

Cultural Heritage Conservation and Tourism for Sustainable Development: The Saint Lucia National Trust

ST. LUCIA

Introduction

Tourism contributes significantly to the economic growth and expansion of Caribbean SIDS. The islands with the highest per capita income, for instance the Bahamas and Barbados, have the largest sectoral contribution to GDP derived from tourism and related services.

But there are environmental costs. It is widely recognised that several large-scale hotels, located closely to the shoreline discharge heavy quantities of waste. Also, negative social and cultural consequences such as illegal drugs and prostitution have assumed disturbing proportions.

There are strenuous efforts on the part of governments, the private sector, citizens organisations and hotel associations to redress those deficiencies. A growing appreciation has emerged for a redefinition of the tourism product and the nature of related activities. In this regard, a fundamental

shift in the conceptualisation of the tourism product has been the enhancing of a cultural heritage that is educational to both visitors and residents.

Such a radical departure from the conventional emphasis of “sea, sand, surf and sex” are being addressed in the strategic redirections of St. Lucia’s National Trust. This effort deserves further reflection and assessment.

Background

The St. Lucia National Trust (SLNT) emerged in the 1970’s to help conserve and preserve natural and cultural heritage sites. The founders of the SLNT faced a development model which focused on economic growth with little or no reference paid to the natural and cultural environments. An early approach was adopted towards covering the strengths and dignity of the past. This approach would serve to transform St. Lucians and Caribbean people

into creative and resilient communities, contending with the disempowering force of colonialism and the historical mode of production extracting surplus value for the benefit of the metropolises. These dual forces occurred within a national planning context, which caused many natural and cultural sites to be compromised. The SLNT was set up to help conserve the natural and cultural heritage sites of St. Lucia, and to promote values which lead to national pride and love of country. This is perhaps best captured in the SLNT's motto: Conservation through Education, Appreciation and Protection.

In **1975**, after four years of discussions, the SLNT was established by Parliament, through Act No. 16 of **1975**. The SLNT was given a mandate, which remains unique to this day to conserve the natural and cultural heritage of St. Lucia through a process which includes research and publication, education, ownership and management of sites and properties, and development of museums. By creating the SLNT, the artificial divide between the natural and cultural heritage of a country exemplified by the high specialization of Ministries and Government Departments was transcended. Most importantly, to complete the holistic approach needed to conserve the natural and cultural heritage of St. Lucia, the jurisdiction of the SLNT was extended to both the terrestrial and marine environments.

The distinctiveness of the SLNT is due to both the configuration of its Council and its membership, as well as the development and strategic business orientation that inform its operations. The Council of the SLNT comprises eleven members of which seven are elected by its membership, two are nominated by the Government of St. Lucia every other year, and two by the Archaeological and Historical Society, whose members were instrumental in the establishment of the SLNT. Within the Council, the partnership between Government and people allows the elected members to control 64% of the votes. Membership, which now stands close to six hundred, is open to persons from all walks of life and as a result, the SLNT is regarded as a Non-Government Membership and Non-Profit Organisation.

An impressive feature of the work of the SLNT was its attempt to analyse critically and brainstorm the issues relative to holistic national development and to educate its membership and the wider community on the results of its intellectual reflections.

Factors Influencing Change and Development

There are many factors which are influencing the SLNT and will continue to do so at increasing magnitudes in the future. Encouraging strides have been

made to have a level of consciousness among members and the wider public. A summary of its analysis is presented with a certain amount of detail, so that others may readily benefit from the findings of the strategic review process undertaken by the SLNT. Among factors discussed with its membership are the following:

1. **Globalisation:** As the 21st century approaches, there are many concerns. St. Lucia, as a young nation, fighting to maintain its own in an environment, where globalisation is the order of the day and where the international economic system demonstrates less and less sympathy for Small Island States, is asking for an opportunity. Globalisation can be regarded as an economic, cultural, social, political, technological and a psychological force, striving to create minds that think alike, have the same aspirations, and accept the paradigm in use with little critical thought. That is, globalisation as a force, produces a "mass mind-set" and a diminished sense of national pride and sense of purpose, while national self actualisation is negated. This is why the Trust encourages critical thinking of the "truths" which are fed by the economically advanced countries. In conserving what represents the history and traditions of St. Lucia, the basis for the re-

discovery of past strengths and for dreaming new visions is maintained.

2. **Segmentation:** In spite of the attempt by the forces of globalisation to create the "mass mind, society seems to be, more and more, breaking down into sub-cultures and interest groups with multiple agendas. This is a reaction to the volume of information reaching the public at an increasing rate; the phenomenon of "time-space convergence"; the tendency for small agendas to be easily lost in the overall scheme of things, and a fundamental psychological need to self-actualize segmentation is the result of a basic need by humans to participate in creating their future and to self-determination. The Trust encourages members to participate in designing their future with focus on their communities and country, or else development becomes meaningless.
3. **The Environment:** The cost of centuries of focusing on quantitative rather than qualitative development has resulted in the compromise of the environment in many parts of the earth. Poverty is still a scourge and a reality in all countries and unlike affluence, is only partially responsible for environmental destruction. It is

most evident that where there is poverty, social justice is an aberration, and the environment suffers. Environmental destruction is a factor forcing people to think of sustainability. In St. Lucia, the smallness of the island makes this factor even more important as the negative impacts on the environment continues unabated.

4. **Social Justice:** This factor forces one to focus on equity in the sense of the accessibility to opportunities for sustainable development. This takes into consideration “inter-generational equity and ”inter-gender equity.” It is this factor which invariably forces one to focus on the role different groups play in the governance of their country, their level of empowerment, and the distribution of the benefits of development. This is one factor which must be focused on, if there is to be more spatial equity in development.

The above factors have persuaded the SLNT to use strategies characterised by genuine participation of people and communities. Which can result in, sharing of benefits, concentrates on the inextricable link between conservation and the material needs of people and enabling empowerment. Conservation has become for the SLNT a way of approaching development from a more

balanced perspective, in which an Anthropocentric Approach is replaced by an Ecosystem Approach in which human needs are in balance with the productive and rejuvenative capacities of ecosystems. The Ecosystem Approach is based on principles of sustainable use which promote a balance between production and use, equity, national pride, and love of self and country. These are some of the principles which are permeating the planning process at the SLNT as it approaches the next millennium.

A Focus on Heritage Tourism for Sustainable Human Development

The cultural heritage of St. Lucia constitutes not only the historical sites, properties and monuments but also the oral traditions and culture of the island. The SLNT has realised this and though not working in documenting oral traditions, depends heavily on such organisations as the Folk Research Centre (FRC) in understanding those traditions and values which have served as a force in the development of St. Lucia. More than anything else, the SLNT has realised that real change comes from understanding the culture and working with people to bridge the gap between what people espouse and what they do.

There are five imperatives which the SLNT identified in developing a

'System of Protected Areas for Saint Lucia. These are:

- (i) Poverty is intolerable and that its causes must be addressed.
- (ii) Present and future generations have a fundamental right to a better quality of life, which involves the satisfaction of economic, social, cultural, and spiritual needs and aspirations.
- (iii) Forward planning is critical to development.
- (iv) The collective good supersedes the interest of the individual and
- (v) Private property is not absolute, a social mortgage exists on such property.

Based on these imperatives and the factors discussed previously, the St. Lucia National Trust's strategies for conserving, developing and managing the cultural resources of St. Lucia for heritage tourism and sustainable development are as follows:

1. Community Empowerment: The SLNT has defined one of its four programme areas (Institutional Development) to include strengthening the capacity and capability of CBOs to participate in decision making and management of sites and properties. This is being achieved through the design of projects for funding and implementation together with comm-

unities and stakeholders, by training and skills transference and by developing mechanisms which will ensure a transfer of benefits to communities. The SLNT has also focused on facilitation as a skill to help provoke critical thought between "espoused values" and "values in use."

The fundamental goal of such a strategy is to persuade communities to realise that by coming together to decide on their future, a significant impact can be made and policy makers will listen. A good example is that of the Praslin/Mamiku Communities where after four years of work, the Prime Minister of St. Lucia responded to their requests to sit and talk about their needs. Effective community empowerment is a necessary antidote to the negative influence of globalisation.

2. Research, Documentation and Publication: The SLNT sees research as a critical part of all conservation work. One cannot know how to conserve without knowing what exists. Inventorising is therefore fundamental to the SLNT's work. Discovering the visible examples of Pre-Columbian, European and African culture and natural sites are the first steps in a conservation programme. Research also include determining "the

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- carrying capacity” of sites in order to develop guidelines for their protection and sustainable use. Research is regarded as the basis for sound decision making and policy development. This is an area the SLNT intends to develop much more than at present.
3. **Institutional Collaboration:** In a complex area such as the management of cultural and natural heritage resources, the SLNT cannot achieve a high level of success without collaborating with numerous organisations at all levels. The SLNT works closely with several Government, Non-Government and Community Based Organisations. For example, towards helping private owners of natural and cultural heritage sites, the SLNT has joined with the St. Lucia Tourist Board (SLTB), the Ministry of Finance and Planning, the Forestry Department, Fisheries Department and several local property owners in establishing the Nature Heritage Tourism Council (NHTC). This Council is working towards greater equity in the tourism industry. Through this strategy, the SLNT recognises its own limitations and strengths, the strengths of other organisations and the truism that purposeful development is a shared responsibility of many, enjoyed by a common vision.
 4. **Public Awareness and Education:** The SLNT has realised the need to continuously educate the many ”publics” with the single goal of changing values and thus, affecting behaviour. Though it is felt by many that the SLNT needs to augment programming in this area, much has been achieved. The SLNT has programmes for children and the youth. There are plans to target the adults through interactive programmes at sites and by specially designed programmes. The use of formal and informal means are continuously being explored.
 5. **Land Stewardship:** Beginning with the reality that most cultural and natural sites in St. Lucia are on private property, the SLNT is working with landowners in protecting and developing their sites. This programme will require the formalization of land stewardship tools such as management agreements, conservation easements, leasehold arrangements and appropriate incentives for landowners. Through such an approach, it is expected that a substantial part of the nation’s natural and cultural heritage resources will be protected. In particular, in doing so economic benefits can accrue to the owners through nature/heritage tourism.

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6. **Policy:** The Trust is continuously lobbying for the development of land use and zoning plans for St. Lucia, and is also in the process of developing a National Architectural Heritage Policy, which will preserve buildings and structures of outstanding architectural and historic merit. This involves setting up a registry of buildings and sites, public education, and an appropriate incentives regime for property owners. It is the hope that privately listed buildings will be open for visitation by locals and tourists.
 7. **Lobbying/Networking:** Informal networking and lobbying for policy changes are also part of the strategies used by the SLNT. These are increasingly done through the membership based in strategic places who have strategic roles in national, regional and hemispheric organisations. Through this process the SLNT is able to promote its philosophy and policies in an effective manner.
 8. **Marketing and Promotions:** The **SLNT** also sees its role as promoting sites and properties for visitation by locals and tourists. It is in so doing, that greater opportunities for economic benefits are provided. Joint marketing of parts of the country with the **SLTB** is a strategy the **SLNT** will examine in the near future.
 9. **Legislation:** Legislation is regarded as a useful tool for assisting in the conservation and management of sites of heritage value. It however, must be subject to continuous review as experiences give way to new and more effective ways of achieving desired goals.
- All of these strategies are only effective in each case depending on how they are used creatively. That means, understanding all situations on their own merit and designing strategies accordingly. There is no uniform approach to cultural heritage conservation, development and management, as the variables change from case to case.
- The **SLNT** is not a tourism promotion agency, as commonly undertaken by a Tourist Board. Rather, it serves to educate society and potential clients, both local and foreign of the natural history and culture of St. Lucia and the Caribbean so that heritage tourism can offer both aesthetic and economic benefits to providers and users. The mission of the **SLNT** is to conserve that which represents the natural and cultural heritage of St. Lucia. Cultural tourism is regarded as a means of transforming natural and cultural heritage assets into use-value which can contribute in an economic way to sustainable livelihoods for the people of St. Lucia.

Lessons Learned

Within the last twenty-three years of operations, the SLNT has learnt a number of lessons which are instructive in the way natural and cultural resource conservation can be undertaken. Among these lessons are the following:

1. *Planning must be influenced in a profound manner by the principles of social justice and equity:* Successful conservation is development work that is not about freezing natural and cultural assets for the benefit of future generations. Rather, it is about finding creative ways to meet the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. Planners and decision takers must therefore seek to ensure that there is equity in the access to opportunities for development and benefits which arise. Mechanisms must also be found and deliberately incorporated into planning and management processes to ensure that equal access to the fruits of development is available.
2. *Development is a process in which people work together to create their future(s):* In all fields today, not excluding the field of nature/

heritage tourism, partnerships must be developed and nurtured in order to be successful. No one organisation has the entire knowledge base, skills and resources to make the kind of impact required to challenge the paradigm in use and to bring about desired changes. If development is about people and how they utilise their resources to transform their lives, then people must participate in creating their futures or else development becomes meaningless.

It has been found at sites along the south-east coast, east-central coast and south-west coast of St. Lucia, that people who are given the opportunity to engage in creating their future, take the opportunity to do so. But such initiatives require a process which can empower and institutionalise participation so that a devolution of authority from traditional centralised forms, become a norm of community organisation and management.

3. In a world where grant funds available for conservation and development work is becoming more difficult to source, the SLNT has increasingly begun to find ways of exploiting the

'use-value' of sites to generate surpluses for management and development work. Noting that not all sites can generate a surplus and several may have to be subsidised, the potential for generating surpluses from certain sites must be exploited sustainably, i.e., within the carrying capacity of these sites. There are limits in this approach as the business element in such an approach may be compromised when sites are in danger of being destroyed. Cultural heritage tourism can fit under the rubric of an 'Eco-business' once the focus is on communities, equity, and participation.

4. *Research and Information Management is the basis for any sustainable development initiative like Natural and Cultural Heritage Tourism:* The development and successful management of natural and cultural heritage sites require a considerable amount of market and site information. Site information generated must be managed properly and used effectively for decision making. Market information on the other hand, can be sourced through a national organisation such as the St. Lucia Tourist Board which is directly responsible for

this matter. Even within natural and cultural heritage tourism, there are specific recreational activities such as bird watching, snorkelling and diving, archaeological and historic sites, and experiential cultural holidays when visitors live in rural environments. To understand and promote these activities as appealing, educational research and effective marketing are required.

5. *Education programmes are not public awareness programmes and must aim at challenging the existing values base and creating opportunities to vision alternatives:* In order to create transformations in thought and deeds, public awareness is inadequate. What is required is an education programme which challenges the existing "thought-base," enhances critical thought, and introduces experiences which catalyse the visioning of alternatives. That cultural policy will have a positive effect on development. Any education programme must therefore have theoretical and practical components complemented by action which brings about positive changes and results in tangible and intangible benefits.

6. *Membership is the life-line of the St. Lucia National Trust:* For the effective development and management of sites and properties, a large support base is required. A well developed and managed membership gives the lobby-power, provides the communications nexus for information, and supports the work of the organisation in numerous ways. A well developed and action-oriented membership confers influence on an organisation which is frequently required to counter initiatives which will compromise environmental and cultural integrity. The SLNT has realised the power of membership and has began vigorous efforts towards developing its membership.

7. *Cultural and Natural Heritage Tourism must maintain strong community links in order to remain genuine:* Cultural and Natural Heritage tourism projects must be small to medium in scale and must be introduced and/or grow out of genuine community participation in which mechanisms are put in place to ensure that benefits are shared among communities. Failing this, tourism projects become little

more than “mass-tourism” with a nature heritage tourism label. There is also a major difference between the use of natural and cultural heritage sites by visitors and a natural and cultural heritage tourism destination. Unfortunately, the trend in St. Lucia is towards the provision of nature heritage tourism sites to help diversify the tourism product and not towards the creation of a genuine natural and cultural heritage tourism.

8. *In “Turbulent Environments” where change is ubiquitous, a “Learning Organisation” must be created to be successful:* To be continuously successful, an organizational culture which is responsive, anticipatory and promotes learning is required. Employees must be well trained and there must be “a redundancy of functions” to enable flexibility and capitalising on opportunities which arise, i.e., opportunities in all areas including natural and cultural heritage tourism.

Towards the Future

The SLNT engaged in a strategic planning process. The purpose of this process was to bring the organisation

through a reflective period during which the mission and vision of the SLNT was redefined. Among the activities which the SLNT was engaged in, was the completion of a Management Audit and a Perceptions and Expectations Study. The SLNT completed a Major Trends Symposium which allowed for the identification of social, economic, cultural, and political forces at work in St. Lucia, the Caribbean and the World.

Once the strategic issues, direction, mission and vision were determined, the SLNT expects to convene a financing workshop and a major review of its enabling legislation and Statutory Rules and Regulations. The financing workshop will help to develop creative means of financing the SLNT's programming while the amendments expected through a statutory review will incorporate the new directions identified for the SLNT in fulfilling its mission and moving towards its vision.

The SLNT is in the process of creating its future in the present and preparing for more effective and efficient impacts in what has been referred to as "turbulent environments." The success, to date, points to the manner in which an indigenous organisation has made a "paradigm-shift" in practice. The

leadership of the Trust has turned around a traditionally conservation and preservation activity, in relation to the cultural heritage of society and given it a wider understanding of the environment and development, in ways that are strategic, sustainable and aesthetically enriching.

Recommendations

The work of this premier Caribbean institution is worthy of emulation by other SIDS. It is recommended that capacity building among SIDS can be enhanced by donor support of opportunities for study tours and work attachments by staff from other developing country institutions attempting similar development pathways as the SLNT.

Further indepth analyses of the progress of the SLNT every two to three years will continue to generate important lessons on alternative development strategies for sharing with other developing countries. It is therefore recommended that donor support for this continuous assessment process be enlisted to be undertaken in collaboration with the SLNT.

*This is a premier planning document in St. Lucia which was prepared and published by the SLNT for the conservation and management of natural and cultural heritage sites. It is widely used by Government and Non-Government agencies in St. Lucia.