Influences on Tourism Development Decision Making: Coastal Local Government Areas in Eastern Australia

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With sustainable development and specifically sustainable tourism, decision making is perhaps the area where the impact on the future of communities is most crucial. Understanding better the decision-making process, provides possibly the most important potential tool in the sustainable management of tourism development. This paper examines the influence factors on tourism decision making and sheds some light on how important various influences are in the tourism development decision process. A typology of community decision-making influence factors was examined through research on local government councillors in Australian coastal regions. Three major categories of this typology were identified in the literature and further explored in this study: inter-personal, intra-personal and circumstantial influence. Results from this study show that a number of influence factors which relate to sustainable tourism are considered by councillors to have a more profound effect on their decision making than only the components of social influence theory which has been discussed in much of the literature. Utilising this typology of community decision-making influence factors may form the foundation for further studies of decision making. The results suggest that influence factors on decision makers need to be both understood and taken into consideration for sustainable tourism approaches to be effectively implemented.

Introduction

Over the last few decades, pressures regarding sustainable tourism development in coastal regions have become of great interest and concern to researchers as well as communities. This has placed great demands on relatively small communities in coastal regions. The divergent priorities of tourists, residents, investors, providers of tourist and leisure experiences, and non-government and government organisations, as well as the complex relationships between these groups, however, have created enormous challenges in meeting the needs of all concerned. With increased utilisation has come exploitation, over usage, increased development near sensitive sites, polarisation of community needs and interests, and numerous other pressures in maintaining the assets which attracted people to these regions in the first place. These diverse pressures make decisions about future developments in coastal communities arduous and potentially formidable (Galvani, 1993; Owens, 1985; Stanton, 1992). Dealing with these concerns at a community level has become one of the great challenges facing decision makers.

Within Australia, specifically Eastern Australia, much development has occurred near growing tourism centres along its coastal zone. With the added

pressures of urban residential and industrial growth areas, especially near the coasts in New South Wales and Queensland (Faulkner & Walmsley, 1998), this has created additional challenges in determining effective approaches for achieving a sustainable future.

Though policy and long-range planning on coastal development have been primarily the responsibility of the states within Australia, decisions regarding the management of the coastal developments have been traditionally within local communities and the responsibility of the local government (Haward & Bergin, 1991). To reach each judgement or determination on development issues involves a decision-making process which may entail substantial analysis, understanding, and influence, often involving the diversity of interests and the incorporation of both an individual's and a community's value system.

A number of authors have more recently looked at tourism politics and policy development on a national, state or regional level (Elliot, 1997; Hall, 1994, Hall & Jenkins, 1995). An important aspect of the political process in tourism is decision making and the decision-making process. In order to develop effective methods for sustainable tourism development, the decision process and the influences on decision makers needs to be understood. This has been explored at the local community and local government level (Butler & Waldbrook 1991; Davis, 1980; Ewen, 1983; Friend & Jessop, 1971; Jackson & O'Donnell, 1993; Joppe, 1996; Jones, 1989; Vroom & Yetton, 1973).

Aspects of decision making receiving attention have included the informal versus formal nature of decision making (Resource Assessment Commission, 1993b), influence and behaviour in decision making (Wild, 1983), the participants in decision making (Davis & Weinbaum, 1969), the variability and dynamic nature in local government decision making (Healy & Zinn, 1985), the openness in the decision-making process (Shroff, 1993), the social representations of communities which may guide decision makers (Pearce *et al.*, 1991), and the major factors in understanding how individuals interact and relate regarding decision making (Davis, 1980).

One of the key strategic roles in local government councillor decision making is with new development proposals. The Resource Assessment Commission's (1993a) inquiry into the Yorke Peninsula, Australia, discussed numerous coastal developments and the approval process, primarily with regard to the State government input. Marinas, residential development, holiday houses in beach settings, tourism, aquaculture, and other developments have all been found to be part of the decision-making process of various councils and the State government. In each case, local councils were the primary decision makers, except where large-scale or significant impact may take place.

Local governments have been responsible for decision making and referral roles on tourism development proposals which may be in terms of building licences, reviewing building applications, refuse disposal, relevant infrastructure development, and local health protection. Butler *et al*. (1980) discussed appropriate initiatives for local governments. These include comprehensive land use planning, zoning, monitoring of new developments, and local economic development planning: 'Local governments can review development proposals to determine whether they are consistent with local needs and with balanced land use for the area' (p. 2046).

There are a number of additional decisions which may directly affect local communities. Decisions on town planning schemes normally result in zoning or development policy for decision making at the local government level (Resource Assessment Commission, 1993b). In a Tasmanian case study on local government decision making in coastal zones (Resource Assessment Commission, 1993b), major decisions that local governments were involved with included subdivision approval and development approval. Subdivision approval encompasses both planning and health, while development approval also includes planning and building approval. Responsibilities at the State level include environmental assessment as well as evaluating projects of State or National importance. Federal decision making on developments occurs primarily in terms of broader policy and impact.

In looking at local government decision making, three processes of local government planning and decision making have been distinguished (Friend & Jessop, 1971); namely, administrative departmental processes, council committee processes, and council formal meeting processes. In discussing these processes, the researchers acknowledged the difference between routine, more simplistic decisions (made at the administrative level), those of medium level which may utilise a committee of council for endorsement, and those more complex and strategic decisions that require the endorsement (decision) of council (e.g. in formal council meetings). In this paper, the third level is explored (i.e. complex, financially significant, resource oriented decisions – primarily tourism developments – which may influence different aspects of a community's future, potentially from an economic, environmental and/or social-community welfare point of view). It is expected that, at this level, difficult challenges, stresses, and uncertainties are likely to arise through the complex decision process.

Decision making in local government may occur at a number of different phases in the development process as revealed by the Resource Assessment Commission (1993c) in their analysis of Geographic Bay in Western Australia. From the time the developer prepares the original plan, there are consultations with local government and other authorities, ongoing feedback from the environmental protection agency, amendments and consents which may be catered for, and final decisions on accepting the final proposal.

The study of decision making in communities is a complex, multi-faceted and possibly perplexing area. Understanding better the decision-making process, the background, history and influences regarding decisions that are made, however, provides perhaps the most important potential tool in the management of possible developments, the coastal regions affected and the communities within these regions. In addressing a relatively new area in tourism research, this paper examines one major aspect of the elements leading to these complex decisions by exploring factors influencing tourism development decision making in local governments. By understanding the broad range of potential influencing factors, as well as what principal local decision makers perceive as important in influencing their decisions, communities which have pressures for development can become better equipped to address the future changes occurring in their regions.

The following section characterises a recently developed typology of community influence factors on community decision makers (Richins, 1999). The influ-

ence factors described in this typology are then further explored through a recent study of local government decision makers regarding tourism developments.

The Typology of Community Decision-making Influences

A number of authors have attempted to develop theories or define concepts of decision influence (Bailey, 1991; Banfield, 1982; Bernard, 1990; Flinn & Stokes, 1970; Howard, 1990; Iso-Ahola, 1980; Kabanoff, 1985; McLeod & Chaffee, 1972, 1987; Tedeschi & Bonoma, 1972; Tosi *et al.*, 1994; Turner, 1991; Walster & Abrahams, 1972; Weiner *et al.*, 1977) primarily from a social-psychological study of influence. These theories, however, have been limited in their ability to provide more comprehensive views and sufficient debate regarding additional components of decision-making influence. Few theorists or researchers have utilised a more inclusive set of determinants to explore decision influence. They have instead focused primarily on specific areas of potential influence such as social influence (Kelman, 1964; Turner, 1991), values (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972) and to some degree on policy and planning (Hall & Jenkins, 1995; Marien, 1992) and impacts (Perdue *et al.*, 1990).

A recent typology was developed to explore influences on decision making in local communities, generally and at local government councillors in coastal tourism regions of Australia specifically. This broader perspective on decision influence is perhaps more warranted than the previous focus on only social influence (Richins, 1997). For the present work it was found useful to have a definition or overall set of factors (referred to as the Typology of Community Decision-making Influence) which may affect decision influence. This concept attempts to be more inclusive in categorising potential influences on decision making. These encompass influences which are socially, personally, structurally, or community needs focused.

The three major categories of the typology as identified in the literature and further explored in this study include: (1) inter-personal influence, which is based on social influence theory and involves interactions of persons, and/or groups which affect an individual's psychological nature and resulting behaviour; (2) intra-personal influence which involves internal, non-social determinants (i.e. individual aspects, factors, background, values and/or interests); and (3) circumstantial influence, which involves external, non-social determinants or circumstances (i.e. objects, agents, forces, factors, and/or settings) which affect an individual's decision-making behaviour. These circumstantial influence factors can be either community needs based or structural in focus. Literature relating to the typology is discussed below.

Inter-personal influences

Social influence, the major area of influence research, has been studied directly or indirectly in areas of social psychology such as social conformity, persuasion and attitude change, power and authority, group polarisation, formation of social norms and minority influence (Turner, 1991). The main body of literature in social influence includes the study of judgments, of small-group interaction and of persuasive communications (Kelman, 1964). This has developed into an analysis of principles of social influence and induced behaviour

change. Much of the literature on influence in communities has also focused on social influence, specifically on politics, power and influence in the community (Stone *et al.*, 1979).

Various aspects of community inter-personal influence can be seen by prior literature indicating that various spheres of government influence and take part in the decision process (Hambleton, 1978; Thom, 1994), that political parties are important in local government (Friend & Jessop, 1971; Goldsmith, 1980), that developers are forcing decisions upon councillors (Ditton *et al.*, 1977), and that the media play a large role in impacting local government decisions (Goldsmith, 1980).

Though most researchers have concentrated on the social-psychological study of influence, a few have discussed broader influence concepts which relate directly or indirectly to the other two categories of the Typology of Community Decision-making Influence, namely intra-personal and circumstantial influence factors (Baron *et al.*, 1992; Fridgen, 1991; Howard, 1990; Kabanoff, 1985; Lewin, 1935; Mayo & Jarvis, 1981; Schneider, 1988; Tedeschi & Bonoma, 1972; Turner, 1991).

Intra-personal influences

The concept of intra-personal influence is well described by McLeod and Chaffee (1972: 51):

> It is widely held that the influence process is greatly affected by the beliefs, attitudes and values brought to an influence situation by its participants. These intra-personal factors help determine the amount of influence attempted and received, as well as the patterns of interaction that occur in an interpersonal encounter. One's prior beliefs, attitudes, and values form a frame of reference – a kind of cognitive map for interpreting reality that precedes and controls the exchange of information and influence.

Iso-Ahola (1980) also acknowledged the process of explaining individual behaviour (of which influence on behaviour is a part) based on both the characteristics of the individual (e.g. abilities, motives, feelings) and the environment or situation surrounding the individual (e.g. the presence of others, group composition, noise). Tedeschi and Bonoma (1972) suggested that a whole range of personal characteristics may be of relevance in influencing outcomes, even when obvious group or social influences are present. Intra-personal influence factors are related to a person's background, that is their formal education, background, experiences and knowledge (Harrington & Miller, 1993; Elbing, 1978; Simon, 1957), a person's value system (Bailey, 1991; Inlow, 1972; Rokeach, 1973), and personal interest, gain or preference (Jabes, 1982; Moorhead & Griffin, 1995).

Much of the literature on travel-tourist decision making has also been directly related to various aspects of intra-personal influence. The major focus has been on tourist motivation, satisfaction and consumer behaviour (Dann, 1981; Iso-Ahola, 1980; Pearce, 1982; Pearce & Stringer, 1991).

Circumstantial influences

Circumstantial influences include community needs and structural aspects as described above. These are based on external, non-social determinants or

circumstances which affect an individual's decision-making behaviour. These influence factors have been shown in the literature through the focus on a priority for community oriented concerns or needs as well as the concern for the long-term impacts decisions may have on communities. This has been reinforced by numerous authors who have studied aspects of sense of community such as quality of life (Roehl, 1993), sense of place (Lynch, 1972), social responsibility (Carroll, 1993), sense of harmony (Reime & Hawkins, 1981), community vision (Ritchie, 1993), community commitment (Burke, 1968), and empowerment (Din, 1992). Other literature has suggested the importance of community needs influence through research concerning community residents and tourism development (Prosser, 1993), community tourism (Murphy, 1985), and sustainable development (Marien, 1992). Healy and Zinn's (1985) extensive review of research conducted on conflicts in coastal areas found some communities were concerned with potential positive impacts (Murphy, 1985; Perdue *et al.*, 1990), while other communities were found to have more negative impact views (Madrigal, 1995; McNamara, 1987).

A second major category of circumstantial influences are those related to more regulatory or procedurally based approaches to dealing with decisions. The influence related to this more structural-circumstantial type influence (referred to in this paper as 'structural') can be seen by the growing body of literature and great deal of effort put into planning (Bates, 1989; Blank, 1989; Dredge & Moore, 1992), policy (Ditton *et al.*, 1977; Haward & Bergin, 1991; Marien, 1992), land use regulations (Inskeep & Kallenberger, 1992; Resource Assessment Commission, 1993a), and statutory procedures in communities (Pearson, 1994). Aspects of these factors include access and quality of information (Janis & Mann, 1977; Jones, 1993; Marien, 1994; Metz & Zedler, 1983), degree of direction provided through formal policy and procedural documents (Halsey & Abel, 1990; Pearson, 1994) and the degree of legal and regulatory mechanisms (Gardiner & Edwards, 1976; Stanton & Aislabie, 1992).

It is important to note that this typology is not intended to suggest that decision influence factors are mutually exclusive. Particular influence factors may indeed combine in various ways to provide an amalgamation of influence on decision making. On the other hand, specific influence factors may individually be of similar importance in influencing decision makers regarding the complex decisions that they make.

The typology

The Typology of Community Decision-making Influence was recently examined through research on local government councillors in Australian coastal regions. The typology attempts to provide a more extensive grouping of influence factors which may affect decision making of representative community members. The typology has been defined as comprehensive determinants which affect an individual's psychological nature (i.e. attitudes, opinions, emotions, beliefs, perception, feelings, and/or thoughts) and resulting behaviour. These determinants may include objects, agents, background, settings, values, interests, forces, factors, persons, and/or groups. A person's psychological nature may include individual attitudes, opinions, emotions, beliefs, perception, feelings and/or thoughts (Pearce *et al.*, 1998). As discussed above, these influence

factors are made up of inter-personal, intra-personal and circumstantial influences which can be either community needs based or structural in focus. Table 1 further represents aspects of the typology. This typology was utilised in a recent study of local government organisations.

The influence factors for the study were developed using open-ended questions from a previous study of Authoritative Opinion (Richins, 1995) as well as through an extensive review of literature. The results of the study involving tourism development decision making are presented in the following sections of this paper.

Table 1 Decision-making factors of influence on elected community decision makers

Decision-making influence factors	*Comprehensive determinants or circumstances which affect an individual's psychological nature and resulting behaviour*
(1) Inter-personal factors	External social influence determinants (i.e. interactions of persons, and/or groups). These may be either internal (in terms of leaders or other administration) or external to (in terms of media, residents' and electorate's views, community pressure groups, tourism developers, expert opinion, state/Federal government's and political party's views) the organisation.
(2) Intra-personal factors	Internal, non-social influence deteminants (i.e. individual aspects, factors, background, values, and/or interests). These may be based on personal background (in terms of formal educational qualifications, general experience and skills and knowledge of tourism) or values/ interests of the individual (in terms of personal values and the potential for personal benefit to a decision maker).
(3) Circumstantial factors	External non-social influence determinants or circumstances (i.e. objects, agents, forces, factors, and/or settings). These may be structural (in terms of information, direction or mandates) or community needs focused (in terms of outcomes, positive or negative impacts or a sense of community).

Methodology in the study of community decision-making influence factors on local government councillors

The previous section described a typology of influence factors on community decision makers. The influence factors illustrated in this typology are further examined below through a recent study of local government decision makers.

This research, which focused on councillor decision-making influence, was developed to explore local government tourism decisions made by councillors and the primary influences that have the greatest effect on these decisions. The primary aims of this study were:

(1) to determine the importance placed on influences as perceived by present elected councillors making tourism development oriented local government decisions, and
(2) To determine the degree to which specific profile characteristics (councillor and community) have an influencing effect on councillor decision making of tourism oriented local government decisions.

The method used for the Councillor Influence Study was a mail survey of all councillors in Local Government Areas (LGAs) along the coastal regions of New South Wales and Queensland, the most prominent regions where tourism developments exist or have been proposed within Australia. The study involved profiling councillors' characteristics and preferences so that appropriate relationships and correlations might be understood.

The study was conducted in 1996 and consisted of a total population of 795 which included 388 councillors from Queensland LGAs (an average of 10.2 councillors per LGA) and 407 councillors from New South Wales (an average of 11.0 councillors per LGA). Every council administration in coastal Eastern Australia (NSW and Queensland) was contacted to acquire an up-to-date listing of each councillor and their contact address. The Total Design Method developed by Dillman (1977) was utilised to maximise mail survey response rates and ensure data quality. Initial surveys and cover letters were posted and followed by a series of three reminder cards sent to the sample at intervals of 7, 14 and 21 days, with additional surveys sent upon request.

Of the 795 surveys, six were returned with incorrect addresses, and 23 were returned with respondents unable or declining to participate primarily due to time constraints. Most of the declining respondents indicated that they did not have time due to either full time or part time employment in addition to their council responsibilities. A few others who declined to participate mentioned that the survey would be inappropriate for them to complete since few decisions were made regarding tourism in their area.

Characteristics and Representative Nature of the Survey Returns

Two hundred and forty-six surveys were returned for a response rate of 31.2% (246/789). The intention of this study was to sample a representative group of councillors in North Eastern Australia's coastal regions regarding decision influences. Though the return rate of 31% may be considered as modest, results obtained include councillor responses from all but three of the 75 councils surveyed with further representation from each type of council and community included, and from widely spread regions. Table 2 shows in detail the positive representative nature of the returns.

Of the 246 surveys returned, 144 (58.5%) were from New South Wales, and 102 (41.5%) from Queensland. Ninety-six per cent of all coastal Queensland and New South Wales councils returned at least one survey (average of 3.28 per council).

Table 2 Representative characteristics of surveys

Characteristic	Total	New South Wales	Queensland
Study population	789	405	384
Surveys returned	246	144	102
Response rate	31.2%	35.6%	26.6%
Total coastal councils	75	37	38
Councils returning at least one survey	72	37	35
Percent of councils returning at least one survey	96.0%	100.0%	92.1%
Average number of returned surveys per council	3.3	3.9	2.7
Average number of councillors per council	10.5	10.9	10.1
Towns represented by returned surveys	198	115	83

Seventy-two councils returned surveys, but there were almost three times that number (198) of towns or communities (place of residence) represented by the study. Mayors, deputy mayors and councillors were all represented by the study. The number of returned surveys included 20 mayors (also called shire or local government area president or chairperson), 11 deputy mayors, and 215 listed as councillors. Not all mayors or deputy mayors were identified by council administrations, therefore there may have been respondents listed as councillors who were actually mayors or deputy mayors.

Types of communities represented

Table 3 allows for comparison of the 789 councillor study population to the actual returned surveys. Population statistics of councillors from the Australian Classification of Local Governments (1994) were utilised for this comparison. There was a fairly representative mix of urban and rural responses as compared to the council population, though a larger percentage of responses came from regional towns and fringe councils (61%). It is of note that the regional towns' classification is the major coastal area where tourism exists and high growth occurs in New South Wales and Queensland.

Utilising the Australian Classification of Local Governments (1994), councils may be categorised based on population. 'Large' denotes LGA's with over 70,000 in population, 'Medium' identifies population between 30,000 and 70,000 and 'Small' is used to identify LGAs with less than 30,000. As can be seen in Table 34, there was a fairly representative response with regard to community sizes in the surveys returned.

From a regional point of view, eight broader regions were included in the study (see Figure 1). All these regions were quite evenly represented by the respondents. These included four in New South Wales (i.e. South Coast, Sydney region, Central Coast-Hunter, and North Coast), and four regions in Queensland (i.e. Gold Coast/Brisbane, Sunshine Coast/Bundaberg, Rockhampton/Mackay, and Townsville/Far North).

Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents from each of the eight regional areas in New South Wales and Queensland.

Table 3 Comparison of study population (789 councillors) and respondents (246 councillors)

| Characteristic	Respondents (councillors)	Population (councils)
Urban	22.3%	33.3%
Rural (including regional towns)	77.7%	66.7%
Capital city-Metropolitan councils	16.5%	18.6%
Regional towns and fringe councils	61.2%	48.0%
Rural councils	22.3%	33.3%
Large LGAs (over 70,000 population)	24.0%	23.4%
Small/medium LGAs (up to 70,000 population)	76.0%	74.6%
Large LGAs (over 70,000 population)	24.0%	25.3%
Medium LGAs (30–70,000 population)	33.9%	26.7%
Small LGAs (under 30,000 population)	42.1%	48.0%
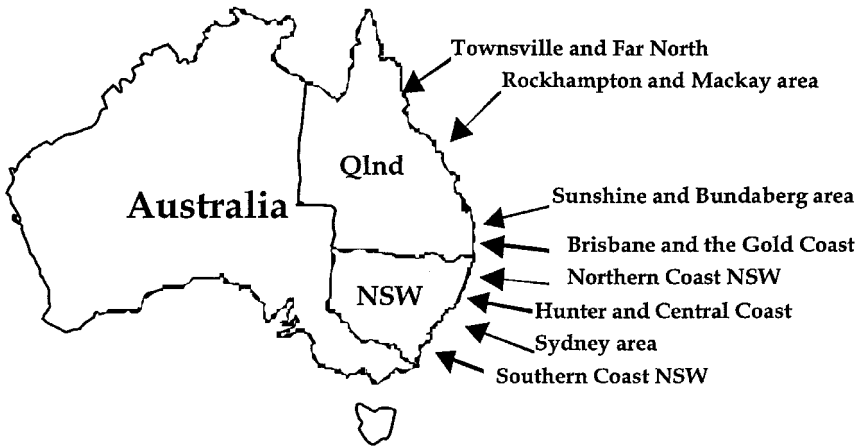
Figure 1 Map of Australia with eastern coastal regions within the states of Queensland and New South Wales

Councillors were asked to rank eight industries of importance in their respective councils, in order to understand better the types of communities in the study. These industries included agriculture, heavy industry, light industry, military, mining, tourism, other services, and other public sector activities. Means were produced for each industry based on a scale from 1 to 8 (where 1 = most important industry and 8 = least important industry). In the study, *Tourism* was rated as the most important perceived present industry (mean of 2.30; most important is closer to 1, least important is closer to 7), with *Agriculture* second (2.97), and *Light*
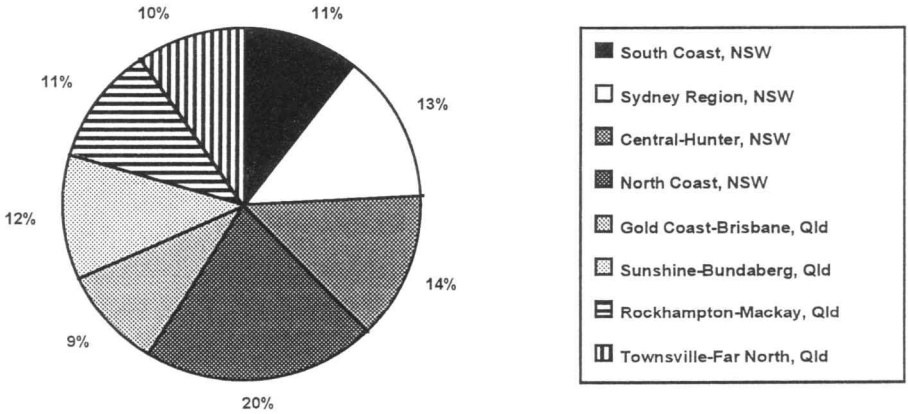
Figure 2 Regions from which councillor surveys were returned

industry close behind with a mean of 3.11. *Mining and Military* were the lowest rating of importance. Councillors rated *Tourism* as even more important in the future, with *Agriculture* being rated second but of lower importance in the future.

Descriptive Results of Councillor Decision-making Influences Study

Councillors were asked to indicate on a five-point Likert scale, the perceived importance they placed on various factors which influenced them regarding tourism development oriented decision making. As mentioned previously, these factors, developed using open-ended questions from a previous study as well as from the literature, were reduced to 33, and displayed on one page of the questionnaire and sent to all of the 795 councillors in all LGAs in Queensland and New South Wales. The influence factors were then combined and formed into influence sub-factors to allow for more efficient analysis (see Table 5). Councillors were asked, 'Please put a tick in the box that best describes how important you believe each item is in influencing you as a councillor regarding decisions you may be faced with regarding tourism development issues in your local government council area'. Items were rated as extremely important, very important, moderately important, of little importance, or not at all important.

Descriptive results of specific influencing factors on tourism development decision making

Results are shown in Table 4, which is sorted by mean. The left-hand column includes an influencing sub-factor, with the next column being specific influencing factors (each of the 33 in the questionnaire). A lower score, closer to one, was considered extremely important, and a score closer to five was considered not at all important. The table was primarily categorised for discussion based on medians.

Table 4 Councillor's perceived influences on local government decision making

Order	Decision making Influence Factor	Specific Influence Factor	Means	Medians
Influences that are perceived to be extremely important				
1	Community Needs	Sense of community	1.48	1
2	Community Needs	Ecosystem degradation	1.55	1
3	Community Needs	Deterioration of physical appeal	1.62	1
Influences that are very important				
4	Community Needs	Economic growth	1.80	2
5	Structural	State-Federal coastal policy	1.88	2
6	Inter-Personal	Resident views	1.88	2
7	Structural	Local land use regulations	1.90	2
8	Structural	Statutory-legal procedures	1.91	2
9	Community Needs	Developing local amenities	1.94	2
10	Community Needs	Environmental impact uncertainty	1.98	2
11	Intra-Personal	Personal values	1.99	2
12	Community Needs	Increased cost of infrastructure	2.06	2
13	Community Needs	Attracting negative behavior	2.07	2
14	Structural	Quality of information	2.09	2
15	Intra-Personal	Experience and/or skills	2.13	2
16	Structural	Consistency with mission and/or plan	2.20	2
17	Inter-Personal	How electorate views issues	2.27	2
18	Structural	Poor access to information	2.34	2
19	Intra-Personal	Knowledge of tourism	2.35	2
20	Inter-Personal	Views of council administration	2.36	2
21	Community Needs	Uncertainty of socio-cultural impact	2.43	2
22	Community Needs	Viability of a tourism development	2.49	2
23	Inter-Personal	Views of expert opinion	2.49	2
Influences that are of moderate importance				
24	Community Needs	Potential tax base increase	2.72	3
25	Inter-Personal	Community pressure groups	2.90	3
26	Intra-Personal	Formal education qualifications	2.92	3
27	Structural	Information overload	3.47	3
28	Inter-Personal	Extent of media coverage	3.55	4
Influences that are of little importance				
29	Inter-Personal	Tourism developer's influence	3.81	4
30	Inter-Personal	Fellow councillor's influence	3.87	4
31	Inter-Personal	State-Federal governmental influence	3.89	4
Influences that are perceived to be not at all important				
32	Inter-Personal	Political party's views	4.26	5
33	Intra-Personal	Potential of personal benefit	4.51	5

Note: A lower comparable score for a mean indicates more influence. Number of respondents ranged from 225-240.

Highlights of the 33 influencing factors will be discussed first, including both comparisons of means and importance ratings (percentages indicating extremely important and very important). Then, combined influencing sub-factors (as developed above in the 'Typology of Community Decision-making Influence') will be compared based on means and percentages indicating high importance.

The top grouping of influence sub-factors, those considered to have an 'extremely important' level of influence (with means from 1.4 to 1.7 and a mode of 1) included three community needs specific factors of *Sense of community*, (rated the highest with a mean of 1.48), *Ecosystem degradation* (1.55) and *Deterioration of physical appeal* (1.62). Note: the *Sense of community* factor, in the highest ranking of importance had a sharp Kurtosis.

The second grouping of influencing factors, referred to here as 'very important', had mean scores between 1.8 and 2.5 with modes of 2. Twenty specific factors were included in this, the largest group, and councillors rated 23 of the 33 different specific factors as very important or extremely important.

The last grouping of specific influencing factors referred to as 'not at all important', had a mode of 5 and means from 4.2 to 4.6. The influencing factors in this lowest group included only two factors: *Political party's views* (inter-personal with a mean of 4.26), and *Potential of personal benefit* (intra-personal with a mean of 4.51).

The top five specific influence factors were rated by over 80% of councillors as 'very important' or 'extremely important', with five of the top six relating to the influence factor of community needs. The top five were highly rated and include: *Sense of community* influence (93.2%), *Deterioration of physical appeal* (88.7%), *Ecosystem degradation* (86.7%), *Economic growth* (83.0%), and *Local land use regulations* (80.8%). Of particular interest is that over 61% (61.3%) rated *Sense of community influence* as extremely important.

Descriptive results of influencing factors on tourism development decision making

The 33 specific influencing factors were combined based on the categorisation table discussed previously (see Table 1). The results of this are shown in Table 5.

In evaluating the four influencing factors regarding councillor decisions pertaining to tourism development issues, community needs (mean of 2.01), was combined from eleven specific influence factors. These include one community sub-factor (i.e. the need to maintain the sense of place, quality of life, or sense of community for residents), three factors which represent the potential uncertainty of outcomes, four influencing factors which represent the potential for negative impact, and three factors which represent the potential for positive impact. This influence factor (community needs) was rated as having the strongest influence with 72% of councillors considering this group of factors to be very important or extremely important in terms of influence on decision making, and 37% considering this as extremely important.

The second highest influence factor with a mean rating of just over two (on a scale where 1 = great influence and 5 = little influence) included structural factors. These factors were combined from seven specific factors, had a mean of 2.25, and included three factors relating to the degree of influence based on

Table 5 Community decision-making influencing factors sorted by means and including percentages

Decision Making Influence Factor			
Order by mean		Means	Percentages rated extremely important or very important
1	Community needs	2.01	72.2%
1	Sense-of-community	1.48	93.2%
2	Negative impact	1.83	79.4%
5	Positive impact	2.15	68.7%
6	Uncertain outcome	2.30	59.2%
2	Structural	2.25	63.4%
3	Mandates	1.91	78.3%
4	Direction	2.03	72.3%
8	Information	2.63	47.6%
3	Intra-personal	2.76	49.7%
7	Personal background	2.46	55.5%
11	Personal interest	3.21	40.3%
4	Inter-personal	3.12	34.5%
9	Internal social	3.11	34.6%
10	External social	3.12	33.2%

Note: A lower comparable score for a mean indicates more influence.
      The number of respondents ranged from 235-240.

access to information, two factors representing the direction provided to the council based on policy or planning, and two factors representing the mandates of regulation and statutory procedures. The percentage of importance was also quite high for structural factors (63.4%).

Intra-personal was rated third of the four decision-making influence factors. Five factors were determined to be representative of intra-personal. Three specific influencing factors included background (i.e. influence based on the degree of formal education, knowledge, experience), and two specific influencing factors that included personal values and possible benefits that may be gained by councillors based on the decisions they make in council.

The factors perceived by councillors as having the least influence were labelled as inter-personal factors. These included the potential influence from eight different external factors (i.e. media, residents' and electorate's views, community pressure groups, tourism developers, expert opinion, State/Federal government's influence and political party's views, and two potential internal

council factors, which included other councillors' views and council administration's potential influence). It is of particular interest that only 7% rated the sub-factor *Internal inter-personal* as extremely important, and only 13% rated the sub-factor *External inter-personal* as extremely important. As can be seen in Table 4, the lack of perceived influence regarding political parties (i.e. the second lowest rating of influence) is consistent with anthropological research conducted in the 1970s in Australia and England (Wild, 1983), which suggested strong opposition to party politics playing a role in local government decisions. Councillors in the present research, however, also rated councillor and council administration of low influence, which is contrary to Wild's findings.

Comparisons of Significant Groups of Decision-making Influences – Councillor and Council Characteristics

Variables variance analysis

Influences were analysed based on characteristics of councillors and LGA's. Councillor characteristic independent variables included age, educational interest, educational level achieved, gender, level of councillor (i.e. mayor, deputy mayor or councillor), occupational level and type, length of terms served, previous work in tourism, years lived in LGA, and desired community tourism scenarios. Local government area independent variables included population size, regions, states, urban versus rural communities, and perceived present and future community tourism scenarios. Community tourism scenario independent variable results are not reported in this paper.

Dependent variables analysed were the four decision making influence groups (i.e. inter-personal, intra-personal, structural and community needs). The data was analysed as appropriate using *t*-Test and ANOVA.

In reviewing dependent variables of perceived influencing factors, both councillor characteristics and LGA characteristics were analysed. With councillor characteristics, inter-personal and intra-personal factors had variance in only one independent variable, whereas structural influence factors varied on five councillor characteristics. Community needs factors varied based on four factors. For LGA characteristics, there were very few variances. Each influence factor had variance based on only one independent variable regarding LGA characteristics.

Discussion of differences: Decision-making factors and sub-factors of influence

The following section summarises the degree of influence regarding both councillor and LGA independent variables. The four decision-making influences and their sub-factors of influence are discussed.

Table 6 summarises the independent variables where significant differences between groups were found in terms of councillors and LGA characteristics regarding the four influencing factors of inter-personal, structural, intra-personal and community needs factors. The following describes further the significant differences between independent variables in the study based on the four factors of decision-making influence.

Table 6 Summary of analysis of variance of councilor influence on decision making

Decision Making Influence Factor	Importance	More influenced if:	Less influenced if:
Community Needs	High	Female	Male
		Semi-skilled employment	Semi-professional employment
		Less terms served as Councillor	Many terms served as Councillor
		Previous work in tourism	No previous work in tourism
		Small population size of LGA	Large population size of LGA
Structural	Moderate	Female	Male
		Older Councillor	Younger Councillor
		Semi-skilled employment	Semi-professional employment
		Work in trades, real estate, armed forces	Work in business, government, education
		Councillor	Mayor or Deputy Mayor
		Not sure if tourism plan is in place for LGA	Tourism plan in place for LGA
Intra-Personal	Low	Regions of Sunshine Coast, Sydney area & North Queensland Coast	Regions of Brisbane-Gold Coast & Central Queensland Coast
Inter-Personal	Low	Semi-skilled employment	Semi-professional employment
		Tourism is less important economically in the LGA	Tourism is more important economically in the LGA

Inter-personal influence factors

Inter-personal influence factors were found to be more influential with the *Occupation level of Semi-skilled workers*, and less influential regarding *Semi-professionals*. This was mostly due to *External inter-personal* sub-factors. The inter-personal influence factor also was found to be of influence in LGA's where *Tourism* was one of the least important industries. *Females* were seen to be more influenced than *Males* by primarily *External inter-personal* sub-factors.

Structural influence factors

Structural influence factors were believed to be of greater influence with councillors who were in the older age category (*More than 54 years*); with the education interests of *Trades/real estate, Armed forces/police*; with *Females*; and with the occupation level of *Semi-skilled workers*. Those respondents with a focus on *Government* as their educational interest were perceived to be influenced by the sub-factor *Information*. *Government, Real estate/trades* as well as *Professional* educational interests were the main groups who were thought to be influenced by the sub-factor, *Direction*. Those with educational interests in *Business, Arts/social*

science, Sciences, Government/Legal and *Education/academia* believed themselves to be less influenced by structural influence factors.

Intra-personal influence factors

Intra-personal influence factors were perceived as more influential in the regions of *Sunshine Coast-Bundaberg* and *Townsville-Far North* in Queensland and the *Sydney* region. Less influence from intra-personal factors was seen from the *Brisbane-Gold Coast* region and the *Rockhampton-Mackay* region. There was no significant difference with any other region.

Community needs influence factors

Community needs influence factors were perceived by councillors as more influential with *Females, Semi-skilled workers*, councillors who served *Few terms* (one to two) and by those who *Worked previously in tourism*. Councillors who had *Served five terms or more* were found to be less influenced by community needs. Councillors in *Small LGAs* were found to be more influenced by community needs influence factors than those from *Larger sized councils*.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

This study was developed to explore the primary decision-making influences on local government councillor decision making. All councillors in local government areas along the coastal regions of New South Wales and Queensland were sent a detailed questionnaire asking them to provide information on their community and themselves (e.g. major industries, community tourism scenarios, and demographic background). In addition they were asked to rate the importance of various influence factors on their own decision making regarding tourism developments.

Differences regarding the influences were also explored and these were based on council (local government) characteristics and representative councillor characteristics. Councils were well represented by 96% of the 75 LGAs in the study area (i.e. coastal councils in New South Wales and Queensland).

Councillors were asked to rate various influence factors concerning their tourism decisions. They rated the circumstantial influence factors (i.e. community needs and structural) as the most important influence on councillor decision making. Table 7 contains a summary of the results of decision making influence importance ratings for sub-factors and specific factors. Community needs influences (i.e. sense of community, negative and positive impacts) were rated as the most important influences followed by structural influences (i.e. mandates and direction).

The two decision-making influencing factors of intra-personal and inter-personal influence were believed to have much less influence on councillor decision making. A councillor's background was believed to be only somewhat important, and personal values and potential personal benefits were considered of lowest influence.

In contrast to the focus in previous literature (Bailey, 1991; Kelman, 1964; Stone *et al.*, 1979; Turner, 1991; Walster & Abrahams, 1972), this study suggests that councillors place much less importance or believe themselves to place little

Table 7 Summary of results from the study of influences on councillor decision making: sub-factors and specific factors

Influence factors	*Ambient influence*	*Importance*
Top sub-factors of decision influence		
1 Sense-of-community	Community needs	High
2 Negative impact	Community needs	High
3 Mandates	Structural	High
4 Direction	Structural	High
5 Positive impact	Community needs	Moderate
Top specific factors of decision influence		
1 Broad community influences	Community needs	High
2 Ecosystem degradation	Community needs	High
3 Deterioation of physcial appeal	Community needs	High
4 Economic growth	Community needs	High
5 State/Federal coastal policy	Structural	High
6 Resident views/input	Inter-personal	High

importance on both external and internal inter-personal influence and also intra-personal influences.

This study of councillor influence found community needs influences to be of importance in tourism development decision making. These include *Sense of Community, Negative,* and *Positive Community Impact,* which are all of importance for councillors making decisions. Structural influences were also found to be perceived as important.

This focus on sense of community is reinforced by numerous authors who have studied aspects of sense of community such as quality of life, sense of place, social responsibility, sense of harmony, community vision, community commitment, and empowerment (Burke, 1968; Carroll, 1993; Din, 1992; Lynch, 1972; Reime & Ritchie, 1993; Roehl, 1993).

As can be seen by the present research, community needs factors were the overwhelming influence factors, with three to four of the top five specific factors being community needs influences. The factors of community needs, specifically the sub-factors of *Sense of Community, Positive,* and *Negative Community Impact* which councillors indicated as important influence factors in their decision

making, are also consistent with much of the research mentioned previously concerning community residents and tourism development, community tourism planning, and sustainable development.

The findings in this research substantiate the importance of additional factors, apart from the generally accepted social or inter-personal influence factors, playing a significant role in influencing councillor decision making. This may or may not be found to be the case with research populations other than local government councillors.

The process in this research of exploring various influences on decision making has attempted to explain the broad and more specific aspects of what affects elected officials in their decisions regarding tourism development in coastal regions of Eastern Australia. The results of this study have shown that a number of influence factors are considered by councillors to have a greater effect on their decision making than only social or inter-personal influence theory. As was mentioned previously, concentrating primarily on inter-personal influence has limited the ability to provide more comprehensive views and sufficient debate regarding additional components of decision-making influence. Community needs and structural influences, both identified as circumstantial influences, are believed by councillors to be key factors influencing their tourism decisions.

Contrary to the apparent focus on external organisations attempting to influence local government decisions (Agger *et al.*, 1964; Goldsmith, 1980; Hambleton, 1978; Haward & Bergin, 1991), councillors believe themselves to be much less influenced by such inter-personal social influence groups as political parties, tourism developers, fellow councillors, media, and community pressure groups. This finding may have strong implications for the approaches which various groups (Figgis, 1984) have taken and advocated in attempting to influence local government councillors. The reluctance to allow pressure groups to have influence on decision making is consistent with Newton's (1982) research, which found that 'noisier' (more vocal) pressure groups might actually have a negative effect on decision makers.

This apparent focus by councillors on impacts in terms of influence on decision making is also consistent with previous research on conflicts in coastal areas which found some communities were concerned with potential positive impacts (Perdue *et al.*, 1990), while others were found to be concerned with negative impact factors (Madrigal, 1995). In this research, both positive and negative impact factors were rated by councillors as important influences in their tourism decision making.

The great deal of effort put into planning, policy, land-use regulations, and statutory procedures in communities, may also be a meaningful explanation for the high importance ratings by councillors in this research concerning structural circumstantial influence (i.e. mandates and direction).

Conclusion

This research examined the use of a new typology to explore for the first time the full array of community decision-making influences and the degree to which councillors believe these influences affect their decision making. It is acknowl-

edged that decisions are complex, may involve an amalgam of various factors and that these influence factors are not mutually exclusive, and may indeed be an oversimplification of the great variety of potential influences. There is, however, value in beginning to understand first the various factors of influence and, second, the importance decision makers place on decision influences. Utilising a more comprehensive grouping of influence factors may form the foundation for further studies of decision making involving other localities, other types of decisions, decision makers, or decision-making groups.

Further limitations to this study include the use of perceived importance ratings, which may suggest a biased or exaggerated point of view in some cases. The results of this study, however, were substantiated to a large extent by further studies involving case studies of specific communities as well as a study of authoritative opinion (Richins, 1999).

Research conducted in this study has shown that a number of influence factors are considered by councillors to have a more profound effect on their decision making than only the components of social influence theory which has been discussed in much of the literature. Community needs and structural influences, both identified as circumstantial influences, are believed by councillors to be key factors influencing their tourism decisions. Key sustainable tourism influence factors such as ecosystem degradation, environmental impact uncertainty and other community needs type influences were found to be important in this study.

The common strategies of endeavouring to sway councillors regarding future decisions through social inter-personal influence, as shown by this research, may be misdirected and ineffective. A potentially more appropriate approach might focus on the positive or negative impacts of councillor decisions providing well documented proof of expected outcomes in order to minimise impact uncertainties within a sustainable development framework. Dealing with the components of a sense of community and gaining a better understanding of how each councillor views each of these components may also be of great benefit in establishing approaches, networks, and interactions for influence on councillor and other types of community decision making. Understanding better the social representations (Moscovici, 1984; Pearce *et al.*, 1991) related to tourism development, which have been found to be inherent in tourism oriented communities, could also provide a basis for further research to be conducted on decision influence.

Based on the findings of this research, possibly more attention ought to be focused on the development of sustainable tourism strategies which address various circumstantial influence factors identified in this study. These may specifically be focused on community needs influence factors, in the areas of *Positive* and *Negative Impact* and *Sense-of-community*, and also structural factors which may have a constraining influence on councillors. Future research may shed light on these directions.

Developing positive relationships with elected community officials which show a sense of understanding and compassion for their individual Councillor's views on sense of community, impact issues, and uncertainties of potential outcomes may provide progress in beginning to break down the reluctance local government councillors appear to have (at least in coastal regions of Eastern Australia) in being amenable to social inter-personal influences.

For sustainable tourism approaches to be effective, the implications from this study are that local government decision-making influence factors need to be understood and strongly considered. It is these decision makers which may indeed have the greatest effect on the future sustainability of communities. Recognising the importance of what influences key decision makers in community tourism development decision making may be a first significant component in achieving successful sustainable tourism outcomes.

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