

TOURISM-LED REGENERATION: THE NEED FOR LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGIC THINKING IN SMALL REGIONAL TOWNS

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**BUILDING BETTER
HOMES, TOWNS
AND CITIES**

Ko Ngā wā Kainga hei
whakamāhorahora

National
Science
Challenges

SPECIAL SESSION: SUPPORTING SUCCESS IN REGIONAL SETTLEMENTS

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THE TIMARU STUDY

- We report a study of Timaru, in New Zealand's South Island, focusing on attempts to realise the potential of a currently underdeveloped regional visitor economy
- In this small district (population 49,000) with an economic base in food processing, agricultural servicing and allied transport infrastructure there is a growing interest in *“using tourism to further diversify the economy and support the development of services for visitors and locals”*



LITHOGRAPH, 1936
RAILWAYS DEPARTMENT (ARTIST UNKNOWN)

APPROACH & FOCI

- Interview-based qualitative fieldwork and co-construction of knowledge approach (n=30 and a lot of informal interactions)
- Our starting point (Year 1) was to talk to a wide range of regeneration stakeholders about their aspirations and activities
- They highlighted a range of regeneration initiatives: tourism stood out as an area in need of attention
- We worked with our stakeholders to develop two guiding questions:
 1. How tourism development could be better organised and resourced?
 2. How the visitor economy could be linked to the effective provision of facilities and services for locals?
- Engaged with literature on tourism-led regeneration, rural tourism and small town regeneration

FINDING # 1: STRUGGLES AROUND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

- Broad range of views – and some disagreement – about the degree to which tourism development should be advanced
- Should tourism be a priority?
- Caroline Bay – the “Riviera of the South” and of central importance (beach, penguins, new pool, skate park, rose garden...). Symbolises the height of tourism in the town and the current malaise (reflecting economic and cultural change)
- Sports and event tourism (emphasis on domestic tourism)
- Te Ana Māori Rock Art Centre
- Making the most of international tourism in Geraldine
- Accommodation shortage



FINDING # 2: MANY DISPARATE ACTORS

- Fragmentation
- District Council (planning, parks, sports, community development, art gallery and museum...)
- Te Rūnanga o Arowhenua (a key stakeholder in the Ngāi Tahu Māori Rock Art Trust, established in 2002, to support rūnanga and their communities)
- Aoraki Tourism (Experience Mid-Canterbury), Aoraki Development and the Chamber of Commerce
- Moteliers/hoteliers
- The event community, including Sport Canterbury (multiple event calendars)

FINDING # 3: RESOURCING CHANGE

- When asked what is needed to build a better tourism system, stakeholders indicated a need for resources (human and financial) to develop a strong and attractive tourism destination:
 1. Support from central government: ideas, advice, tactics, connections and funds (“hard to build a Rolls Royce system on a Mini budget”)
 2. The appointment of skilled local staff to coordinate and plan tourism development (not just marketing and PR), and with the capacity to harness the energy of the community

CONCLUSION

- Our study is illustrating the challenges facing stakeholders in small towns who want an improved approach to tourism development
- Stakeholders recognise that this is easier to talk about than operationalise
- Further development will depend on: bringing diverse actors, networks, and resources together collaboratively to initiate a process of strategic tourism planning that goes beyond place and activity promotion
- The Government's new draft tourism strategy and its call for more active tourism planning gives us some hope for improvement