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Integrating Political, Technological and Change Management Forces in Achieving Sustainable Tourism Success in the Hawaiian Islands

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The Hawai'ian Islands are a place of great challenge and opportunity. They are located in one of the most remote ocean environments on earth, yet have access through air transportation for over half a century to a myriad of diverse visitors, residents and enterprises. After post-European contact, economic development created dependence on single industries starting in the early 1800s. From sandalwood and whaling, to sugarcane and pineapple, the State of Hawai'i has simultaneously become a strategic military base and major international tourist destination. With substantial growth over the past two decades has come many concerns of over-development, population increase, inadequate and dated infrastructure, transportation congestion, expensive housing, as well as major pressures on both the landscape and seascape. More recent awareness of environmental and energy issues within the tourism field has brought to the forefront such challenges as climate change, energy and water consumption, solid waste management, and ensuring the future of Hawai'i as a vibrant place with a thriving community attractive to visitors and residents alike. This brief thought paper discusses first the movement in committing to sustainability within the tourism field and more broadly within Hawai'i and then follows with a discussion of challenges in integrating and achieving the critical outcomes for sustainability and tourism in consideration of technological and political forces.

The Movement and Commitment toward Sustainability and Tourism

Within the State of Hawai'i, public and private agencies and organizations have brought forward in more recent times, mission statements, plans and strategies, which attempt to address many of these significant challenges. These include State-funded organizations such as the Hawai'i Tourism Authority and the [Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism](#), the [Hawai'i 2050 Sustainability Task Force](#) created by the Legislature, and non-profits, including the [Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association](#) and the [Hawai'i Ecotourism Association](#).

An organization which has focused on eco-friendly tourism, the Hawai'i Ecotourism Association (HEA), developed a mission which is: "...to protect Hawai'i's unique environment and culture through the promotion of responsible travel and educational programs aimed at the public and visitor industry relating to ecotourism issues." The [Hawai'i Tourism Authority](#) (HTA) has made sustainability values a major component of their [Hawai'i Tourism Strategic Plan 2005-2015](#). Where many more marketing oriented state and federal tourism organizations focus on economic growth, the HTA commits to sustainability through its mission "to strategically manage Hawai'i tourism in a sustainable manner consistent with our economic goals, cultural values, preservation of natural resources, community desires and visitor industry needs." This also includes guiding principles of collaboration, sustainability, responsibility, quality and accountability, while also embracing Native Hawaiian values such as lokahi (harmony), malama 'aina (nourishing the land), kuleana (responsibility), ho'okipa (hospitality) and aloha (welcome). This reorientation of their mission draws on the findings of a major 2004 study of sustainable tourism in Hawai'i, which included a group of 25 diverse stakeholders representing numerous Hawai'ian agencies and organizations that called for fundamental changes to the industry to ensure its long-term viability as a major economic engine for the State.

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The 42-year-old [School of Travel Industry Management](#) at the [University of Hawai'i at Manoa](#) has had as part of its core mission to provide "...leadership in research, training, outreach and service in a fashion that contributes to economic, social, and environmental sustainability as well as supports and enriches the host culture." As part of caring out that mission, a number of outreach, research and planning activities related directly to sustainable tourism and ecotourism have become a priority. On a broader level, the University of Hawai'i formed the [Office of Sustainability](#) to emphasize its support for the "...enhancement of culture, community and sense of place," to "...increase Hawai'i's economic independence and self-sufficiency," to "...lead the state toward a future of environmental, social/cultural and economic justice and vitality." A primary objective of this and related initiatives is to "...develop the University as a sustainability demonstration site for the State and beyond."

More recently and also on a broader level, the State of Hawai'i Legislature formed the [Hawai'i 2050 Sustainability Task Force](#) to develop community-identified concepts of sustainability that ultimately integrates the diversity of public opinion and expresses images of a sustainable future for the Hawaiian Islands. In addition to respecting Hawaiian values of reverence for place and culture and responsible stewardship, participants acknowledged that "living sustainably is part of our daily practice in Hawai'i," and that the importance of a "diversified and globally competitive economy enables us to meaningfully live, work and play" while responsibly and respectfully using, replenishing and preserving natural and cultural resources for future generations. The State [Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism](#) and County governments also has increasingly acknowledged the importance of focusing on sustainable energy policies and support for sustainable enterprise development.

Challenges and Promise for Sustainability and Tourism

Virtually all of these platforms and principles show an intention for making a major commitment toward merging sustainability and enterprise with a special focus on tourism in all future decision-making. Though in a number of strategies and plans, there are action items attached, the all-important success of future outcomes is not at all assured. With the many pressures on the Hawaiian Islands, there is expected to be great difficulty (and measured skepticism) in achieving some of these lofty goals. In addition, with Hawai'i being one of the most multi-cultural places on the planet, this provides further challenges in meeting the diversity of interest, cultures, opinions and preferences.

There are perhaps a number of areas, however, where the Hawaiian Islands have an important part to play within both the Pacific arena and also the world stage. This can include the development, implementation and use of significant emerging technologies, which may potentially showcase Hawai'i in attempting to address extremely important issues of its sustainable future. These include technologies dealing with energy, green building, reductions of carbon emissions and waste, as well as those that address visitor access and site resource management, development of full, active and more involved visitor experiences, provision of education and understanding of sustainable methodologies, and facilitating further technologies and innovation in sustainable enterprise development.

Hawai'i has an abundance of key energy requirements from which technologies currently in existence or in the near future can be tested and implemented. Public-private partnerships involve the further development of energy policies, which include clean energy initiatives, energy planning, conservation and efficiency, and renewable technologies, and which are expected to make use of abundant sources of solar, wind, wave, geothermal and others. But this type of action takes major forward thinking and involves critical human and natural capital commitments and all the planning, decision-making and implementation challenges that come with these important directions and dynamic shifts in status quo. While many challenges and constraints have been acknowledged by decision makers in committing to such initiatives as investments in new green building design, retro-fitting existing facilities, as well as employing waste reduction strategies, these areas have considerable promise within the tourism and hospitality industry in a location such as Hawai'i with such high costs, capital and infrastructure intensity and high use of imported energy inputs.

Another issue of great importance is of accessing and managing the existing natural assets available in the State for visitor experience. Hawai'i's abundance of natural assets are as yet relatively inaccessible to visitors within the tertiary environment and to some degree the marine environment. Integrated resource development and management technologies are expected to assist in mitigating important barriers to visitor access and experience. Building collaboration and partnerships can be effective through institutions of higher education and associations that span the Asia-Pacific region. Various technologies may facilitate appropriate development strategies involving tourism site identification, access and management outcomes and recognition of constraints and initiation of controls on carrying capacity. Development and use of soft and hard technologies such as geo-mapping, futures thinking, asset development, destination and visitor management, use of internet based communications, and understanding and developing complete visitor experiences, will assist the Hawaiian Islands to become a more desirable place to experience as a visitor or enjoy as a resident.

With substantial movement and commitment toward the environmental and responsible aspects of tourism (including, for example ecotourism, cultural tourism, geotourism, and even adventure tourism), important technologies which much earlier would have been looked on as frivolous or extreme, are now seen from the lenses of cost saving and of strategic commitment. Through the use of provocative futures thinking and future scenarios analysis (as has been conducted on numerous occasions through the Hawaii Research Center for Futures Studies) potentially glum 50-year future outcomes may be more profoundly considered in accomplishing long range policy development and planning. This might also assist Hawaiian enterprise, organizations and agencies in making important, integrated and broad ranging political and technology commitments in order to achieve preferred economic-tourism-sustainability scenarios related to Hawaii as a major resort destination.

The Hawaiian Islands have shown progress in the development of strategic sustainability platforms and

understanding many of the actions and technology needs related to the tourism and hospitality industry. The essential message now is to begin to bring integrating political, technological and change management forces together in order to take the important leap forward away from the constraints, impacts and barriers of the past. The critical objective is to truly commit and take major action toward a future, which emphasizes and builds on development and management, yet goes beyond in integration and implementation of effective processes and technologies, many that already exist, some of which are further developing, and both of which are highly relevant to Hawaii's tropical environment. By taking these important steps in strategically addressing constraints of access, energy, emissions and conservation of the assets of the Hawaiian Islands, these will go a long way in enhancing experiences, a sense of community and a place of wonder for visitors and residents alike and which may become a showcase of sustainability innovation and success on the world stage.

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