlined in the RFP involved the development of a strategic plan that would offer a collective vision and quantify the

financial resources and investment required to implement it (TCR, 2007). In addition, the RFP listed eight strategic issues facing the province, including: ensuring the total visitor experience; product development strategies; marketing; sustainable workforce; research; technology; transportation and access, and; partnerships. These strategic issues would establish topics for discussion during the province wide consultations in November 2007 which would closely resemble the seven strategic directions included in Uncommon Potential.

Involvement and participation of stakeholders

As discussed above, the steering committee of leaders from TCR and HNL was originally assembled with four HNL representatives and three officials from TCR. The four HNL representatives were formally asked to join the committee by HNL and TCR leadership. With respect to the TCR's representation on the committee, developing the tourism strategy was delegated to the assistant deputy minister for tourism, the director of tourism marketing, and the director of tourism product development. However, as will be further discussed, certain tourism groups feel marginalized by not being invited to serve on the committee.

The company responding to the RFP and winning the contract was AMEC Earth and Environmental (AMEC). AMEC is an international consultancy company, with an office in St. John's, which specializes in project management. The head consultant for the AMEC consulting team was familiar to both public and private tourism industry stakeholders having served in several prominent provincial government positions through the 1980s and 1990s, such as Commissioner of the Economic Recovery Commission formed after the cod moratorium and as assistant deputy minister of tourism in the mid-1990s.

The committee held its first meeting with AMEC in August 2007 beginning a six month pre-vision strategy process that included meetings and interviews with industry stakeholders,

tourism-related industry organizations, and government representatives, as well as province-wide industry consultation workshops (Tourism Times, September/October 2007). Over a two week period in November 2007, in consultation with the committee, the consultant organized 13 workshops and two meetings with industry stakeholders throughout the province at which a total of approximately 190 tourism stakeholders participated (AMEC, 2007). A variety of locations were chosen to hold the industry consultations and these choices were geographically based to ensure that a wide variety of industry representatives had the opportunity to raise concerns and discuss solutions. However, it is important to note that although consultations were meant to be as inclusive as possible, they aimed specifically at tourism stakeholders. As explained by a former member of the committee, “We invited tourism people. That’s an important point. If this is a vision for Newfoundland and Labrador tourism then let’s bring the tourism stakeholders primarily into these sessions, and with all due respect to everyone else.”

Based on the industry workshops and meetings, and in line with the responsibilities outlined in the RFP, the consultant produced a Strategic Tourism Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador in December 2007. However, committee members interviewed explained that the document did not meet their expectations with respect to providing the vision and insights needed to address challenges facing the industry. Moving forward, the committee decided that the document would not be released to the public.

By this time, the committee, now called the vision steering committee, had grown to ten members with three additional stakeholders from the private sector (HNL) invited to participate. These new members were also asked to participate based on their reputations within the industry as leaders. However, the committee struggled to develop a second version using the original consultant’s research, with one of the members explaining that “Probably the reason we

stumbled along was that nobody was sure what we were doing... It took us awhile to get our legs under us.” After holding monthly meetings throughout 2008, in the autumn of that year the committee made the decision to hire a new consultant with a marketing background to help finalize a document with the intention of releasing it publically.

Consultation processes and issues

According to the Strategic Tourism Plan for Newfoundland and Labrador: Industry Consultation (AMEC, 2007), and key informant interviews, at the beginning of each workshop and meeting, a representative of the consulting team delivered a presentation. The purpose of the presentation was to familiarize participants with the competitive international climate by presenting examples of best practices of 12 leading tourism destinations as well as to establish the topics of discussion for the workshop. After the presentation, participants met in discussion groups to determine the most important issues that the province must overcome in order to improve the tourism industry. The groups were also asked to offer potential solutions to the problems.

According to key informant interviews with committee members and stakeholders who participated in the consultations, as well as the aforementioned industry consultation report, issues raised during the workshops included, limited marine and air access, low quality of workforce and accommodations, lack of internet technology usage, limited amount of research on existing visitors and target markets, lack of market awareness and limited marketing funds, poor protection of natural resources and environment, insufficient infrastructure such as signage and stop-over sites, lack of governmental support for services outside of St. John’s, and no investment strategy (AMEC, 2007). As will be discussed later, several of these issues would be incorporated into the Uncommon Potential document through its seven strategic directions.

Drawing from the results of the research conducted by the original consultant, according to a committee member, the new consultant “wound up re-jigging (*reworking*) it to being a more visionary document.” It was during the final drafting of the document that the consultant employed an approach that involved all members of the vision steering committee having to reach consensus on each point before moving forward. According to committee members interviewed, if a member of the committee could not support a particular part of the document that the other members had agreed upon, then that member would agree to self-withdraw from the drafting process and vision steering committee. Of the ten members of the vision steering committee who participated in 2008, one member withdrew during the finalization of the document.

DISCUSSION

On face value, it seems that the main intention of the Uncommon Potential is to provide a collective vision for the Newfoundland and Labrador tourism industry towards doubling tourism revenues by 2020. The step zero analysis reveals, however, that the main drivers of the process included private industry’s push for broader influence in decision making processes and for increased investments in the industry. This initiated a process that included the formation of the tourism strategy steering committee, the hiring of the consultant and province-wide industry consultations. Drawing from the findings of the step zero analysis, two key points deserve further deliberation. First, concerns expressed by committee members about not possessing the authority required to fulfill the aims set out in the RFP. Second, decisions surrounding who was invited and who was not invited to formally participate in the document’s drafting may have led to the marginalization of a key stakeholder group.

Authority

The main goals outlined in the RFP were the development of a strategic plan that would offer a collective vision and quantify the financial resources and investment required to implement it (TCR, 2007). With respect to these two aims, the vision steering committee did succeed in drafting a vision for the province towards 2020. However, based on interview data, the decision was made by the committee that the tourism investment plan would be one of the first tasks of the Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism Board (NLTB) formed as an outcome of the Uncommon Potential document. This missing component of the plan is puzzling, given several calls made in previous documents (e.g. Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism Marketing Strategy Review: Final Report, 2002; A Special Place, A Special People: the future for Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism, 2004; and Creative Newfoundland and Labrador: The Blueprint for Development and Investment in Culture, 2006).

According to Chuenpagdee et al. (2013), one potential avenue to understand why certain aims were not achieved is to consider the authority of stakeholders involved in the process. Although some members of the original tourism strategic steering committee participated in the meeting with the premier, and later invited certain stakeholders to participate in the process that would lead to Uncommon Potential, concerns related to the authority the committee members possessed to fulfil the goals outlined in the RFP did come up in the study. For instance, one committee member remembered discussions about, “just how far in the weeds do you go and how much meat is on the bone (*to what extent*)... there was only ten of us in the room.” In addition, some of the committee members from private industry recalled contention over the types of suggestions and ideas that could be discussed during the meetings, with one explaining that, “government employees would push back and explain to us what is not possible”, and another adding:

(There were) certain things that government were sensitive about... and they certainly didn't want us to have the ability to say that "you said you were going to do that", right? That's why this became a vision and not an operating manual.

Comments by some committee members also suggest that the decision to not develop the investment plan may have led to contention over whether the choice of doubling tourism revenues was an appropriate goal for the Uncommon Potential document. As explained by one committee member, "If we are going to double revenues by 2020...you need to have an investment plan."

Participation

When developing a strategy for a destination's sustainable development, the views of all relevant stakeholders who typically hold diverse interests and priorities must be considered (Richie, 1993). Understanding how these stakeholders interact can help to create synergies that would enable stakeholders to work in concert towards the vision. However, Sautter & Leisen (1999) emphasize caution with respect to underestimating the complexity involved in deciding which stakeholders to invite to participate, noting that such choices are often limited to the most obvious, such as tourists, and private and public tourism representatives. Their caveat echoes the first of Freeman's (1984) key concepts of stakeholder theory, which requires planners to have a full appreciation of all stakeholders who have interests in the planning, processes, delivery and outcomes.

The process taken to develop the Uncommon Potential document was participatory. The several workshops and meetings organized by the consultant, held throughout the province was a good testimony of this. Although concerns raised during these consultations may have been influenced, to some extent, by issues presented to the workshop participants, it seems concerns expressed by the stakeholders were properly considered. Indeed, the seven strategic directions

(private public leadership; sustainable transport network; market intelligence and research strategy; product development; tourism technology; marketing our brand, and; developing our workforce) in Uncommon Potential reflect these. Notable changes in the final strategic directions, compared to those listed in the RFP before the province wide consultations include ‘marketing our brand’ (as opposed to ‘marketing’) and ‘developing our workforce’ (instead of ‘sustainable workforce’). Respectively, the former emphasizes the need for the industry to work together and market itself as one entity, while the latter suggests that efforts were needed in order to improve the workforce in terms of training and quality, as well as meeting labour demands. In addition, according to key informants interviewed for the study, the final version of the strategic directions is widely believed to have provided a vision for the tourism industry that was lacking before 2009. As one committee member described, “we are now strategically aligning all of our focus in the same way”, while another informant, who was not formally involved in the drafting but participated in the industry consultations, commented, “having worked in rural tourism for a number of years, the industry was fragmented... but I think that (*presently*) we are all singing from the same page.”

However, although the inclusion of a wide range of participants in the industry consultation process could be understood as one of the vision’s strengths, a question needs to be raised about stakeholders who did not participate in the document’s drafting. For instance, a review of government documents and interview transcripts found that non-profit volunteer groups were understood by public and private stakeholders as playing a fundamental role in the province’s tourism industry both before the process began and during it (TCR, 2002; 2003; 2006a; 2006b). Yet, as revealed by the step zero analysis, non-profit volunteer organizations were not engaged in

the formal drafting of Uncommon Potential. While they may have participated in the industry consultations, they did not have a seat on the vision's steering committee.

The absence of a non-profit volunteer organization on the committee is significant considering that government documents describe that the province's tourism industry's volunteer base was in decline and presented a serious challenge for the industry. For instance, the TCR's Annual Report 2005-2006 states that a "severe decline in the volunteer base is creating difficulties in maintaining quality products and services in rural areas" (TCR, 2006: 18). Although reasons for the absence of the non-profit volunteer organizations could not be determined in the context of the study, inclusion and exclusion of certain stakeholder groups depends largely on who conceived the idea, who were the key drivers behind the initiative and who set agenda (Chuenpagdee and Jentoft, 2007).

Indeed, it is impossible to determine whether inviting a member from a non-profit volunteer organization to sit on the committee would have had an impact on increasing volunteer numbers. However, based on the step zero analysis, it is argued here that not doing so may have been a strategic miss. As suggested by the key informant interviews, some non-profit tourism organizations feel they, "don't have a voice" to ensure that their concerns and priorities are being considered, with one committee member reflecting:

As time goes on, I think about the tourism groups that are not-for-profits. That sector is big in tourism along with the profit sector. We spend more time, typically, with people who are in business than the not-for-profit... but it is always challenging marrying the not-for-profit with the profit.

The absence of the non-profit tourism organizations also seems to be pertinent to choice of the economically driven main target of the Uncommon Potential document. As echoed by one key informant from private industry not involved in the process:

Number one is the volunteer side of things. It is more difficult and they are typically older and all of sudden they are saying that they want “a little more time for me” now. Also it is harder to get the volunteers because there is so many steps, you need to get a letter of conduct and reference, where is years ago you could put your hand up. Plus, we have got a different culture, youth today are very self-centered and absorbed, versus ‘I want to help the outside world’, so that's a really big challenge. That’s a real challenge. In order for the tourism in this province to survive and sustain you've got to have that volunteer base. That's a real threat by 2020.

CONCLUSION

Several studies suggest that the success of a tourism destination requires the commitment by all stakeholders to work in concert towards a common goal (Hall, 2000; Richins & Pearce, 2000). Such synergy can be created, not only through facilitation processes and consultation to arrive at a shared vision, but also through understanding how stakeholders interact with other groups, and with governing actors. This paper argues that an attempt to understand stakeholder interactions needs to take place as early as when the idea about creating a common goal was introduced. Following path dependency theory and interactive governance, an examination of what happened during the pre-implementation stage can provide valuable insights for addressing challenges, determining what could have been done better and pinpointing what may need to be adjusted, in order to achieve set goals. Examining these interactions is particularly important when a strategy incorporates the principles of the sustainable tourism concept as stakeholders with different interests and priorities are likely to have diverse views about what sustainable tourism means.

Sustainable tourism calls for long-term strategies that enable the industry to have the capacity to deal with potential adversity. By employing the step zero analysis, this study reveals the importance of addressing challenges at their core, as opposed to applying ‘quick fixes’ or ‘crisis management’ type strategies. In particular, insights were provided concerning

understanding authority and participation with respect to stakeholder interactions. As shown, putting together an investment plan may not be as simple as one may think as one of the core reasons for the committee's inability to develop the investment strategy was linked to the absence of authority possessed by the stakeholders who drafted the document. In addition, although recognized as an essential stakeholder group, non-profit volunteer organizations were excluded from Uncommon Potential's vision steering committee. Yet giving them a seat in the NLTB may not solve the problem of representation because it is questionable whether the vision that the board is mandated to implement captures what non-profits envision as an ideal future.

In conclusion, that Newfoundland and Labrador's tourism industry has a vision and is working to fulfil it is a positive step. However, different processes can be employed in moving forward in order to generate synergies and strengthen commitment towards the vision's fulfillment. Re-thinking issues surrounding authority and participation provides a place to start towards ensuring that the vision is more than mere 'unabated optimism', and to improve the province's chances for developing a "sustainable industry with far-reaching economic, social, and cultural benefits reaching benefits" (TCR, 2009: 17). Understanding a variety of other key elements of stakeholder interactions, such as information sharing, community engagement and leadership, is also recommended.

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