

The Managing Local Tourism Master Class: Communicating and Building Sustainable Tourism Management Practices across Local Government Divides

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Introduction

The aim of this paper is to describe an action-based research project entitled the *Management Local Tourism Master Class* (MLTMC) and to discuss the merits of this extension tool in building sustainable tourism management practices across local government divides. The MLTMC is specifically designed to explore and build awareness of local government's role in tourism management in the Australian context and to address a number of challenges being faced by Australian local governments including the need for a 'joined-up', networked model of management and service delivery for tourism. These challenges are not unique to Australia, and are common in many other parts of the world. The MLTMC demonstrates an innovative approach to information sharing and solution building in a complex organisational setting. The findings suggest there is potential to develop issue-based networks to address a range of sustainable tourism challenges faced by local government. However, collaboration is an essential forerunner to this issue-based network approach.

The MLTMC was designed as an information dissemination, extension and strategy building program to assist senior local government officers and elected representatives to better understand the role of local government in tourism management. To date, discussions of sustainable tourism education and training have tended to focus on higher education while the professional development of those working in, and more importantly around the outside of tourism in allied policy areas, has received only limited attention. The MLTMC addresses this gap. Participants of the MLTMC included general managers, councilors, strategic planners, transport engineers, parks and recreation planners, community and indigenous liaison officers. The tourism officers, who facilitated the development and implementation of the MLTMC, opted to be silent observers in the process. The significance of this paper then is to highlight the potential role of the MLTMC to address the challenges of developing a more comprehensive and collaborative response to local tourism management challenges. In doing so, the contribution of the paper is twofold: (1) the paper draws together disparate and fragmented information to identify the imperatives associated with local and regional tourism management and the need for a 'joined up'

approach, and (2) it outlines a potential solution to bridge internal 'silo-ification' of councils and fragmentation that characterizes the multi-sectoral tourism policy space of local government. Further, the paper provides an avenue for provocative debate about the future of Australia's local and regional approaches to tourism arguing for an alternative 'joined-up', issue-based network approach to local tourism planning and management.