October 2016

Applying the Holistic Conceptual Conservation Framework for Sustainable Tourism

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1.0 Introduction

Pervasive and profound human activities are altering the stability of the earth in ways that are threatening the very life support system upon which humanity depends (Shapira, Ketchie, & Nehe, 2015). The tourism and hospitality industry's environmentally sustainable actions constitute an enormous opportunity for its long-term success and the Earth's wellbeing. The millions of non-human life forms that exist within most tourist locations coupled with the rapid loss of global biodiversity necessitate new approaches to sustainability (Liu et al., 2012; Budeanu, Miller, Moscardo, & Ooi, 2015; Manomaivibool, 2015). A macroscopic approach to industry development and sustainability may better assure that the companies and other organizations that benefit from the preservation of ecosystems avert the exhaustion of ecological resources caused by short-term, narrow perspectives and actions that are intended to address comprehensive largescale issues (Meißner, 2013).

The *tourism system* model provided a foundation for the macro study of tourism for decades. Using such a systems approach lent itself to a more comprehensive view of tourism (Mill & Morrison, 2002), which encouraged environmental sustainability—the extent to which the tourism and hospitality industry preserves and/or invests in local natural resources. Practitioners used the approach well before the mainstream acceptance of environmental sustainability considerations. To transform research on sustainable tourism to a more scientific level, a systems perspective and an interdisciplinary approach are indispensable (Liu, 2003).

The rapidly widening cultural shift of tourists expecting tourism and hospitality providers to have a higher level of eco-responsibility features prominently in the academic literature (e.g., Barber, 2012; Chan, 2013; Millar, Mayer, & Baloglu, 2012; Chia-Jung & Pei-Chun, 2014; Ogbeide, 2012). The literature indicated that the evolving tourist perspectives and preferences point to a cultural shift. Consumers worldwide have expressed to tourism and hospitality entities the need for them to exercise eco-responsibility (e.g., Barber, 2012; Chan, 2013; Millar, Mayer, & Baloglu, 2012; Chia-Jung & Pei-Chun, 2014; Ogbeide, 2012). Furthermore, the adoption of sustainable development practices on the part of lodging operations can positively influence customer satisfaction (Prud'homme & Raymond, 2013).

Another concern for the long-term interests of the tourism and hospitality industry in any destination centers on the absence of a unified conceptual

framework mindful of all of its components (e.g., land, buildings, nature, consumers). Improving sustainability practices in large operations (e.g., full service resort) and supporting successful peripheral industry sectors (e.g., local fishing charters) can serve the industry's future. Since consumers' changing perspectives can lead to growing sustainability preferences and increased expectations, the entire destination experience becomes the focus of eco-friendly assessments on the part of tourists.

Rewriting the paradigm of people's ecological understanding constitutes individuals becoming more aware of the importance of Earth's natural environment. Science and reason improve such understanding. People become increasingly cognizant of their own environmental stewardship roles as they reason through the current state of nature and their own future actions. Stakeholders from tourist companies to locals within the tourism system can more accurately discern the human effects on nature through thoughtful contemplation. Macro reflection and planning can drive solutions by drawing together various conceptual narratives within the tourism studies literature for comprehensive problems that previously were addressed fractionally in the research and thus leaving a gap (Canavan, 2016; Mohammed, 2014; Liu, 2003; McLennan, Becken, & Watt, 2016; and Meißner, 2013).

To aid the process, a new multidisciplinary unified conceptual framework, called the *holistic conceptual conservation framework* (HCCF), was developed for the following article. The rationale for HCCF is that it offers tourism and hospitality planners, policy makers, developers, and other tourist destination stakeholders a context to consider the interactions and interconnections between natural and human environments. The framework uses a systems approach to integrate the critical analysis and reflections on environmental issues from economic, social, political, and ecological perspectives found in the paper's literature review. The view that all life is important and that building a verdant world is vital (MacArthur Foundation, 2015) presupposes the HCCF. The key objectives of the HCCF are to:

- Encourage a macro view of environmental issues among tourism stakeholders.
- Integrate solutions based on research.
- Address problems that are indifferent to political borders.
- Use a systems approach to tourism planning or redevelopment.
- Consider and involve multiple constituents.

The first component of the HCCF specifically prescribes a 5-step process for individual organizations seeking higher levels of sustainability:

1. Develop formal organizational sustainability statements (i.e., vision, mission, etc.)
2. Detail implementation plan or *success* map
3. Implementation or application of program
4. Evaluate program with valid and reliable research methods
5. Revise sustainability statements and repeat

The second component of the HCCF comprises the following seven elements

1. Raising Awareness and Knowledge
2. Continual Communication
3. Cooperation and Acknowledgement
4. Political Involvement
5. Enfranchised Locals
6. Justice and Democracy
7. Conduct and Laws

The elements are non-sequential, often practiced iteratively. Figure 1 below visually depicts the 5-step organizational process (micro-level) connected to the 7-element community/regional process (macro-level). Organizations take action at the micro-level and then engage the macro-level strategies and actions with other firms and agencies. The two collectively comprise the HCCF as a model for a sustainable tourism future.
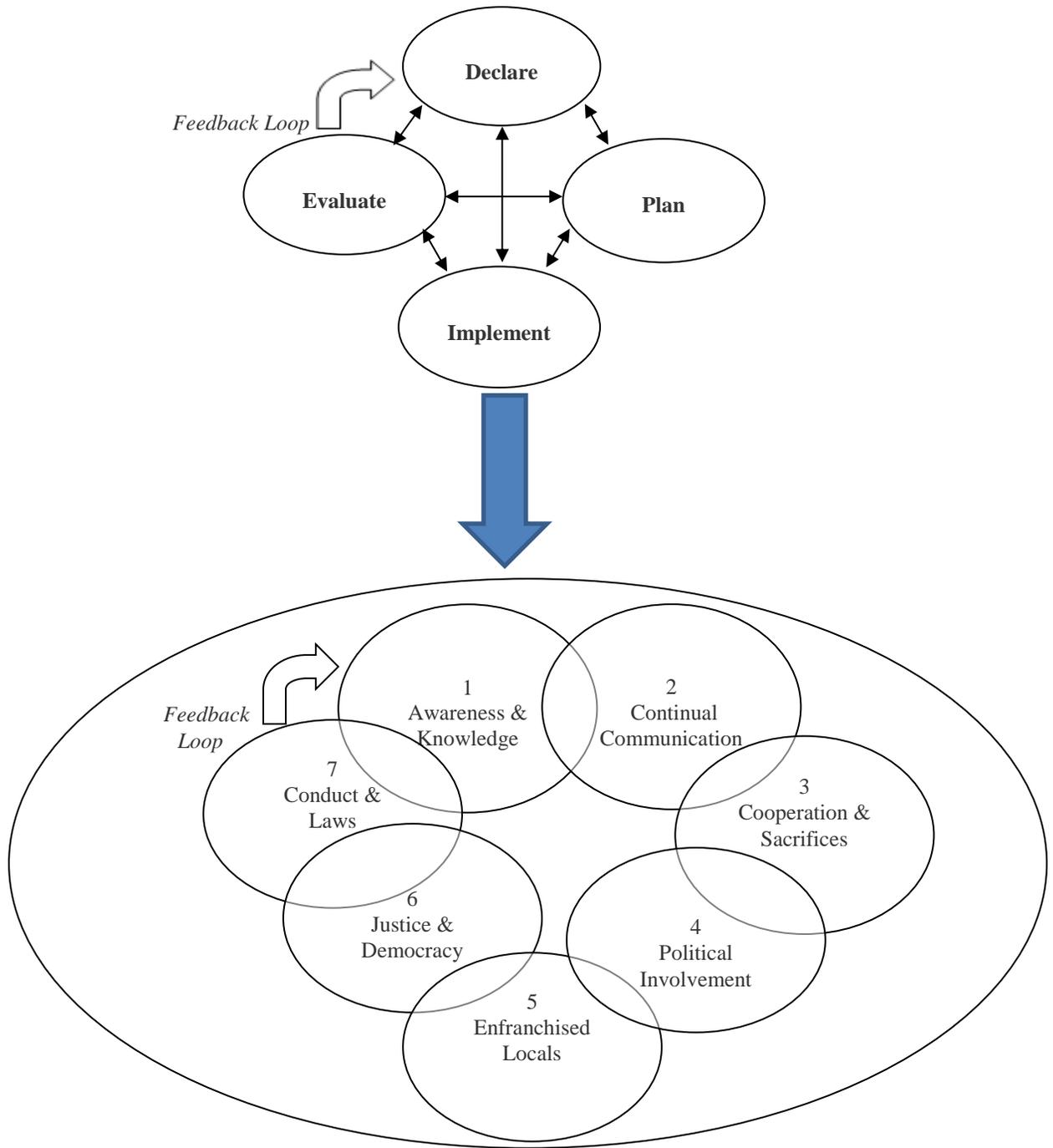
Figure 1. Organizational level environmental societal level sustainability processes.

HCCF considers that virtually every single action that humans take affects the natural environment. Those involved in the tourism and hospitality industry that internalize this reality undoubtedly will improve their sustainability practices and hence serve their own long-term interests. The travel and tourism industry is an amalgam of business activities including transportation, lodging, entertainment, meals, and retail trade (Platzer, 2014). Examining each sector individually and all sectors collectively forms the basis of the article's HCCF, which aims to share knowledge primarily with tourism and hospitality practitioners. To facilitate a deep and rich understanding of the complexities of the issues, the discussion of the conceptual framework will be approached by first presenting related issues from the tourism sustainability literature. A detailed discussion of the model and its operation follows the literature review. The model fills the literature gap by taking a comprehensive, all-inclusive approach to sustainable tourism development and redevelopment.

2.0 Tourism Development and Conservation

The Earth Charter (an international declaration of fundamental values and principles) preamble provides a general premise concerning the planet's health:

> The resilience of the community of life and the well-being of humanity depend upon preserving a healthy biosphere with all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air. The global environment with its finite resources is a common concern of all peoples. The protection of Earth's vitality, diversity, and beauty is a sacred trust. (Earth Charter Commission, 2000, para. 2)

The tourism and hospitality industry represents an immense component to an environmentally sustainable global society. The World Tourism Organization's Article 3(1) of the *Global Code of Ethics for Tourism* (1999) deals with sustainable development. It specifically stated:

> All the stakeholders in tourism development should safeguard the natural environment with a view to achieving sound, continuous and sustainable economic growth geared to satisfying equitably the needs and aspirations of present and future generations. (para. 1)

Concern over the natural and social environments has generated much research and debate on the tourism–environment relationship (Mihalic, 2014). Environmental sustainable or pro-sustainable tourism behavior refers to voluntarily applying practices to reconcile environmental preservation, social equity, and

economic demands (Font, Garay, & Jones, 2014). The WTO defined sustainable tourism as that which

> meets the needs of tourists and host regions, while at the same time it protects and improves opportunities for the future. It focuses on the management of all the resources in such a way that all economic, social, and aesthetic needs are met while cultural integrity, key ecological processes, biodiversity, and life support systems are respected. (World Tourism Organization, 1993, as found in Blancas, González, Lozano-Oyola, & Perez, 2010)

Since the terms were coined and defined by the Brundtland Report (Brundtland et al., 1987), which later inspired the above WTO definition, sustainable development and sustainable tourism have been criticized by some as a contradiction in terms (e.g., Burr, 1995). While virtually all development arguably causes greenhouse gases and degrades the natural environment, sound environmental stewardship is observably not the exclusive domain of preservationists. Oxymoron aside, ecological tourism research, documents, and actions have recently been progressively more accompanied by the notion of responsible tourism. Although heavily researched, the principles and practices of sustainable tourism for destinations has had limited implementation (Ali, 2009). Mihalic (2014) contended that tourism stakeholders are applying sustainability practices at a sluggish pace and that the gap between the appealing conceptual idea of eco-sensitive tourism and its alarmingly slow penetration of action is of great concern. Hernández-Martín, Álvarez-Albelo, and Padrón-Fumero (2015) offered the option of moratoriums to give a tourist site a break to repair or maintain the natural environment. To be effective, the authors say that a moratorium must be accompanied by complementary policies, besides being coherently embodied in a broader tourism and regional rejuvenation strategy. Furthermore, the concerns over the commodification and distortion of native populations can give rise to moratoriums aimed at ensuring that cultural meaning is not lost, customary knowledge is maintained, natural resources are preserved, and that income is directed towards appropriate sustainable development (Cheer, Reeves, & Laing, 2013). The core of a moratorium with the agenda of preserving the environment and reinforcing native traditions is predicated on the participation and buy-in of all stakeholders including but is not limited to political leaders, local communities, residents, tourist, and tourism businesses (Cheer, Reeves, & Laing, 2013).

Sustainable development and brand equity go hand in hand—they are essentially the same concept (Gartner, 2014). Analyzing brand equity using marketing results defined as enhanced revenues, increased visitation, and so on as the only way to value a destination brand ignores what gives a destination its

marketability (Gartner, 2014). For instance, what is the Florida destination with oil-soaked beaches? (Price-Howard & Holladay, 2014). Destination brand equity valuation cannot focus solely on economic returns but must reflect the overall health and well-being of the destination, which includes all the characteristics that gives each destination its uniqueness (Gartner, 2014). Murphy (2013) explained the destination life cycle:

> Tourist destinations are attractive to different types of visitors as they evolve from untouched discoveries to popular resorts. A community can enter the tourism business with the arrival of a small number of adventurous allocentrics, but their impact would be small because no special facilities would be desired or required for this type of traveler. As the area becomes more accessible, better serviced and more widely known an increasing number of mid-centrics would visit. They in turn give way to large numbers of psychocentrics as the destination becomes a popular resort dependent on foreign investment and labor. The new visitors are made to feel at home, with a full range of facilities and attractions that may now be divorced from the natural geographical and social attractions which first attracted the allocentrics. (p. 7)

2.1 Ecotourism Perspectives

Traditional development-based tourism contrasts with the growth of nature-based tourism and ecotourism. Whereas nature-based tourism is travel to natural places, ecotourism is a type of nature-based tourism that benefits local communities and destinations environmentally, culturally, and economically (IES, 2015). Ardoin, Wheaton, Bowers, Hunt, and Durham (2015) found that while nature-based tourism is often promoted as influencing tourists' environmentally friendly attitudes, the main outcomes reported in most peer-reviewed tourism studies were related to new environmental knowledge. For instance, well-known lodging companies have initiated sustainability efforts to reduce waste, increase the energy efficiency of their properties, and reduce carbon footages by modifying their behavior (Chen, 2015). Tourism businesses operate from a primarily economic-centric point of view, but nature-based tourism businesses are also acutely aware of the need to sustain the natural resource that attracts the client to their outdoor recreation service (Gaede, Strickert, & Jurin, 2011). Gaede, Strickert, and Jurin (2011) went on to say:

> Nature-based tourism companies have a unique opportunity to engage their customers in pleasurable activities while simultaneously affecting their perceptions of the natural environment. Interpretive education that is theme

based could be productively utilized in conjunction with the routine guiding services these companies provide to enhance customer experience and environmental conservation. (p. 56)

The idea echoes what Orams (1995) seminal study argued: "ecotourism should strive to achieve objectives which result in better ecotourists and a better natural environment" (p. 7). With increasing frequency, ecotourism is proposed as a way of ensuring environmental conservation while enabling economic development (Duffy, 2013). Gezon (2014) asserted:

> Because of the centrality of tourism to the economies and visions of so many nations, and because of how closely it touches the lives of the poorest of the poor, critical evaluation of the processes through which (in)equity takes shape remains critical to the goal of sustainable ecotourism. (p. 835)

2.2. Ethnotourism and Meaningful Travel

Destinations are not inert consumer products. They are dynamic, living entities consisting of economic forces, an environmental setting, and local residents (Gartner, 2014). The argument is that tourism planners and policymakers should move past respecting the natural heritage and local populations by considering the carrying capacity tourist sites and meaningful and purposeful cultural exchange (Atkins, 2010). "Destinations are the interface between tourists and local communities, where the negative impacts and conflicts are felt most strongly and where remedial action will be required, whether it be physical or strategic planning" (Murphy, 2014, p. 1). A common hypothesis is that the rapid development and high concentration of tourism activities cause negative effects on the natural and cultural environments, and when involvement of locals is minimal or lacking, the outcome would be especially unacceptable to the host community (Gezici, 2006). Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk, and Preciado (2013) described the characteristic tourism development approach:

> The growth of coffee bars such as the Starbucks partly is fueled by the demand for leisure activities that can fit into the work schedule. Thus, tourism marketers should monitor tourists' lifestyles continuously to understand their needs and develop goods or services to enhance destination brand offerings and destination loyalty. (p. 6)

Slocum and Everett (2014) found that when large commercial interests control a destination's image and discourage small business participation, the region is unable to manage tourist expectations or community development

interests. Their study indicated that the struggle between industry, government and community caused power and leadership to be refocused away from resource assessment towards a market view of destination management that serves big business rather than community. While the large-scale, market-driven developments comprising a large portion of the world's tourism needs to be more environmentally sustainable driven, developers will often default to profit motives. Therefore, the key at theses levels is connecting long-term profit and pro-sustainability. Developments during the first decade of the 21st century indicate that an ethical approach to business will become increasingly important to business practice (Font, Walmsley, Cogotti, McCombes, & Häusler, 2012). Destinations need to recognize that mass-market growth is not a sustainable strategy (Kozak, & Martin, 2012). Furthermore, the more eco-educated consumers become, the less destruction tolerant they become. Lansing and De Vries (2007) suggested that tourism corporations sustain and prosper economically by using sustainability as a differentiation tool by integrating a sustainability governance instrument with existing ratings such as AAA Diamonds, Mobile Stars, and Michelin Stars.

Conversely, Strom and Kerstein (2015) highlighted the idea of investigating culture and branding as means of forging an area's identity. Their research described how marketing and product development strategies were used in Ashville, North Carolina with a particular focus on cultural attractions, to increase overnight visits. This was done so with an eye for maintaining a high quality of life for full-time residents and preserving indigenous natural and cultural resources. Such projects can inspire locals to develop a deliberate and purposeful ecological perspective.

Lansing and De Vries (2007) asserted, "Education is a fundamental element in the opportunity for local communities to be conscious of the changes in their environment and in the provision of the tools and capacity to deal with the invasions that they are faced with." For instance, protecting flora and fauna is less of a challenge when the locals are made aware of the situation. Strom and Kerstein (2015) also presented public-private partnerships to promote tourism while avoiding the loss of local identity associated with late stages of the "tourism area life cycle." According to Atkins (2010), 21st century tourism must mean building an industry around what exists, and not just what tourists want. While some American bars and restaurants may be necessary, too many may diminish the tourist experience and marginalize meaningful local involvement. As Charles Maynard, a culture minister from the Bahamas, lamented:

> One of the mistakes we made . . . we should have tried to stick more closely to what was culturally ours, and sell that to the tourists, rather than making sure that the Burger Kings and the McDonald's were readily available. (Atkins, 2010, para 10)

Atkins (2010) concluded that if tourism ends up having more power than the people and place playing host, the result is resentment, and often an erosion of identity. Gezon (2014) called for a more equitable distribution of tourism profits targeting projects that would benefit the overall community. Goodwin (2011) encouraged destinations to be more responsible by implementing informed decision-making about how to ensure that the benefits of tourism reach the poor. "Thoughtful multi-sector planning efforts (that involve local communities) can strive to maximize profits, distribute benefits equitably and minimize impacts as tourist numbers increase" (Gezon, 2014, p. 835). However, caution must be used to avert the crass commercialization of local culture as seen in some parts of Ecuador. Commoditized forms of shamanism emerged in some indigenous cultures of the Ecuadorian Amazon due to the influx of interested tourists (Davidov, 2010). Shamanic rituals are popular because they map onto the tourists' fantasies of cultural alterity, but the resulting economic exchanges raise issues of legitimacy and authenticity: tourism privileges the performance aspects of shamanism, rather than traditional training. The communities have seen a rise in "new" shamans skilled at shamanic performance, who have access to the hallucinogenic plants employed in the ritual, but lack the proper training traditionally associated with becoming a shaman. In this context the meaning and legitimacy of shamanic vocation is contested and constructed both interculturally and intraculturally (Davidov, 2010).

The voyeuristic gluttony associated with viewing Shamanic rituals aside, intercultural experiences involve multiple tourism and hospitality industry contributors. For instance, they often take the form of outdoor events such as festivals. Oliver, Naar, and Harris argued, "Festival organizers have an incentive to understand how festival attendees perceive hotels with green practices in place" (p. 1).

Long-term planning, incorporating and achieving eco-sensitive principles, sound knowledge of e-commerce, and use of information technology embracing clean green tourism can increase leisure and recreation opportunities for the local community and fair distribution of rewards (Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards, & Mihalic, 2012). "Discussions of equity in tourism will be enriched by a deeper understanding of community equity, focusing on patterns of difference both within and among communities who are stakeholders in ecotourism" (Gezon, 2014, p. 834).

Summary Review of Literature

The above review of the literature directly relates to the conceptual framework below. All of the literature review concepts represent current knowledge and

substantive findings from secondary sources and do not present new or original concepts (Lamb, 2014). Although the literature informs the following, the framework has no specific models off which it builds upon.

3.0 Constructs in the Holistic Conceptual Conservation Framework

The above literature intimated that experienced-based tourism is gradually prevailing over attraction-based tourism. The research speaks to a growing demand by consumers to have more regionally authentic experiences when they vacation. The emotion tied to such complete and visceral experiences can strengthen the customer loyalty of tourists towards all tourism and hospitality operators and related practitioners.

Although the literature provides ample starting points for environmental tourism sustainability principles and practices, Liu (2003) argued that a macro solution is needed to deal with the macro environmental problem. Innovative research ideas should be integrated beyond community planning and strive for models that address issues at a regional level and beyond. The following holistic conceptual conservation framework (HCCF) for tourism and hospitality entities reflects the review of related literature. The all-inclusive nature of the HCCF counteracts the society's compartmentalization (i.e., left hand, right hand syndrome) and may serve to curtail the long-term processes of environmental destruction. Therefore, the HCCF illustrates its element parts in such a way so that all interested parties can view the multi-component segments of the various systems that make up Earth's natural and built environments with clarity and candor. The premise that the tourism and hospitality industry has a special obligation to be mindful of the way that it impacts ecosystems and the carbon it emissions that it creates, directly and indirectly weaves through the constructs of the HCCF. The greening of markets, increasing knowledge of the fragility of the environment, better informed managers, and the recognition that there is a close relationship between good ecology and good economy has been discussed in the tourism industry at least since the 1990s (Björk, 2000). Sustainability is considered as a "popular" development approach, but costly and therefore sustainable actions have low priority (Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards, & Mihalic, 2012). However, the long-term cost to the tourism industry will undoubtedly eventuate disaster. The popular idea of sustainable tourism planning, development, and operation is followed by continuative implementation and reliable unending evaluation. The HCCF then includes seven elements essential to fundamental transformational change versus simple atomistic reforms.

The first part of the HCCF (see Figure 1) establishes a premise that holistic programs should follow a four-step process:

Declare → Plan → Implement → Evaluate → Repeat

Each of the above steps has associated components to assure success. The components are to be viewed as a "living documents" subject to periodic change. The first step involves co-creating suitable, characteristic, and emblematic formal organizational destiny statements (Alexakis, 2009) that advance sustainability. They typically will take the form of the following:

- Vision Statement
- Mission Statement
- Goals and Objectives
- Philosophy Statement
- Ethics Code

Ideally, the process of creating formal organizational destiny declarations involves various people that represent all constituencies inside the organization and all outside associated parties (e.g., vendors) having a voice. It bears mentioning the obvious: an environmentally sustainable vision statement should be lofty and have very long-term goals, so that everyone can re-imagine the organization and the natural environment as much as possible while simultaneously envisioning a realistic, credible, and attractive future (Alexakis, 2009). Tourism and hospitality industry declarative destiny statements ought to be in harmony with local, regional, and national statements.

Before implementing any programs, a detailed, step-by-step plan can be created to serve as a success map. The high level of specificity of such an *implementation plan* provides clear direction. It also amasses further buy-in by representative parties. Then, evaluation criteria should be developed *before* implementation. The criteria should be referred to and modified carefully, iteratively, and frequently by those that implement. Not only does such a method ensure a higher level of success but also it allows the criteria to be synchronously modified, when necessary. Evaluation is the last step, but most crucial. Expectations should be reconciled against practice. Continually examining and measuring performance not only assures standards are met, but usually causes performance to improve. Effective assessments and evaluations inform the revision of programs in a continual criticism feedback loop. Criticism from a broad range of constituents provides a most valuable tool for reaching sustainability excellence.
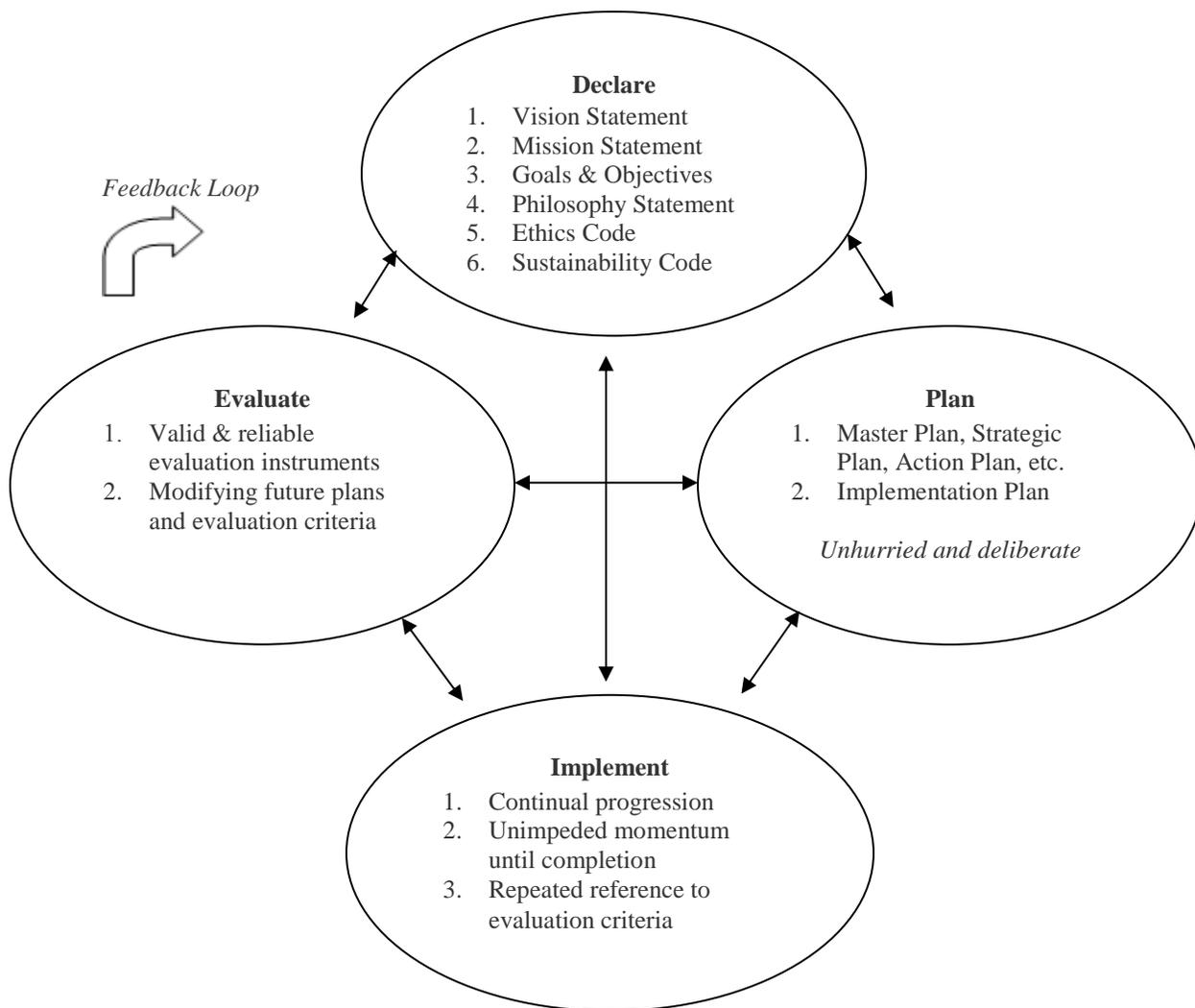
Declare
1. Vision Statement
2. Mission Statement
3. Goals & Objectives
4. Philosophy Statement
5. Ethics Code
6. Sustainability Code

Feedback Loop

Evaluate
1. Valid & reliable evaluation instruments
2. Modifying future plans and evaluation criteria

Plan
1. Master Plan, Strategic Plan, Action Plan, etc.
2. Implementation Plan

Unhurried and deliberate

Implement
1. Continual progression
2. Unimpeded momentum until completion
3. Repeated reference to evaluation criteria

Figure 1. An organizational process for implementing highly sustainable practices at a tourism/hospitality organization or agency.

Measuring tourism's environmental impact is not new, but the urgency of the Earth's current state of health would suggest stronger standards and criteria with long-term thinking as never seen before. The old adage contends that awareness is the first step to change. The knowledge that the natural environment is inextricably linked to the survival of the human species is paramount to important change. For instance, while all tourism stakeholders in the country of Slovenia stand to benefit from the adoption of sustainability practices, Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards, and Mihalic (2012) pointed out that individual travel and tourism firms have the incentive to avoid the costs involved in adopting these practices themselves. The

crisis of short-term perception fueled by self-interest represents a genuine natural environment predicament.

3.1 Atypical Solutions for Complex Problems

The second component to the HCCF extends beyond the organizational level. Much like the triple bottom line accounting framework, HCCF is a multidisciplinary framework that focuses on social, ecological, and financial aspects (Elkington, 2004). However, the financial piece juxtaposes socially responsible elements with financial interests (e.g., non-speculative growth). The reality is that products, people, and the environment are treated with diminished reverence once a corporation gets past a certain size. The next portion of the HCCF, visually depicted in Figure 2, focuses on the specific collective actions to be taken by tourism, hospitality, and any other environmental stakeholders. The seven elements presented sequentially will often be practiced iteratively. However, they all frequently connect to *Conduct and Laws* without the interposition of the other five HCCF steps.

Raising Awareness and Knowledge

The saying, awareness is the first step to change, has particular importance in altering sustainability mindsets, or lack thereof. "A poor understanding of the value of critical forms of natural capital and the reasons for its preservation are likely to be detrimental to strong sustainability" (Neumayer, 2011, p. 7). Education in its many forms leads to drawing logical inferences linking items of verifiable environmental knowledge that are indisputable. Such revelations can stimulate powerful conceptual shifts that can eventually lead to behavioral and legislative change directly. For example, more than a decade ago Cape Town, South Africa developed a *Declaration of Responsible Tourism*. The statement has provided guiding principles for economics, social, and environmental responsibility. It is used to educate all constituents on what signifies the meaning and sentiment of responsible tourism (Goodwin, 2003).

Continual Communication

Frequent interactions among parties can also lead to changes in conduct and laws. Whereas the mainstream tourism and hospitality approach focuses on crafting clear messages that enhance organizational productivity, a hallmark of *multistream* communication, as defined by Neubert and Dyck (2014), is its emphasis on involving others in developing the content of messages. Collaboration, creativity, and ethical decision making that lead to developing eco-sensitive organizational

models often commences with highly effective communication. Arguably, both the perception and the reality should support the idea that tourism and hospitality operators are contributors to the health and viability of the natural environment (Orams, 1995), which in turn serves their interests.

Cooperation and Acknowledgement

One of the swiftest ways to change conduct and laws is collaboration and acknowledgement. Looking for ways to become self aware of shortcomings and conceding those points to opposing parties is a reliable manner in which to break communication barriers and strengthen trust. Tourism and hospitality industry players can cooperate with local people, the authorities, tourists, and other tourism organizations by establishing strategic alliances. Such associations can assist to increase product awareness, market consistent messages, develop complementary products, develop economies of scale, strengthen market intelligence, and improve quality control and cooperation along value chains (Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards, & Mihalic, 2012).

As a certain famous frog once articulated, it's not easy being green. Changing the way that the building environment affects the natural environment incurs various costs. The public is becoming increasingly aware of companies transferring their moral responsibilities by externalizing environmental costs (Neumayer, 2011). Unloading indirect costs and pushing degradative effects unto humans and nature can ultimately lead to the death of society for the sake of corporate profits. Long before going green was mainstream, Theodor Seuss Geisel warned of the dangers of disrespecting the environment through *The Lorax* (Seuss, 1971). Now, going green is mainstream.

Environmental limits to growth have little to do with available land but more to do with the right and necessity of flora and fauna to exist in a way that will sustain all life. Rating systems such as *Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design* (LEED) and the *Florida Green Lodging Program* set guidelines for environmental performance.

Political Involvement

Political freedom is presupposed in any debate on sustainable development, as justice and democracy underlie the idea of sustainability (Ott, 2014, p. 896). Citizens in democracies are better informed about environmental problems (freedom of press) and can better express their environmental concerns and demands (freedom of speech), which will facilitate an organization of environmental interests (freedom of association), which will in turn put pressure on politicians operating in a competitive political system to respond positively to these

demands (freedom of vote), both domestically as well as via international cooperation (Neumayer, 2011). A major obstacle to political participation lies in the interests that are behind extraordinary influence wielded by the U.S. media. The results of a study by Antilla (2005) reported on the sustainability issue indicate that the collective newswire/news service community is a dominant source of climate science news. Media reports that frame climate change in terms of debate, controversy, or uncertainty were and still are plentiful. Antilla found that not only were there many examples of journalistic balance that led to bias, but some of the news outlets repeatedly used climate sceptics—with known fossil fuel industry ties—as primary definers. Worse yet, in some instances, such articles originated from wire or news service providers (including newspapers that provide such services or are affiliated with news service agencies). The issue of political involvement is more important than ever at a time when very few academics (e.g., Shani & Arad, 2015) and even fewer scientists, relatively speaking, support the denial of human-driven climate change. The media reports that perpetuate the myth of a lack of international scientific consensus on anthropogenic climate change have succeeded maintaining public confusion, particularly in the U.S. (Antilla, 2005).

Nonetheless, political activities form the foundation of many democratic principles of civic engagement (NCOC, 2015). Voting, contacting legislative representatives, and attending public meeting can have a positive effect on the natural environment relied on by the hospitality and tourism industry (NCOC, 2015). However, direct entry into the political arena through running for office or supporting another campaign can be a highly effective way to affect future policy. This also can lead to compelling people and organizations to change their conduct, not to mention laws.

Enfranchised Locals

Including both the environmental and socio-cultural elements of a particular destination can lead to tourists taking a bigger interest in the local/regional culture and way of life. After completing his research, Atkins (2010) was convinced that culture needs to be built into the heart of the tourist industry in a manner where fragile traditions can survive the glare of mass tourism.

Meaningful travel through authentic regional and local travel experiences tie customers viscerally to tourism and hospitality operators. Such experiences can undoubtedly be achieved if mass tourism is not allowed to threaten local customs, heritage, amenities, and culture (Atkins (2010). Destination marketing organizations such as convention and visitor bureaus, boards of trade, and chambers of commerce that focus on tourism marketing are advised to engage fair distribution of rewards (Dwyer, Cvelbar, Edwards, & Mihalic, 2012). Discussions of equity in tourism will be enriched by a deeper understanding of community equity, focusing

on patterns of difference both within and among communities who are tourism stakeholders (Gezon, 2014). Neumayer (2011) studied the theoretical and empirical links between inequalities in human development and environmental sustainability, addressing both directions of causality and concluded that vicious circles between more inequality leading to more unsustainability and vice versa are likely to exist.

Justice and Democracy

Just as enfranchised locals thrive under equitable circumstances, equity necessarily focuses on social justice. Equity has an intergenerational dimension, implying a concern with the distribution of resources available to current and future generations (Davidson, Kellett, Wilson, & Pullen, 2012). A social democratic approach to sustainability is necessarily predicated on an explicit set of values such as social justice, equity and environmental quality (Davidson, Kellett, Wilson, & Pullen, 2012, p. 63). The HCCF places a strong emphasis on the importance of social justice, equity, and natural capital. It seeks to better balance considerations of economic sustainability with social justice and equity, and sustainable environmental outcomes, while maintaining economic efficiency (Davidson, Kellett, Wilson, & Pullen, 2012). Huckle (2014) suggested that scholars could establish valid pathways to a common future along a broader direction that leads not only to sustainability but also to greater democracy and justice.

Conduct and Laws

Laws are essential to regulate large-scale environmental degradation. The idea that the Earth's health constitutes a moral and legal imperative has begun to take root. Bolivia in 2011 passed environmental legislation that accords nature the same rights as humans, and may allow citizens to sue individuals and groups as part of *Mother Earth* in response to real and alleged infringements of its integrity (Solon, 2011). It is considered the first instance of such a law. Legal personhood to the natural system can be a standard world-wide, and the tourism and hospitality industry could benefit greatly from such laws over time. In June 2011, the Canadian province of British Columbia announced they had officially become the first provincial/state jurisdiction in North America to achieve carbon neutrality in public sector operations (LiveSmart, 2011).
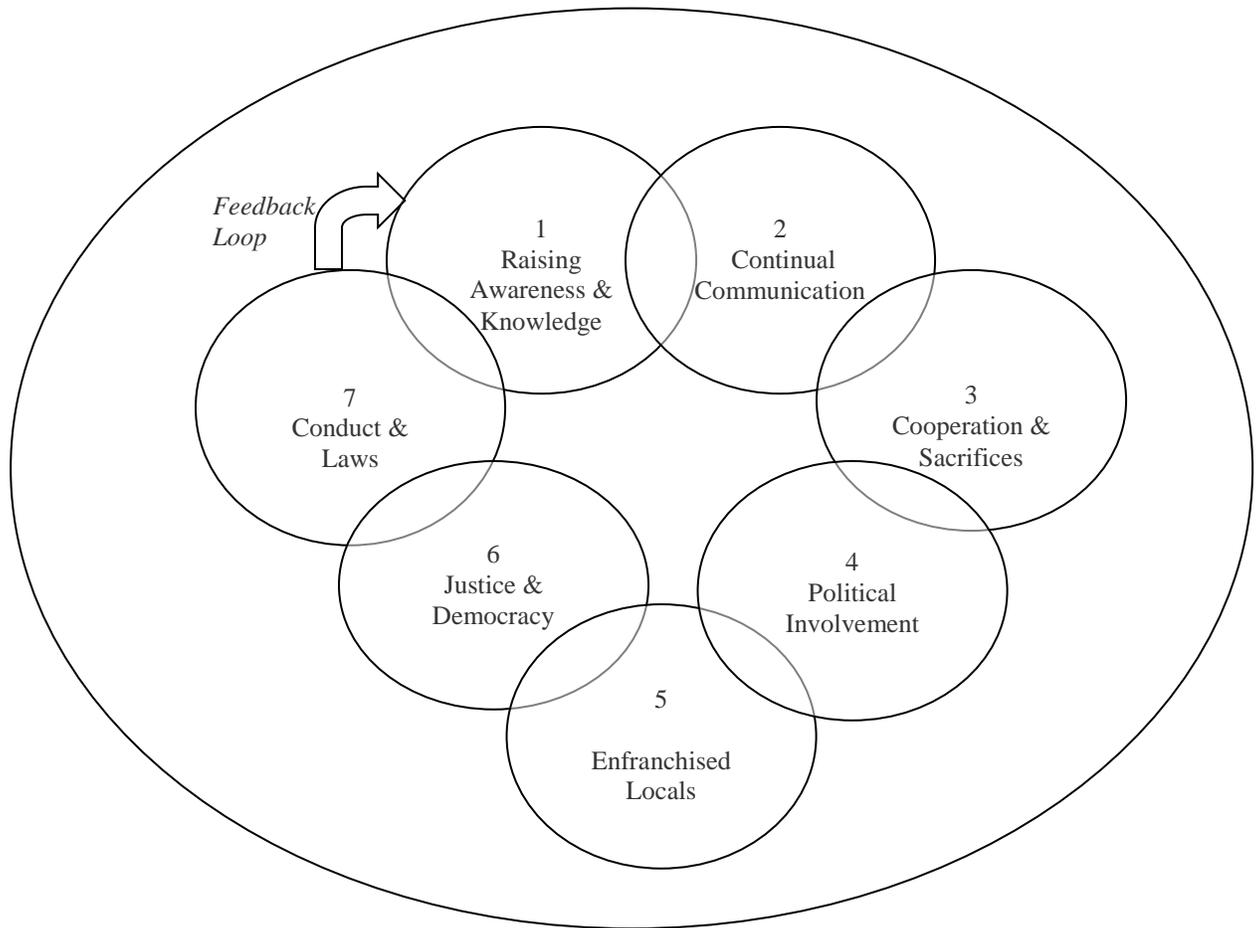
Figure 2. Societal Process to Sustainability

4.0 Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research

The unified conceptual framework for environmental sustainability (i.e., HCCF) described and illustrated in the paper can assist in safeguarding the long-term interests of the tourism and hospitality industry. The visually depicted framework begins with organizational level actions. The first step involves creating shared formal organizational destiny declarations (i.e., vision, mission, etc.). Declarations are followed by developing and executing a sequential plan (i.e., success map). Once implemented, evaluation criteria advises the revision of the next plan that is

essentially a *living document*. The ongoing sequence of organizational steps directly connect to seven societal elements:

1. Raising Awareness and Knowledge
2. Continual Communication
3. Cooperation and Acknowledgement
4. Political Involvement
5. Enfranchised Locals
6. Justice and Democracy
7. Conduct and Laws

Multiple relations iteratively exist among all seven. For instance, political action can take the form of laws or regulations that lead to government protection or support thereby enfranchising local tourist operators. The HCCF's seven elements focus on the specific collective actions to be taken by tourism, hospitality, and other environmental stakeholders. The elements thus can promote fundamental transformational change. Managers can use HCCF's first five steps to begin the process of lifelong enhanced sustainability for their firms or destinations. This sets the stage for approaching one of the seven societal elements with which they feel most comfortable.

Improving sustainability practices, supporting ecotourism and ethnotourism, and implementing the HCCF addresses the increasingly prevalent eco-concerns and eco-preferences of tourists and practitioners. Since tourists develop loyalty to destination brands because the destination visit experience fits well with their lifestyles (Gartner, 2014), it follows that increasingly eco-sensitive populations will view themselves as environmentally sustainable travelers. These should be sobering theoretical implications to those in the tourism industry. Relevant contributions related to organizations and environmental sustainability may come from theory building. While some room still exists for further clarification of what constitutes sustainability, considerable more attention needs to be given to building a systemic theory of organizational and societal pro-sustainability (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002).

Several practical implications also exist. By first seeking sustainability awareness and change at the, practitioners begin the long process of environmental literacy. This allows them to effect positive change at the organizational level through HCCF first 5-step process. Then, the experience and knowledge gained informs communications, interactions, and cooperation at the societal level using HCCF's seven elements. The HCCF encourages a continual cooperative interchange among managers, educators, researchers, and other concerned parties.

Practically speaking, a more holistic understanding of organizations and their place in the world promoted in the HCCF—today and in the future—can

positively influence how values and ethics influence business decisions and integrate complementary views for everyone's long-term interest (Neubert & Dyck, 2014). Discouraging excessive consumerism and promoting sustainability is ultimately in the best interest of everyone. The business implications also include providing enriching experiences in a manner that addresses *eco-anxiety*, which unquestionably implies an emotional attachment leading to higher consumer loyalty from the tour operator to the resort operator for years to come. Forward-thinking tourism and hospitality developers, operators, or managers will give heed to environmental issues, tread lightly, and perceive their businesses as part of an integrated system. Such developers and operators must know that customer environmental awareness, preferences, and activism will only continue. No developer or operator wants to be the focus of negative attention concerning their environmental practices and social irresponsibility. The managerial consequences of increased sustainability awareness and actions promoted by the HCCF will help future research to focus on holistic testable models and applied theories for broad application.

The idea of attracting humans away from where they live for overnight stays at a place that requires development is anathema to minimizing carbon imprint. The premise should be sobering to travelers and industry alike. Some would suggest that sustainable tourism is a contradiction in terms, because environmental sustainability is arguably best served by people staying in their own localities and having no children—leave no trace. As the Earth charter cautions, humanity depends upon the preservation of a healthy biosphere, all its ecological systems, a rich variety of plants and animals, fertile soils, pure waters, and clean air (Earth Charter Commission, 2000). The HCCF models a direct democratic process at a time when those that are not as inclined to model such behavior are decidedly challenging institutions that seek to be more sustainable in their practices. Reality strongly suggests that the time for change was yesterday, and today desperately necessitates an integrative approach that simultaneously considers the business and social responsibility components of the tourism system. The main research area that results from the literature and framework is how human aspiration of Earth's preservation for many future generations ties into the sustainability systems. Prud'homme and Raymond (2103) determined that the adoption of sustainable development practices in the industry "is meant to limit the negative impacts of this industry's activities on natural and social environment, and to increase its benefit to host populations" (p. 116).

The essentialness of the natural environment for human and all other species' survival depends on accurately viewing the world and humans place in it. For instance, minimizing carbon footprint, at a time when the entire world arguably should have been at carbon neutrality decades ago, is a moral and survival imperative. Measurable sustainability progress within the tourism industry can be

fostered through authentic collaborations across all stakeholder groups irrespective of locale, region, or nation. The extent to which the political leaders, local communities, residents, tourists, tourism, and hospitality businesses come to recognize that reducing the environmental carbon footprint will serve to benefit all involved, monumental gains to the natural environment and human environment will be realized. A new, more sustainable tourism and hospitality industry will then flourish.

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