Practitioner Note – Community priorities for the future of tourism in the Lau Group of Islands

Reflections on major tourism discourses in the Lau Group

June 2023

Context

This practitioner note presents results of the first stage of the ARC-Linkage project 'Developing a transformative tourism model for the South Pacific', focused on identifying long-term tourism goals of stakeholders. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted many shortcomings and vulnerabilities of the pre-COVID-19 tourism system, including its single-minded focus on serving the visitor and determining success in narrow economic terms. As part of the recovery and rethinking the tourism system, the call for tourism to deliver outcomes for host-communities has gained renewed traction, and together with it, the recognition that success should be defined more holistically.

Vatuvara Private Islands is located on Kaibu Island in the Northern Lau Group of Fiji. The resort is the main (tourism) employer for the local community on the neighbouring Yacata Island. Through the Vatuvara Foundation, the resort is committed to protecting Fiji's Northern Lau Group and is already engaged in a wide range of initiatives that give back to the community and environment. The Foundation's underlying idea is to link conservation, community resilience and livelihoods.

Approach

This Practitioner Note was informed by a study applying Q methodology. This methodology helps gain a deeper understanding of how people think about complex issues. Q methodology groups people with similar views to identify dominant discourses (how people talk or think about a particular issue, in this case tourism). In the Lau Group of islands, 47 representatives from both Kaibu Island and Yacata Island participated in the study and expressed their priorities for the future of tourism. They did this by sorting 34 statements describing outcomes that tourism may or should deliver in order of importance. As indicated by Figure 1, the two statements considered most

important were placed by respondents on the far considered the least important were placed on the far left (-4) of the mat. All other statements were placed somewhere in between depending on their relative importance.
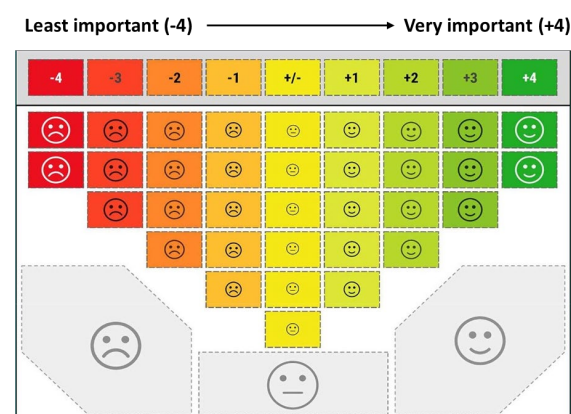

Figure 1. Mat and scale for statement ranking.

Statements shown to participants were developed based on the South Pacific Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework, amongst others. They can be grouped into the following [1]:

Economic
- **Economic & livelihoods:** Tourism delivering economic and livelihood outcomes.
- **Infrastructure:** Tourism providing infrastructure outcomes.

Community
- **Community:** Tourism contributing to community outcomes.
- **Health & Safety:** Tourism strengthening health and safety aspects.
- **Social:** Tourism enhancing social outcomes.

Culture
- **Culture:** Tourism supporting cultural outcomes.

Environment
- **Environment:** Tourism contributing to improving environmental outcomes.
- **Climate Change:** Tourism contributing to addressing climate change risk.

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[1] SPTO (2021). Pacific 2030. Sustainable Tourism Policy Framework. Accessible https://southpacificislands.travel/wp- content/uploads/2021/07/Pacific-Sustainable-Tourism-Policy-Framework.pdf

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right (+4) of the mat, the two statements
Results identified three distinct discourses that reflect what individuals in the Lau Group would like out of tourism in the future. The discourses, which are introduced in more detail below (see also Table 1 in the Appendix), are:

1. **Financial and transactional benefits**
2. **Resilience, stability, and infrastructure outcomes**
3. **Inclusion and appreciation of culture**

Qualitative observation
Tourism in the Northern Lau Group is small scale and many participants have limited interaction with tourism development. According to clarifications and response to open ended follow-up questions, many participants focused on the present and prioritised outcomes they were experiencing and benefiting from today, despite being asked to prioritise future outcomes. Lower importance was placed on outcomes addressing issues they had no experience with (such as negative environmental impacts).

As can be seen in Figure 2, the aspect of livelihoods is very important in all three discourses. This means, that regardless of other priorities, the economic dimensions are important for most people. The other dimensions are more varied across the three discourses.

DISCOURSE 1: ECONOMY, MONEY, AND ENVIRONMENT

Participants represented by Discourse 1 prioritised transactions in tourism's outcomes, including:
- contribution to the Fijian economy (+4),
- financial benefits for individuals (+4), and
- tourism contributing financially to enhance conservation, community assets/resources (+3).
- benefits being fairly distributed (-1), and
- tourism not contributing to climate change (-1).

This group placed lower priorities on health and safety outcomes tourism may deliver, as they believed these to be of individual responsibility, and other community benefits, (despite valuing gender equality (+1)), such as:
Less important, but more important to this group than to the other groups, were:
- tourism not increasing the cost of living (0),
- tourism being respectful of local decision-making (-3),
- involving local communities in the planning, development and management of tourism (-3), and
- tourism enhancing community solidarity and stability (-4).

Qualitative explanations:
Many participants in Discourse 1 saw the deep role of tourism as a critical driver in Fiji's economy. They prioritised tourism as an important and *individual* financial capital maker. Vatuvara Foundation's contribution to conservation was acknowledged as very important.

People associated with Discourse 1 were:
- More likely to be residing on Kaibu Island
- Over 50 years of age, and
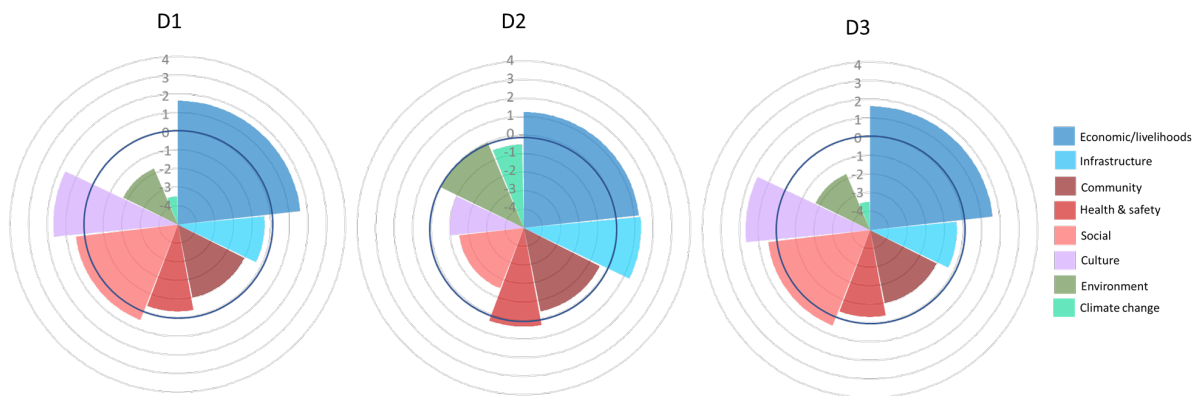- More highly educated.

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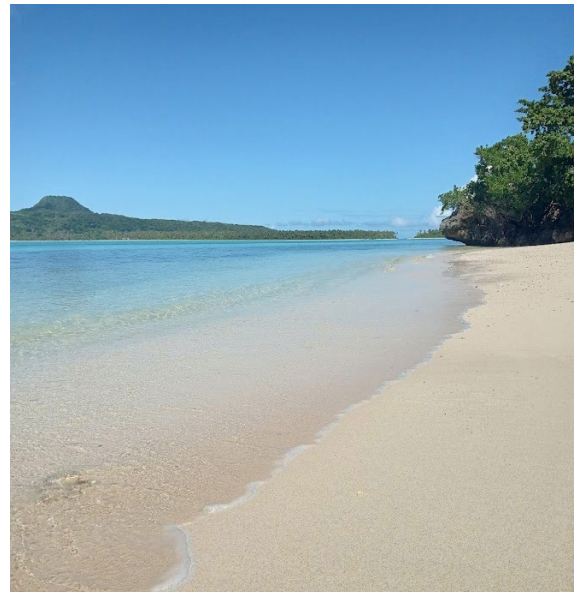
Figure 2. Importance of statement categories for each discourse, whereby the width of each piece reflects the number of statements in each category, and the outward length the relative importance of statements within each category.

DISCOURSE 2: RESILIENCE, STABILITY, AND INFRASTRUCTURE OUTCOMES

Participants associated with Discourse 2 prioritised tourism outcomes that contribute to resilience and stability, with a strong focus on economic outcomes. In particular:
- tourism contributing to a growing national economy (+4),
- supporting communities to recover from economic and environmental shocks (+4),
- tourism encouraging small businesses/entrepreneurship (+3).

In addition, and in line with the above priority on resilience, the below statements including outcomes on infrastructure were more important to this group then others:
- improved transport infrastructure (air, roads, wharves, and jetties) and access to communities (+2),
- enhanced digital infrastructure for local peoples (+2), and
- tourism supporting the community to adapt to climate change (+2).

Less important in this discourse were social and cultural outcomes. These included:
- allowing people to attend to important family obligations (-1),
- supporting, regenerating subsistence livelihoods (-2),
- tourism encouraging visitors to learn about local cultures and custom (-3),
- promoting gender equality (-4), and

- involving local communities in the planning, development and management (-4).

Qualitative explanations:
Participants with this view valued the assistance the resort provided to recover from previous shocks, including COVID-19, and place high importance on this benefit in the future. People in this group expressed concern about climate change, but other environmental outcomes (conserving resources) were seen to be of individual responsibility. Social outcomes were less important to this group, but this may also be because some participants did not feel this was an outcome they currently experienced.

People associated with Discourse 2 were:
- Both from the resort island and local community
- More likely to be over 50 years of age.

DISCOURSE 3: INCLUSION AND APPRECIATION OF CULTURE

Participants associated with this discourse also prioritised certain economic outcomes, including tourism benefiting local people financially (+4).

In addition, cultural outcomes and those that foster inclusion were more important to this group than others. Examples include:
- encouraging visitors to learn about local cultures and custom (+4),
- empowering marginalised people (+2),

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- involving local communities in the planning, development and management of tourism (+1),
- tourism being respectful of local decision-making (0), and
- not stealing natural resources from future generations (0).

Less important to this group were infrastructure outcomes, environmental and climate change outcomes, including:
- tourism improving transport infrastructure (air, roads, wharves and jetties) and access to communities (-1),
- supporting the provision of community utilities (-1),
- tourism not contributing to climate change (-3),
- supporting the community to adapt to climate change (-4), and
- Tourism protects community access and use of local resource (e.g. potable water, beach access) (-4).

Qualitative explanations:

Participants representing Discourse 3 noted the remoteness of their community and highly value improved (air) access tourism delivers. They did not believe tourism to be a major contributor to climate change and thus did not think tourism has any responsibility. They also did not feel tourism was restricting access to resources ("qoliqoli"), and thus did not prioritise this as a future outcome.

People associated with Discourse 3 were:
- Mores strongly represented by local people residing on Yacata, including both those working in tourism and those who do not.
- Were younger (<50), and strongly represented people between 30 and 49 years of age.

Consensus and disagreement
There was strong agreement on the high importance for tourism to deliver economic outcomes, in particular tourism contributing to a growing economy and benefiting local people financially were, whereas protecting, promoting and revising cultural heritage was somewhat less important across all discourses (Table 1).

There was strong disagreement whether visitors should learn about local culture and custom,

tourism's role to help the community to adapt to climate change and how important community access and use of local resource is.

Implications
Economic outcomes were important to all groups and cannot be overlooked. Local people value the transactional benefits they receive by engaging in tourism. This is because tourism is preferred over alternative jobs and because it delivers direct improvements to people's daily lives. However, economic outcomes were also not the only outcomes local people would like tourism to deliver in the future. Because there were no outcomes that were unimportant to all groups, the importance of holistic planning to ensure certain outcomes are not achieved at the cost of others is important.

Climate change was less important, and the analysis suggest this may be explained by a lack of understanding how tourism contributes to climate change. This should not be a reason to disregard outcomes linked to climate change.

Environmental outcomes were of a lower priority, and this may be because the natural environment in the Lau Group remains undisturbed and pristine. People in the Lau group are not exposed to unsustainable forms of tourism with negative environmental impact. Further, the resort is already doing a lot in terms of environmental conservation. This may mean that improving environmental outcomes may not be regarded as critical, or perhaps because local people do not see themselves as separated from the environment, and thus do not regard environmental health as an external outcome tourism adds to.

Next steps

We acknowledge the importance the people in the Northern Lau Group place on economic outcomes. Results of this study will be compared to Q studies in several other case study destinations, to identify whether the degree of tourism development has an impact on people's priorities (as they seem to be influenced by their experience with tourism). In addition, we are looking forward to working with Vatuvara to identify how multiple benefits can achieved through tourism.

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Cite as: Loehr, J., Mafi-Stephens, M., Fleming, C., Westoby, R., Becken, S. (2023). Practitioner Note – Community priorities for the future of tourism in the Lau Group of Islands. Griffith University.

Appendix

Table 1. Significant statements of each of the discourses on what tourism outcomes local people perceive as important/less important (the numbers ranging from +4 to -4 represent the scale presented in Figure 1).

TYPE of Discourse	Important outcomes	Neither important nor unimportant	Least important outcomes	Agreement	Disagreement
D1 - Financial and transactional benefits	- Financial benefits to local people (+4) - Growing national economy (+4) - Funds environmental conservation and protection (+3) - Protects community access and use of local resource (+2)	Improves transport infrastructure (0) Does not increase the cost of living (0) Enhances digital infrastructure for local peoples (0) Supports the community to adapt to climate change (0)	- Improves the mental health of local people (-4) - Enhances community solidarity and stability (-4) - Improves physical health of local people (-3)	- Financial benefits to local people (+4, +3, +4) - Growing national economy (+4, +4, +3) - Promotes the value of cultural and creative industries (+2,+1,+2) - Use of local goods and services (0,0,0) - Protects, promotes, and revives local culture and heritage (-1,-1,-1) - Minimises energy use, water uses, waste generation and pollution (-1,-1,-2)	Visitors are encouraged to learn about local cultures and custom (+1,-3,+4) - Supports the community to adapt to climate change (0, +2, -4) - Protects community access and use of local resource (+2,-2,-4) - Supports and regenerates subsistence livelihoods (+2,-2,+3)
D2 - Resilience, stability, and infrastructure outcomes	- Supports communities to recover from shocks (+4) - Growing national economy (+4) - Encourages small businesses/entrepreneurship (+3) - Supports the community to adapt to climate change (+2)	Tourism improves the physical health of local people (0) Tourism enhances community solidarity and stability (0) Empowers marginalised people (0)	- Promotes gender equality (-4) - Involves local communities in decision making (-4) - Visitors learn about local cultures and custom (-3)		
D3 - Inclusion and appreciation of culture	- Visitors are encouraged to learn about local cultures and custom (+4) - Financial benefits to local people (+4) - Empowers marginalised people (+2)	Does not steal natural resources from future generations (0) Is respectful of local decision-making (0) Funds environmental conservation and protection (0)	- Protects community access and use of local resource (-4) - Supports the community to adapt to climate change (-4) - Does not increase the cost of living (-3)		

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