

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK

STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

COMMENTS BY CAIRNGORMS CAMPAIGN

It is clear that the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) needs a strategy of this kind and the aim of producing one is welcomed by the Cairngorms Campaign, particularly since it attempts to set the strategy within the context of sustainable development.

Given that:-

- 1) Sustainable development involves consideration of the social, environmental and economic benefits and disbenefits of any development, it is important that all three aspects are considered within the strategy.
- 2) However, as the tourist industry occupies such a dominant place within the local economy and since, like all industries, it has weaknesses and strengths, it is clear that the strategy for the development of tourism cannot really be created on this stand-alone basis, divorced from other livings or the lack of them within the area.

Within tourism, the relationships between tourism development, and its economic, social and environmental benefits and disbenefits has been closely studied in many places, including heavily developed tourist industries within upland areas like the western Alps. This extensive research has led to important insights into tourism development and guidelines as to strategies for development, and any modern tourism development strategy which aims to be sustainable needs surely to be couched within the context of these. It is a key weakness of this strategy that it does not do this, and indeed seems to show no awareness of it.

A key issue that occurs globally, is the tourism as an industry has an inherent tendency to undermining itself by overdeveloping and hence damaging the environmental and social resources on which it is based. To be more specific, as long ago as 1984, Messerli and Brugger¹ defined the two key resultant problems as:-

- 1) **Autonomy versus Dependency** – The loss of local control as large scale tourism developments, too large to be under local ownership, become more preponderant and more and more of the key decisions are taken in boardrooms far removed from the area, or from concern for local inhabitants. Aviemore is a good example of this. The problem of local people being driven out of the local housing market by house prices they

¹ The Problems by E A Brugger and P Messerli pp 19-30 in The Transformation of the Swiss Mountain Regions, Eds Brugger et al, Pub Paul Haupt Berne 1984

cannot afford and holiday homes are controlled by nonresidents, is another example of this situation.

- 2) Ecology versus economy – The strong tendency for tourism development to damage the environmental resource on which it is based, despite the strong and welcome emphasis that local tourist enterprises have placed on a high quality environment.

A sustainable tourism strategy surely has to address these issues explicitly, especially within a National Park with the aims of the CNP, and ask where the balance of action lies on them. For example, It is an important finding of research into tourism development that if the number of tourist beds outstrips the number of resident beds by more than a factor of 2:1, then there are important irreversible social consequences. Residents find themselves perpetual strangers in their own community and social cohesion is badly damaged. The tourism industry is be then so powerful that key decisions are taken in the interests of the industry and not the community. Aviemore past this ratio by the early 1980s. The development of such a dominant resort also damages the interests of nearby smaller ones. Even by 1980, Getz² concluded that further tourism development might take the area past the tipping point between economic and social benefits and ecological damage.

Members of the Forum may agree or disagree with such conclusions, but the Campaign would assert that there must, in any modern sustainable tourism development strategy, be at least an analysis based on the insights and guidelines derived from global experience and research into tourism. There is a lot of useful information in the strategy but basically it seems to have two major problems:-

- 1) It is not a strategy. A strategy needs surely to have at its heart a basic cohesive analysis of the areas fundamental opportunities, problems etc. set in a wider more global context of influencing factors, and a set of proposed actions derived from this, but this not present. There are four clear sections based on Assessment, Strategic Objectives, Priorities for Action, and Implementation and Monitoring, but there are no clear links between them. The one is not derived from the other – certainly not clearly by a spelt out chain of logic.
- 2) The “Strategy” needs to take account of the insights into tourism development discussed above. As it stands, the analysis might be described as “traditional”, but if the CGM is to live up to its aims, such a strategy has to move far beyond “traditional” analysis and grasp more modern approaches to the situation.

Within the SWOT analysis, there is certainly a wide range of factors identified and none that the Campaign might disagree with, although it would require a

² Effects of Tourism on the Host Population – A Cse study of Tourism and Regional Development in the Badenoch-Strathspey District of the Scottish Highlands PhD Thesis, Edinburgh University, 1980

more thorough consideration of them than we have been able to carry out within the limited time available. Within Weaknesses, it is worth pointing out regarding the Mountain Resource that it is highly vulnerable to human impact, and hence has a relatively low carrying capacity. Human impacts detract from its value as a resource for scientific research in which capacity the Cairngorms have made major contributions to our understanding of the management of natural resources.

Among threats, we would suggest that the following be added:-

- 1) Possible water shortage for any new development after 2015 due to overexploitation of the Spey Catchment.
- 2) Bioinvasion as a potent threat to the wildlife that is an important resource attracting tourists to the area.
- 3) The potential social and ecological damage from overdevelopment of tourism.
- 4) The steadily advancing urbanisation of the Aviemore-Glenmore- Cairn Gorm corridor, which is the “journey to play” of many of the areas tourists looking for a wilder experience, and the key area where development will threaten the heartland of the Cairngorms National Nature Reserve.
- 5) A wider possible set of impacts from climate change than is identified.
- 6) The possible complete closure of the Funicular and Cairngorm facilities.