

# Adaptive environmental management of tourism in the Province of Siena, Italy using the ecological footprint

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Received 23 September 2005; received in revised form 3 February 2006; accepted 5 April 2006

Available online 8 December 2006

## Abstract

Adaptive management as applied to tourism policy treats management policies as experiments that probe the responses of the system as human behavior changes. We present a conceptual systems model that incorporates the gap between observed and desired levels of the ecological footprint with respect to biocapacity. Addressing this gap (or ‘overshoot’) can inform strategies to increase or decrease visitation or its associated consumption in the coming years. The feedback mechanism in this conceptual model incorporates a gap between observed and desired ecological footprint levels of tourists and residents. The work is based on longer-term and ongoing study of tourism impacts and ecological footprint assessments from the SPIN-Eco Project. We present historical tourism and environmental data from the province of Siena, Italy and discuss the use of discrete, static environmental indicators as part of an iterative feedback process to manage tourism within biophysical limits. We discuss a necessary shift of emphasis from certain and static numbers to a process-based management model that can reflect slow changes to biophysical resources. As underscored by ecological footprint analysis, the energy and material use associated with tourism and local activity can erode natural capital foundations if that use exceeds the area’s biological capacity to support it. The dynamic, and iterative process of using such indicators as management feedback allows us to view sustainability more accurately as a transition and journey, rather than a static destination to which management must arrive. Published by Elsevier Ltd.

*Keywords:* Adaptive management; Tourism; Ecological footprint

## 1. Introduction

Tourism is an important industry in almost every region of the planet. It touches the lives of most of the world’s population, employing one-twelfth of all workers and contributing 11 percent of the global GDP (WTO, 1999, 2003). Tourism has long been identified as a powerful tool for development, spurring economic growth, increasing foreign exchange, smallholder investment, and local employment (Brau et al., 2003; De Kadt, 1979; Woods et al., 1994). In some cases, tourism results in increased environmental protection and funds for conservation (Pearce, 1981; Woods et al., 1994; Pigram, 1980; Boo, 1990; Sonnino, 2003; Bramwell and Lane, 1994).

All major intra-governmental organizations which address tourism (e.g., World Tourism Organization, United Nations, World Wide Fund for Nature, World Bank, European Union) have established definitions of ‘sustainable tourism’ (IWGIST, 1993), yet exactly what this means in practice continues to be hotly debated (summarized by Sharpley, 2000; Clarke, 1997; Hunter, 1997). While “strong sustainability” is implied in much of the sustainable tourism literature (Collins, 1999), growing evidence indicates that most all tourism activity contributes to environmental pressure (Duffy, 2001). These impacts can be tracked in a variety of ways. One technique is direct observance and measurement of impacts. Tourism has been documented to lead to direct changes in land cover, land use, water and energy (Becken and Simmons, 2002; Carlsson-Kanyama and Linden, 1999), increases in biotic exchange (including disease), disturbance of wild species, and changes in environmental perceptions of the host

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community (Gössling, 2002a). Retrospective examination and restoration of tourism impacts on host communities and ecosystems are rarely successful. Moreover, given those degraded resource bases and civil infrastructure requirements, rejuvenation costs are generally quite high (Butler, 1980). Thus, even in conventional economic terms, there is significant and widespread interest in finding practical means of avoiding natural capital degradation which leads to a decline in visitation (BA, 1994; Garrigos Simon et al., 2003; Lindberg et al., 1997; Mowforth and Munt, 1998).

Tourism registers indirect yet profound and persistent changes on the natural capital of its destinations (Collins, 1999). However, the full extent of these impacts has been notoriously difficult to measure with direct and quantifiable indicators. Tourism impacts are often indistinguishable from those produced by local residents, and are therefore difficult to monitor and control. Often, the most challenging of tourism's impacts to assess are those which are the result of rapid economic growth which outpaces civil infrastructure and its ability to monitor changes to the environment. Even in the most wealthy and well-planned destinations, indirect impacts escape recognition because tourism's impacts can (for example in the case of airline emissions, or imported products) be caused half a planet away, or take years to manifest impacts (Gössling, 2002a; Patterson, 2005). While management concerns focus on the more visible, immediate, or offensive impacts of tourism, little to no attention has been focused on the slow but persistent erosion of natural capital which may be occurring if a given area is in ecological 'overshoot'. As a result, this feedback cannot be incorporated into tourism management and doubts in tourism's ability to deliver on promises of sustainable development have been expressed (Hunter, 1997; Schmidt di Friedberg, 1997; Collins, 1999).

Cost and other difficulties prevent the observation and documentation of the complete range of tourism impacts, effluents, and changes, at all relevant scales and through time. Thus, a second technique to assess tourism impacts is through tracking tourism impacts by accounting energy and resource use and waste emission per capita throughout the tourist's journey. This category of information is more difficult to incorporate into management considerations, because the source or sink of tourism impacts can be conceptually, spatially, or temporally far removed from the institutions and managers who would control them. One objective of this paper is to remove this conceptual distance by illustrating an example which incorporates this second form of impact assessment into an adaptive management structure. We use the ecological footprint and its corollary, biocapacity as an input to this process.

The biocapacity of any defined area represents the maximum amount of goods and environmental services that could be produced, in a sustainable way, according to the land use of that area (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996). As explained by Monfreda et al. (2004), when compared to the ecological footprint, biocapacity can be considered as a

measure of environmental carrying capacity. From a tourism management perspective this indication is of interest for a number of reasons. When an ecological footprint is calculated for an area's resident population, and is then compared to the area's biocapacity, it reveals the presence or absence of ecological 'surplus'. In theoretical terms this surplus is the result of natural capital producing ecological goods and services faster than they are being consumed. If an optimal outcome means maximizing the use of this surplus, in theory it can be reallocated to either support other populations, used as a 'buffer' against over-consumption, or it can support increasing consumption trends. Once biocapacity has been exceeded, this implies that environmental pressures are either occurring beyond the area of study, or within the study area but are unlikely to manifest themselves until some date in the future. As an input to a management plan for tourism impacts, this tracking approach may result in more detailed information with respect to the option of waiting for diffuse or delayed impacts to evidence themselves, and may prevent unintended consequences. The levels of visitation, and the visitor's consumption and waste are therefore of interest to provincial managers charged with maintaining natural capital in perpetuity, at local to global scales.

The systems model presented in this article cites recent work using an indicator of tourism's indirect and economic throughput impacts (the ecological footprint), and applies it to an adaptive management structure which can incorporate this information in an iterative process. Incorporation of new sources of information on tourism's direct and indirect environmental impacts can lead to more accurate and timely interventions.

The systems model presented takes its cue from the success of destination tools based on the concept of adaptive management. Adaptive management treats management policies as experiments that probe the responses of the system as human behavior changes; Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) (Stankey et al., 1985) Visitor Impact Management (VIM) (Graefe et al., 1990) and Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) (National Park Service, 1995) are all examples (see review in Manning, 1999). However, as astutely noted by Lawson et al. (2003), adaptive management is *reactive* in nature, with little forward-looking policy, or ability to incorporate indirect or systemic impacts to the natural capital which supports tourism (as discussed above). As awareness for tourism's pervasive impacts has grown, developments in related fields suggest that tourism environmental management would be more comprehensive if both direct and indirect impacts could be incorporated into comprehensive, systemic, and adaptive paradigms (Hunter, 1997; Lawson et al., 2003).

## 2. Site description

The Province of Siena is a rural area located in Southern Tuscany in central Italy. Its economy is based on services,

manufacturing, agriculture and a growing tourism sector. The exceptional density and quality of cultural, architectural and environmental assets make the Province of Siena a popular national and international tourist destination. Tourists are primarily motivated by art and culture (54%) and spas (29%) (Fig. 1). (Amministrazione Provinciale di Siena, 2005). Annual arrivals have grown from 133,255 to 341,449 between 1991 and 2002 (Fig. 2) (Amministrazione Provinciale di Siena, 2005). However, this growth has not been evenly distributed: a limited number of popular sites and towns in the Province suffer from overcrowding and congestion (such as Siena, San Gimignano and Chianciano Terme), while others languish for lack of visitors (Fig. 3). Visitation is prone to peaks throughout the year (Fig. 4).

Agenda 21 (as highlighted in the findings from this issue) focused Provincial leadership on five factors which were seen to limit the sustainability of the tourism industry in Siena; direct impacts (emissions, landscape impacts, privacy intrusions, etc) at especially popular sites and areas, lack of mechanisms to diversify the tourism product or distribute tourists spatially, lack of promotion or protection for historical-cultural patrimony, scarce environmental certification for the tourism sector, and a lack of means to address tourism’s indirect impacts on ecologically fragile areas (Poggiali, 2002). Ultimately, the Province undertook a cultural inventory, identified and promoted a territorial identity through advertising vectors, and mandated a strategic environmental plan for impacts. The thrust of these efforts focused on voluntary and certification initiatives, yet tourism managers lacked the information and feedback structure which would allow decisions to incorporate information about the status of an area’s natural capital (or biocapacity).

Erosion of natural capital is a concern relevant to rural areas of Italy, especially in light of trends in land-use which have removed many of the natural ecological buffers in the system (Patterson, 2005). For example, growth of tourism infrastructure has led to a rise in impervious surfaces which

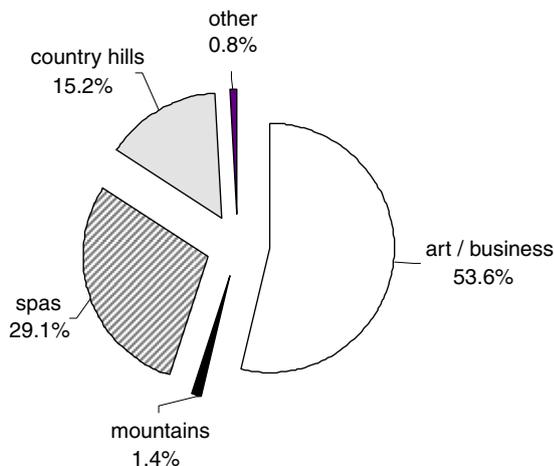


Fig. 1. Tourist visitation to Siena by motivation in 2002. Source: Amministrazione Provinciale di Siena, 2005.

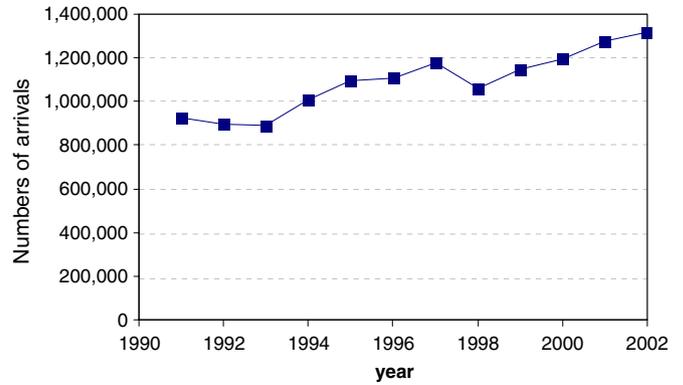


Fig. 2. Time series of arrivals in the Province of Siena (1991–2002). Source: Amministrazione Provinciale di Siena, 2005.

speed water, sediments and pollutants into streams. Landscape cover, species diversity, crop diversity, and riparian vegetation have particular implications for an area’s natural capital and its consequent ability to deliver ecosystem services. An analysis of aerial photo sequences from years 1950 to 1996 revealed that each of these have undergone changes as a result of increases in tourism infrastructure and the mechanization of agriculture (ibid).

Rural areas of the province have undergone particularly sharp shifts in demography as residents have moved from an agrarian economy to what is industrial, specialized, or tourism based. Food, fertilizer, and other agricultural inputs take up a far greater share of domestic imports than in previous years. As economic transition based on consumption, importation, and petroleum use increase, local traditions of frugality, recycling, gleaning (the act of following behind a first harvest to salvage remains), knowledge of local plants, animals, have become less common (Patterson, 2005). Tourism development plays a subtle but pervasive role in the development transition that has occurred in the Province of Siena. The cumulative effect of these changes has had implications for the Province’s natural capital. A need exists to relate these trends to Siena’s growing energy and resource consumption by residents and visitors.

Pressures on civic infrastructure are the result of modern trends: demands for second homes, cheap trips, spontaneous decisions, more mobile travel behavior, more frequent, shorter trips, greater driving distance, ‘exotic locations’, rising expectations of amenities and service, rising habits of consumption. Acknowledging Siena’s strong prospects for tourism growth, provincial planners have expressed concern for these as drivers of development, and their consequent effect on visitation, infrastructure, resource use, and environmental impacts, both direct and indirect, whether seen or unseen. Indication of the area’s biophysical capacity to support rising population and consumption patterns would be a useful tool for management. An integrated and long-term strategy could then be better equipped to weigh the use of resources and waste production through time against the ability of an area’s

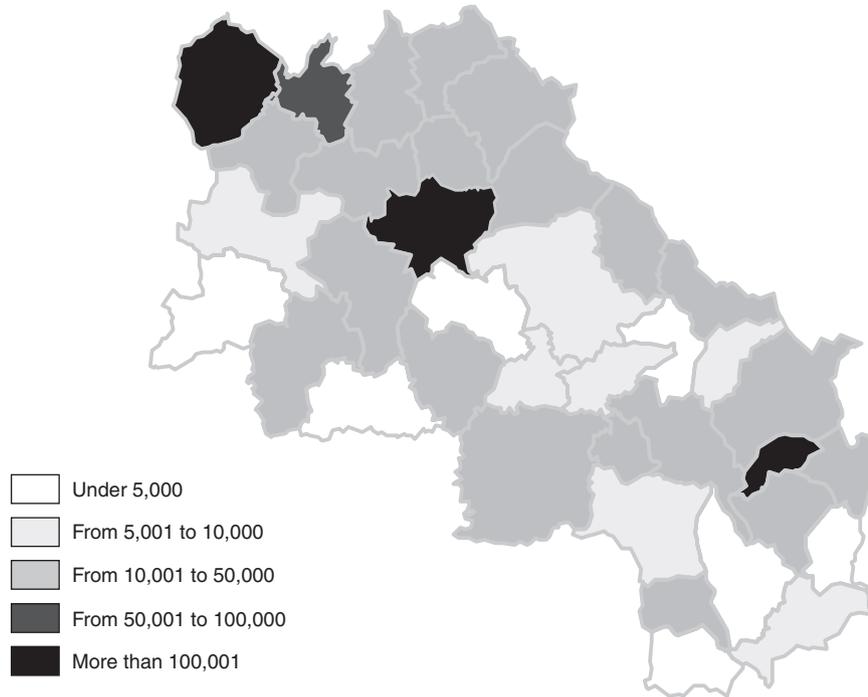


Fig. 3. Arrivals in Province of Siena per municipality (2002). Source: Amministrazione Provinciale di Siena, 2005.

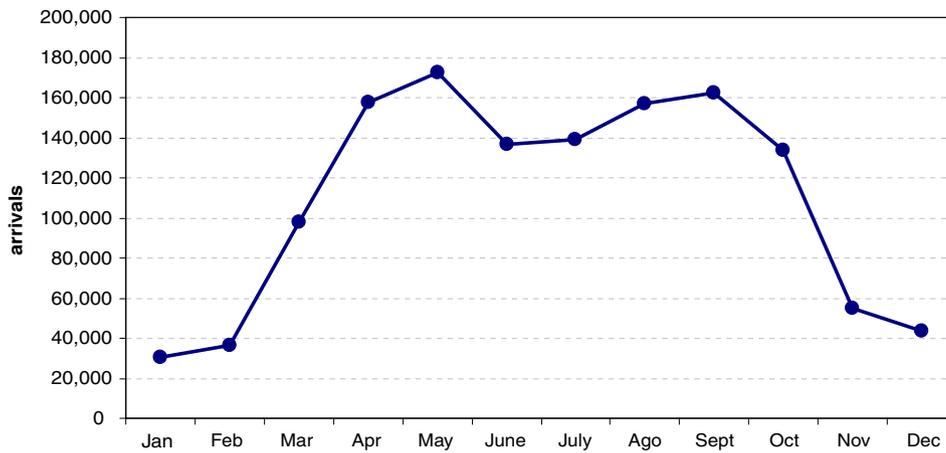


Fig. 4. Tourism visitation by month in Province of Siena, 2002. Source: Amministrazione Provinciale di Siena, 2005.

natural, social and economic assets to support that activity in perpetuity.

An ecological footprint analysis can give indication as to whether human resource consumption and waste emission is exceeding the area’s ability to produce goods and services in perpetuity. The ecological footprint provides a translation of data from average patterns of household consumption to the bio-productive area necessary to provide those goods and ecological services (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996). EFA compares a quantified measure of residential material and energy consumption and waste production (the ecological footprint) to that area’s natural resource production and capacity for waste assimilation (biocapacity).

From an environmental management perspective, tourism means hosting an additional (non-resident) population, visitation which increases consumption of resources and emissions of waste. Often tourists choose to maintain on vacation the high patterns of consumption and waste generation established at home (Akama, 1999; Urry, 1990). Prior studies have provided the basis for using the ecological footprint as an indicator for tourism management. Attempts to quantify these impacts have been made in terms of the Ecological Footprint Analysis (EFA) (Gössling et al., 2002b; Hunter, 2002; Patterson, 2005; Patterson et al., 2006a; Peeters, 2005; Bagliani et al., 2004). We attempt to extend these advances, with the primary goal of assisting the tourism management framework of the

Province of Siena. Drawing off of existing and ongoing study of tourism impacts in Siena (Patterson, 2005), tourism ecological footprints (Patterson et al., 2006a), tourism carrying capacity (Patterson et al., 2006b), and resident ecological footprints (Bagliani et al., this issue), we propose an adaptive management framework for tourism policy to include biophysical conditions.

Recent innovations in sustainability science (Holling, 2001; Gunderson and Holling, 2002a), have suggested that a systems dynamic perspective might be useful in addressing especially challenging conditions posed by the structure of the system. This involves identifying components of the system, illustrating their linkages in terms of structure and feedbacks, and identifying a possible gap between observed and desired conditions of the system. To date, few studies have presented time series for biocapacity or the ecological footprint (Wackernagel et al., 2004; Erb, 2004). We employ time series of biocapacity and the ecological footprint to illustrate possible trajectories and longer-term consequences of relating tourism in Siena to a systems perspective.

### 3. Methods

This article takes a perspective underscored by Walters (1986) and Gunderson et al. (1995), that environmental problems are sometimes best addressed by setting aside for a moment the direct and obvious linkages between a problem and its manifestations, and instead concentrating on underlying dynamics. This approach stresses that management be flexible, adaptive, and experimental at scales compatible with scales of critical system functions. An understanding of how systems migrate towards states of increasing risk can help to better understand the impacts of tourism growth, and prevent unanticipated damages. As described above, this implies a longer-term view on tourism impacts, and not just those that can be immediately and directly perceived. In this section, we first present the methods used in systems dynamic modeling to illustrate the analytical context of the tourism management challenge. We describe the ecological footprint methodology and its comparison to biocapacity, and explain how this method has been adapted in prior studies to incorporate concerns regarding tourism population. This approach demonstrates management use for the EFA indicators of tourism pressure. Improving this form of application would allow environmental managers to respond to feedback regarding Siena's population, net consumption levels and visitation, as they relate to biophysical measures of natural capital.

#### 3.1. System dynamics modelling

System dynamics identifies, explains, and attempts to eliminate problem behaviors in socio-economic systems principally by identifying feedback loops in the system. In cases of dynamic complexity, when cause and effect are not obviously related, this framework is particularly useful.

System dynamics draws off of non-linear theory, cognitive and social psychology, organizational theory, economics, and other social sciences (for a review see Senge, 1990) and posits that the behavior of a system arises from its structure.

Interesting non-linear interactions are often noted between system elements. In the system dynamics view, dynamics (behavior over time) can be explained by the interaction of the two basic types of feedback loops: positive (or reinforcing) and negative (balancing) (for further explanation see Senge, 1990). As is typical for a dynamical systems description, we explain our systems model in terms of feedback (causal) loops, stocks (levels), flows (rates). Like all models, ours is a depiction of the tourism system as it relates to the natural capital that supports it. It is a conceptual model, whose principle value is to convey system insights by placing data from other studies within the analytical systems-based context of the tourism management challenge at hand. We relate this structure to the ecological footprint data derived from studies and procedures described below.

#### 3.2. Ecological footprint analysis

The full methodology used to adapt EFA to resident and tourism statistics, respectively, can be found in Bagliani et al. (this issue) and Patterson et al. (2006a). Methods for using the ecological footprint as an indicator of environmental pressure due to tourism are similar to those used in prior study (Gössling et al., 2002b; Hunter, 2002; Patterson, 2005; Patterson et al., 2006a; Peeters, 2005; Bagliani et al., 2004). See Patterson et al. (2006b) for further explanation relating the ecological footprint to biophysical carrying capacity.

Ecological footprint analysis is not intended to be a determinant or encompass all concerns relevant to sustainability (see reviews in Roth et al., 2000; Troell et al., 2002; van den Bergh and Verbruggen, 1999). In this application we use the calculation as a proxy for the amount of the productive capacity of the biosphere that is occupied by tourist and resident activities. While we present data in time-series format, it is important to note that neither the ecological footprint nor the biocapacity predicts future demand or capacity, which are functions of future uses and technologies.

##### 3.2.1. Biocapacity

We calculated provincial biocapacity using data from 1960 to 1996, at intervals of 10 years. Calculations follow the methodology outlined by Monfreda et al. (2004) and used yield and equivalence factor as reported in Living Planet Report 2000 (WWF, 2000). Accordingly, land-use data was organized into the six types of ecologically productive areas by IUCN classification: cropland, pasture, forest area, fishing ground, built up land and "energy land". Spatial data for each interval was taken from CORINE land cover analysis, an aerial photo survey of the

Province and other statistical data (data published as Giorgi et al., 1966; Tornar, 1976; Regione Toscana, 1993; Amministrazione Provinciale di Siena, 1996). An expanded explanation of our methodology can be found in (Bagliani et al., this issue).

3.2.2. Ecological footprint

Data for the ecological footprint evaluation over time were taken from population census (ISTAT, 2005), and our previously calculated value for the base year of 1999 of 5.8 global hectares per inhabitant (gha) (see Bagliani et al., this issue). Resident consumption was broken down into typical EF categories of food and fiber consumption, waste, goods and services, fuels, accommodation. These values were then converted into the six types of ecologically productive lands according to equivalence and yield factors reported in WWF (2000). The trend projection for years 1960–2002 was taken from the increases reported for the world over the same time period in the Living Planet Report (WWF, 2004).

3.2.3. Tourist ecological footprint

As suggested by Hunter (2002), quantitative assessments can help inform civic planners as to whether a tourist population differs radically from local residents in terms of resource consumption and waste production. We applied estimates of a tourist ecological footprint (Patterson et al. 2006a), to the Province of Siena arrival estimates. This method allows the comparison among tourists and residents through the use of ‘annual equivalent residents’ (total annual tourist arrivals multiplied by length of stay in days, divided by 365 days per year). Tourism historical data for years 1991–2004 originated from Provincial records (Amministrazione Provinciale di Siena, 2005). The equivalent resident population was assigned the annual ecological footprint value calculated for residents.

Contrary to Akama’s (1999) findings, consumption analysis of tourism to rural Siena has determined that tourists do not differ ostensibly from local residents (Fig. 5)

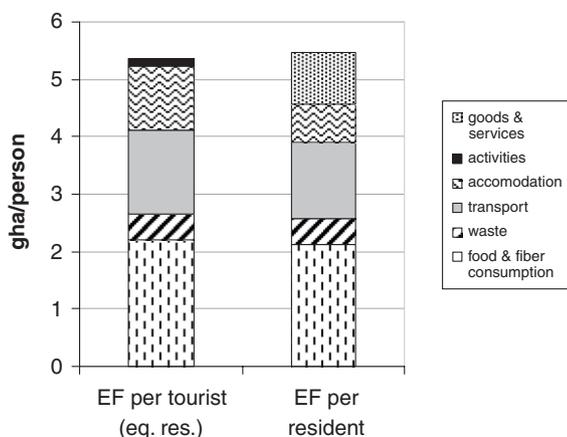


Fig. 5. EF per tourist vs EF per resident (arrival transport is excluded) for Siena. From Patterson et al. (2006a).

(Patterson et al., 2006a). This area has been shown to produce some of the lowest (most environmentally favourable) documented eco-efficiency values (Gössling et al., 2005). Some examination has been made of the conditions that cause tourists in Tuscany to moderate (ie reduce) their consumption levels to match that of local residents (Patterson et al., 2006a).

4. Results

This section describes the use of the ecological footprint of tourists, residents, and biocapacity over time as a dynamic feedback mechanism, informing environmental managers on the status of the broader biophysical context of Siena’s tourism carrying capacity.

Basic systems dynamics models often refer to the reinforcing loop, the balancing loop, and the delay. A reinforcing loop is a system design which uses its own momentum in a positive feedback to produce growth or decline. Increasing one variable (tourism) can lead to an increase in a second variable (tourism consumption), which leads to increases in the first variable (tourism), etc. Fig. 6 illustrates a reinforcing loop depicting a positive feedback relationship between tourism development and tourism energy and resource use.

Identifying feedback loops in the system, and emphasizing the behavior of the system arising from its structure, can shift the dialog to understanding how tourism influences consumption of energy and resource use, and conversely, how these impacts influence tourism. As a first step, this process is illustrated as a positive reinforcing loop.

Systems often display characteristic behavior when locked into reinforcing loops (Gunderson and Holling, 2002b). Comparing these dynamics to the Holling’s resilience archetype, can elucidate some of the principles governing this behavior. As a result, new leverage points for intervention can emerge. The cross-scale, interdisciplinary, and dynamic nature of the theory of panarchy/resilience is one which rationalizes the interplay between change and persistence, between the predictable and

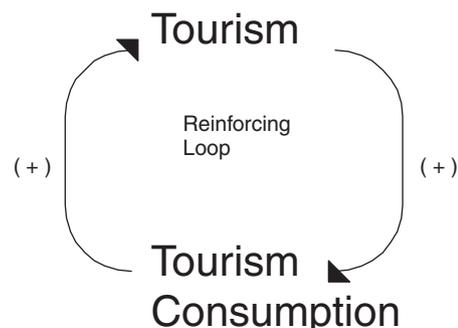


Fig. 6. A reinforcing loop depicting a typical positive feedback relationship between tourism development and tourism energy and resource use.

unpredictable. Fig. 7 illustrates Holling’s (2001) adaptive cycle, one depiction of complex system behavior as it exploits and conserves resources to the point of system collapse. The first phase (white) is one of rapid growth and eventual stagnation. The second (black) return phase of the diagram explains a system going through stages of release and reorganization.

The interplay of connectedness and potential has been a subject of much debate within circles discussing panarchy theory (ibid), much of which can be applied and hold insights for other complex systems. Yet if critical system functions and their associated non-linear responses have received only recent attention in the ecological literature, less has been written about the nested, linked ecological/social/economic systems which support tourism. Systems ecologists often illustrate the episodic view of change (Pritchard and Sanderson, 2002), underscoring the im-

portance of “knowing where you are” in system cycles. A systems diagram such as that presented by Holling’s (Fig. 7), can be used to facilitate dialog regarding aspects of tourism development which are in phases of rapid growth with increasing efficiency and rigidity, versus periods of slow change exposing areas of vulnerability, versus phases of complete disorder and disintegration, versus rebuilding stages of innovation where innovation begins to emerge in pulses.

Tourism researchers have commented on the similarities between the front half of Holling’s (2001) resilience model (in white, Fig. 7) and Butler’s tourism destination cycle of evolution (otherwise known as destination cycle) (Fig. 8) (Farrell and Twining-Ward, 2004; Petrosillo et al., 2006). This illustration of systems development is a key concept for many tourism industry representatives, policymakers, and researchers. The destination cycle describes the system behavior of changes in tourism visitation volumes as a function of local tourism assets and the increasing popularity of a destination over time (Butler, 1980). From left to right, as impacts from tourism development become apparent (including crowding effects from increased arrivals), the appeal of a destination begins to erode. The vibrancy of the socio-cultural experience, and the appeal of an ecologically healthy environment declines. As a result, growth in arrivals flattens, ultimately stagnating the local economy and producing a period of steady visitor decline (Butler, 1980, 1991). Barring effective mitigation or rejuvenation, a destination will ‘burn out’, as development impinges on the locale’s natural and social capital which sustain positive experiences for visitors (ibid).

When a system is locked in a reinforcing loop, barring intervention, both variables will grow or decline exponentially. When initial growth is slow, it may be unnoticed until it becomes rapid, at which point it may be too late to control. The Butler cycle of tourism is an example of the consequences of a reinforcing-loop in a tourism system

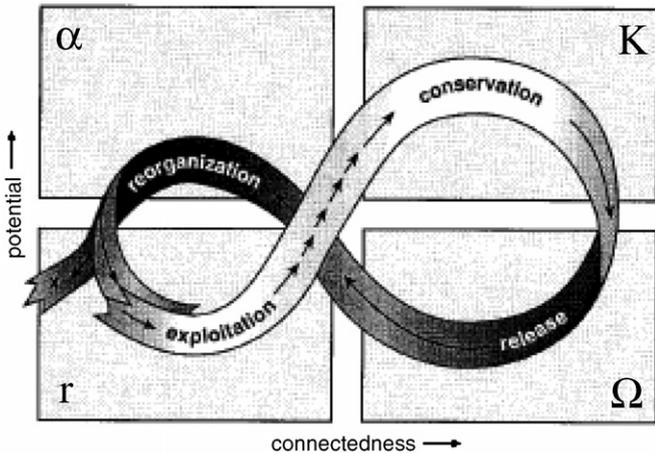


Fig. 7. The Adaptive Cycle, as proposed and illustrated by Holling (2001), with kind permission from Springer Science and Business Media.

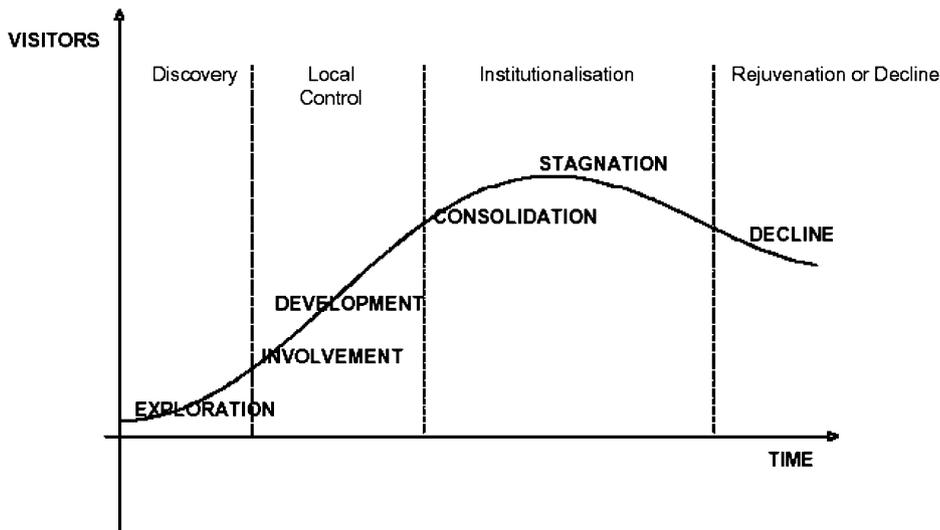


Fig. 8. The Destination Life Cycle from Butler 1980, as in Amelung et al. (2002).

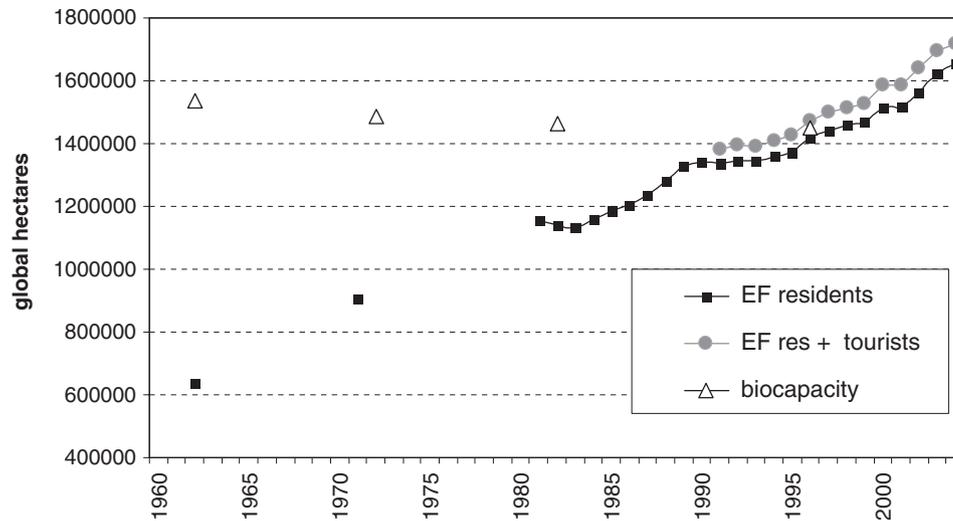


Fig. 9. Ecological Footprint of tourists and residents compared to Biocapacity of Siena Province through time since 1960. Data from Patterson et al. (2006a) and Bagliani et al. (2006, this issue).

over time, where tourism development increases to a point where it burns out.

The ecological footprint can be used in a difference equation, where the system evolves through a set of discrete time steps. This permits successful efforts to reduce the ecological footprint to also be reflected in the mapping function, and affect decisions in the next time-step. Thus the time-evolution of the discrete ecological footprint is obtained by repeated iteration of the mapping function. In management terms, this constitutes a feedback process necessary to transition toward a dynamic carrying capacity, and which is currently underutilized in tourism adaptive management strategy. A graphical illustration of the ecological footprint of tourists and residents compared to biocapacity shows the rising material and energy consumption and waste disposal (see Fig. 9). This contrasts with the slowly diminishing levels of biocapacity within the province. An intervention designed to mediate the prospect of increasing ecological footprints (both per capita and through increasing population) would address this trend in a forward-looking way.

Effective intervention in a system locked in a reinforcing loop requires an intervention which will shift the dynamic. A *balancing loop* is a structure that attempts to move a *variable* value to a *desired* or *reference value* through some *action* (using negative feedback). The difference between the current state and the desired state is perceived as a gap or opportunity for intervention. In creating this space, an action can be taken so that over time the observed state is guided closer to the desired state. Fig. 10 depicts a balancing loop, which includes a space created in the relationship between tourism development and its impacts, as a result of a perceived gap between observed and desired conditions. A critical component of this approach is that both observed and ecological footprint considerations are included in assessment of this gap.

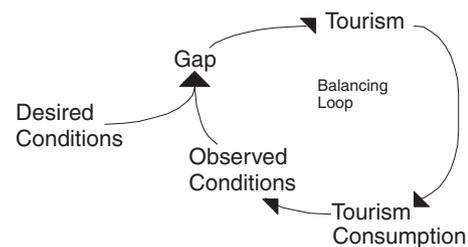


Fig. 10. A balancing loop depicting a new space created in the relationship between tourism development and tourism energy and resource consumption, as a result of a perceived gap between observed and desired conditions.

The result contrasts the case of the Butler cycle. Where the reinforcing loop depicted a destination at risk for rapid and uncontrolled growth or decline, the balancing loop tends to dampen the oscillations of the system, settling the observed state closer to the desired one. The use of a quantified measure such as the ecological footprint and its comparison to biocapacity is useful here, because strength of the remedial action taken is proportional to the size of the gap, therefore the current state initially rapidly approaches the desired state. Ideally, as the error decreases, the rate at which the current state approaches the desired state decreases. However, *delays* are a component which describes the time that elapses between cause and effect, and may be a consideration in affecting positive change in the system.

## 5. Discussion

Humans often fail to build self-organizing or adaptive capacities into their technologies and economic designs (Westley, 2002). What is becoming clearer is that the complexity of the challenge at hand can no longer be

understood in terms of a single management objective that can be attained. It is critical that environmental managers are assisted in setting an adaptive, rather than static carrying capacity, which responds to “a framework of nature’s rules, that captures the adaptive and evolutionary nature of adaptive cycles that are nested one within the other across space and time scales (Holling, 2001)”. Incorporating indicators of environmental pressure from tourism (both from direct and input–output means of tracking these pressures) brings tourism management closer to responding to the variety of spatial and temporal scales that manifest tourism’s impacts.

Little attention in tourism management has been cast upon slow variables of environmental change (such as an area’s biological capacity). Often these are mistakenly assumed to be static. Meanwhile, reports have increasingly commented on the ‘overshoot’ of human consumption of energy and resources compared to global production. Tourism, as an energy and material resource intensive service, and as the world’s largest industry, contributes to this trend. Recent ecological footprint applications can serve as inputs to inform management initiatives on the indirect impacts of tourism development. Incorporating this information into both the observed and desired condition statements for a feedback model, can result in a more accurate sense of the gap to be addressed by policy interventions.

There is a limited set of trajectories over which environmental problems generated by tourists will travel. These need to be understood in dynamic rather than static terms. The key to understanding tourism environmental management over time lies in understanding the dimensions around which patterns of structures and processes can be identified and studied. In ecosystems, the key dimensions are space and time. For social systems, Westley (2002) advocates adding a third dimension that references a social tendency to discount the future, and look backward rather than forward. Viewing ecological footprint and biocapacity data in time-series highlights the importance of addressing “overshoot” before it occurs. Should management fail to incorporate this forward-looking information, the Province’s capacity to respond to slow but pervasive changes will be reduced. As a result, the ecological footprint of the combined populations of the study area is at greater risk of surpassing the area’s biocapacity.

We have described a time-series, systems-based approach to interpreting existing data on ecological footprint assessments of residents and tourists. The environmental management significance of this systems approach deserves some review. Environmental management for tourism is in need of tools to draw information from multiple scales, and in a forward looking way. In absence of information indicating the indirect impacts of the tourism population, tourism managers in the Province will be inclined to seek to distribute the flow of tourism spatially across the Province, and increase tourism visitation. The perspective presented by a comparison of provincial biocapacity draws attention

to the broader context of rising consumption of energy and resources among residents, and the slow degradation of local natural capital. A systems dynamics perspective stresses the importance that the Province identifies ways to transition the whole system to less energy and resource use intensive ecological footprints.

Depicting the tourism system and its related consumption in terms of a systems dynamic model draws attention to areas relevant to future research. With respect to tourism, the relevant scale of a systems model is a challenging issue. Both temporal and spatial considerations need further review, in order to incorporate the full range of management concerns into decision-making. While one model will not be able to address all concerns, the systems approach outlined in this article can be adapted to a variety of temporal and spatial scales, from municipal to national application. Temporal scales are also relevant, for example, seasonal peaks in visitation are especially problematic for environmental management, exacerbating strains on infrastructure and waste processing, energy and water resources (Gössling, 2001; Kuvan, 2005; Sun and Walsh, 1998). The ecological footprint for visitors could be iterated on a monthly time-step, to reflect the rise and fall of tourism visitation throughout the year depicted in Fig. 4.

Prior to this analysis, the ecological footprint may have been grouped among those notions of sustainability which discourage experimentation by implying that there are unique, fixed targets for sustainability and only one way for management to optimize them. Throughout this article, we have underscored the importance of incorporating management feedback using a systems approach. The ecological footprint analysis is beneficial from two standpoints. First, it provides a more complete assessment of impacts by tracking the full range of impacts from their source. Second, it provides common denomination against which various populations across various spatial and temporal scales can be compared. This contribution is valuable in that it can support a dialog regarding efforts to widen the range of concern for tourism impacts. Increased understanding of tourism’s indirect impacts, or pervasive impacts on biocapacity, are otherwise difficult to incorporate into decision-making. Disregard for supporting resources of tourism such as biophysical carrying capacity implies risks for undermining the natural capital which attracts tourism visitation. This risk is amplified in the presence of factors which point to a broad probability distribution of uncertainties, shortsightedness due to discounting of the future, and losses of social flexibility and ecological resilience (Carpenter et al., 2002).

A number of uncertainties prevent the full incorporation of indicators of both direct and indirect impacts of tourism. First, little guidance has been given regarding how or how often various tourism management institutions should respond to feedback from the environment, and how they use knowledge of indicators to learn and design more resilient tourism systems. The role of tourism management

institutions is critical to successful inclusion of qualitative and quantitative monitoring and management.

These institutions play a valuable role in data management, providing long time-series of local observation and institutional memory for understanding system change. The drawbacks of using the ecological footprint in any of the above are that many of the ecological footprint values calculated are not comparable at different scales, using different conversion factors, or using different years or databases. Further civil statistics are more prevalent but not collected consistently or with wide availability. This makes inter-linkages difficult. Lastly, the EF is an annual measure and does not account for seasonality (365 tourists in a day, are the same as 1 tourist/day/year), so it may not be appropriate for many management questions at the less extensive spatial or temporal scales. Improvement of civil statistics, and a better understanding of tourism visitation and time dynamics would provide the basis for more in-depth research and discussion.

The ecological footprint is being increasingly applied to various populations, and at various scales. This increases the operative potential for the indicator in terms of management considerations, and also increases its tractability in policy terms. Yet to fully implement a management plan which utilizes the EF as feedback in an iterative management function, improvements to civil statistical sources are necessary. Among these needs is the lack of specific information on the degradation of natural capital due to tourism in the province. Improvements to statistical sources involves gathering better information on slow variables, putting more weight on future returns, narrowing the distribution of uncertainties, maintaining social flexibility for adaptive response, and maintaining the resilience of the local economy and ecosystem.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper attempted to view tourism development and its associated energy and resource impacts from a systems perspective. A systems dynamical model assisted us in conceptually illustrating the point at which both direct and input–output based indicators of environmental condition can enter into adaptive management of tourism. Of the latter, we find promise in the ecological footprint methodology as an input to a feedback-based conceptual model which could help to determine the magnitude of tourism interventions necessary to address local and global ‘overshoot’. In our application, the ecological footprint can be used in a difference equation, where the system evolves through a set of discrete time steps, and where successful efforts to reduce the ecological footprint are reflected in the mapping function. In management terms, this constitutes a feedback process necessary to transition toward understanding the limits of beneficial economic growth, and which is currently underutilized in tourism adaptive management strategy. Further work is needed to identify the appropriate spatial and temporal scales for this type of

application, to identify relevant data sets at those scales, and to address inter-linkages between tourism’s direct and indirect impacts. A systems approach can improve managers abilities to incorporating feedback from environmental impacts into decision-making. Direct and observed degradation of natural capital should be complimented with information (such evidence from ecological footprint analysis) on impacts which may be spatially or temporally displaced.

Greater understanding is needed of the problem domains, not only in terms of tourism structure, but also in terms of temporal and spatial dynamics. This emphasizes a shift away from a static vision of carrying capacity that has dominated discussions of tourism management heretofore. Second, a tourism manager can seek other sources (such as broader spatial or temporal information) or collaboration in transforming the problem domain. This includes investigating the management task in question from the perspective of other agencies or social, political, or economic perspective. Third, further investigation is needed to understand how improved indicators can assist in the management of the complex processes that cause (or mediate) tourism impacts. Lastly, there is a need for more conceptual work in the tourism field which examines linkages through time and links between hierarchical management levels (such as the spatial understanding of tourism dynamics from site, municipal, provincial, regional and national scales).

## Acknowledgements

Financial support for the research on which this paper is based was provided by the Monte dei Paschi Foundation and the Province of Siena Administration.

The authors wish to acknowledge the insightful contributions from two anonymous reviewers, Dale Blahna and Linda Kruger.

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