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# SERVICE LEARNING AS AN INNOVATIVE AND USEFUL TEACHING METHOD FOR TOURISM STUDIES

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This paper explores two emerging issues in tourism education: **sustainability** and **student-centered service learning**. The concept of sustainability referring to strategies for maintaining economic, social/cultural, and environmental viability of a business or location, is relevant in any economic sector. However, sustainability is even more important in the tourism sector because tourism is a primary revenue generator in 83% of the countries of the world. Additionally, implementation of sustainable practices in tourism can be a vehicle for educating many cultures around the world in the concept of sustainability. Nowadays, the concept of sustainability is infrequently addressed in by educational institutions offering degrees in tourism studies. However, to meet the needs society, companies, and future generations of tourism managers and professionals, educators must address this important issue as it applies to tourism development. Student-centered service learning methodologies are needed in European and also American Education Institutions to help the students develop the competecences they need in a changing labor market. Service learning accomplishes two goals: 1) educating students for their profession and 2) preparing them to be engaged, ethical citizens (Flannery and Pragman 2008). The use of service learning in business curriculum has become more common since mid 1990's and is actively supported by business educators who believe that it not only does furthers the mission of the universities to develop students' business skills, use critical thinking, and ability to solve problems in authentic situations, but also infuses social responsibility and ethics (Flannery and Progman, 2008). One of the basic constituents of service learning is that it occurs within a community with other students and community partners. Another important feature of service learning is that it can include a variety of teaching methodologies such as class lectures, discussion, assigned readings, independent research, collaborative projects, and reflections (Cook, 2008). Considering the benefits of student-centered service learning and the need to prepare tourism professionals with a clear understanding of the concept of sustainability, the purpose of this presentation is to outline the process of designing and implementing curriculum. Examples of student-centered service learning courses with a focus on sustainability will be provided.

## 1. Introduction

With tourism being one of the largest industries in the world and also having significant positive and negative impacts on environment, society, and economies, many tourism destinations, accommodations, transportation companies have begun to explore and implement strategies for becoming more "sustainable" as it related to environment, society, and economies (Bremner, 2009). Kates, Parris, and Leiserowotz

(2005) identified the need to educate future tourism managers who will be managing the need to achieve and maintain sustainable tourism. Universities have been identified as the force of change that will have a profound moral responsibility to increase awareness, knowledge, skills and values needed to create a just and sustainable future (Cortese, 2003). Tourism journals have a plethora of articles on sustainable tourism development, yet there is little research on how to incorporate the concept into curricula in higher education. One reason for the failures to incorporate "sustainability" has been the lack of clarity with regard to the definition of the term.

According to McKeown (2002), "education is an essential tool in achieving sustainability". She also explores the difference between education about sustainability and education for sustainable development, with the former being just becoming aware and the latter being the actual tools needed to achieve sustainability. In 2007, a tourism think tank group identified the objectives of curricula with a focus on sustainable tourism. The expectations would be that students would:
1. learn about the core values that support the concept of sustainable tourism;
2. apply and experience the values that support concept of sustainable tourism; and
3. cultivate the core values in learning environments and implement the learning experience in a 'walk the talk' fashion (service learning).

Based on these recommendations, the goal of this paper is to demonstrate and explore how both and understanding of the concept of sustainability and the tools to achieve sustainability can be incorporated in a university course through an international service learning project. The following sections will explore the concept of sustainability, the process of service learning, and finally, an example of an international service learning project focusing on sustainability in a historic Portuguese fishing village in the Brazilian Atlantic Rainforest.

## 2. Tourism and sustainable development
Not only is tourism one of the fastest growing industries, it generates over 8.2 million jobs globally (U.S. Department of Commerce: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2009). The tourism industry also has significant impacts on the environment and the cultural of destinations where tourism develops. Tourism is often called the "double edged sword". On the one hand, tourism has positive repercussions such as the creation of revenue and employment, increase of incomes, improvement of the cultural level of local communities, exposure to new habits, cultural and ways of life, local communities and environmental awareness. But, on the other hand, it also has negative effects such as increase of water consumption, increase of energy consumption, damage of the landscape, increase of waste, increased number of forest fires and increase of population flow to tourist areas (Almenar, Bono y García, 1998).

Interest in the protection and preservation of the environment is not really something new, but it has increased during the last couple of decades. *'Our Common Future'*, a report by the United Nation's Brundtland Commission (WCED, 1987), marked the beginning of the "sustainable" development concept that was defined *"to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"*. Although many of the concepts of sustainable development existed before *'Our Common Future'* was published, the Commission's report started the process of making sustainable development an important issue on the world stage.

In Rio de Janeiro, in 1992, at the *First United Nations Conference on Environment and Development* (UNCED), more known as *'The Earth Summit'* some commitments were established, being the most important the *Agenda 21*, in which a plan to grow in a compatible way with the environment preservation was proposed. But, it was not until the *III Environment Summit* (Johannesburg, 2002), when sustainable development became a real important issue, being defined the three first dimensions that encompasses: economy, environment and society.

According to the World Tourism Organization (WTO), sustainable tourism requires the management of all resources to assure that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems. Consistent with Agenda 21 plan, the WTO sustainable tourism definition suggests that the following objectives be achieved: minimization of waste, energy conservation and management, water management, management and control of hazardous materials, transport, urban planning, land management, politics and citizens' commitment to the environmental protection, design of sustainability programs, and collaboration for the sustainable tourism development. Because of that those initiatives have been implemented in some destinations and they are having a good and positive reply from tourists affected by, who feel that they are contributing to the protection and the improvement of the natural heritage. Thus, the demand of a sustainable tourism is growing.

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

In 2008, the *Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria* (GSTC) were launched by the United Nations Foundation, UNWTO, UNEP and the Rainforest Alliance at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) World Conservation Congress. The criteria were developed to offer a common framework to guide the emerging practice of sustainable tourism. Mr. Frangialli, UNWTO General Secretary, pointed out that

*"In order to minimize the negative impacts of this growth, sustainability should translate from words to facts, and be an imperative for all tourism stakeholders. The GSTC initiative will undoubtedly constitute a major reference point for the entire tourism sector and an important step in making sustainability an inherent part of tourism development."*

These criteria support a common understanding and establish a minimum standard for sustainable tourism minimum standard that any tourism business should aspire to reach in order to protect and sustain the world's natural and cultural resources while ensuring tourism meets its potential as a tool for poverty alleviation. They are organized around four main themes:
1) effective sustainability planning;

2) maximizing social and economic benefits for the local community;
3) enhancing cultural heritage; and
4) reducing negative impacts to the environment.

## 3. Service learning as a useful student-centered teaching method

Service learning, as teaching methodology, started to become more widely accepted and used in the US during the 1980's and 1990's. Although some people believe that service learning is just another term for volunteer projects, in 1969 the Southern Regional Education Board first introduced and defined the term "service learning" as *"the accomplishment of tasks that meet genuine human needs in combination with conscious educational growth"* (Stanton, Giles, and Cruz, 1999). Service learning has evolved and been supported as an alternative to the traditional passive, didactic process of education most prevalent in postsecondary education and a way to place more emphasis on social responsibility and community (Stanton, 1990). Interest in service learning was demonstrated in the mid 1990's when Kohls, an educator in the disciplines of management, ethics, organizational culture, and leadership, began to require a service learning component in his undergraduate business ethics course (Kohls, 1996). By that time the *National Service Learning Clearinghouse* (NSLC) was founded with the purpose of gathering and managing information on that topic. In 1994 *Michigan Journal for Community Service Learning* (MJCSL) was founded as a resource for educators to learn more about service learning strategies. The study of service learning is relatively recent, but it has grown rapidly within teaching institutions of all educational levels during the last decade.

According to the NSLC[1], *"Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities"*. Because the concept of service learning is still evolving and gradually gaining acceptance, there is often a lack of agreement on a clear concise definition. This lack of clarity has encouraged a great deal of experimentation in developing service learning experiences. Service learning activities are different from volunteer activities because service learning not only enhances the community but also results in student learning. Volunteer activities that provide a service without a learning component are not less important than service learning, but rather have different objectives. Both are valued components of an effort to increase citizen involvement in community service at every age. Research in service learning demonstrates that learning through service is a more dynamic process wherein academic and cognitive development enhances a students' personal and social growth.

Regardless of the different interpretations of service learning, the basic tenant is that it is form of experimental education where students work in a real situation addressing real needs within the community (Gallagher, 2007). One of the basic constituents of service learning is that it occurs within a community with other students and community partners (Cook, 2008). Participation in that social project helps students develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of the subject taught. Research demonstrates that through service learning, students have the opportunity to develop professional and personal competencies that are not so easily gained with

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[1] Web site of the NSLC: <http://www.servicelearning.org/what_is_service-learning/index.php>. [Retrieved 08/20/08].

traditional teaching methodologies (Bonczek, Snyder and Ellis, 2007; Coffey and Wang, 2006; Flannery and Pragman, 2008; Gallagher, 2007). Thus, service learning combines both service objectives with learning objectives that change both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content. Through service learning, students are providing a service to the community and, at the same time, learning and developing an understanding about a field of study, learning how to interpret issues to the public, and practicing communications skills by speaking to residents. Students may also reflect on the service learning experience and may change their personal and career interests. Likewise, the service that students provide to the society help them to become social responsible and to involve them in such important current issues such as sustainable development. Service learning is transforming both communities and students by intentionally combining service with learning. Because it is such an effective teaching and learning strategy, service learning is often linked to educational institutions courses; however, it can also be organized and offered by community organizations. Whatever the setting, the core element of service learning is always the intent that both providers and recipients find the experience beneficial, even transformative.

An important feature of service learning is that it can include a variety of teaching strategies such as class lectures, discussions, assigned readings, independent research, collaborative projects, and reflections (Cook, 2008). Typically the process includes three approaches: 1) reflection, 2) content knowledge, and 3) skill development. Reflection differentiates service learning from other forms of experiential learning in that it stimulates deeper thinking and an opportunity for students to examine their own beliefs, values, and stereotypes. A successful service learning project also requires content, and background knowledge about the context in which the project will be conducted. This background might include a deeper understanding of history, sociology, culture, economic, and political environment (Cook, 2008). A third component is skill development, which may include the use of a foreign language, interview development and skills, and the use of technology.

According to Gallagher (2007), there are three components to service learning: enhanced academic learning, service to the community and civic learning. The lessons from those three components converge in the activity of reflection. That activity is one of the features of service learning that make a difference between that teaching method and other also experimental ones and that help the students to review and deeply learn about the concepts and theories that they were taught in class. Final reflection can take several forms, such as writing in journals, making presentations, discussing the experience or writing a report. It is through the reflective process that the student reviews the work he or she has done and relates the experiences to the course's learning objectives.

Related to the benefits of service learning, we have to consider that not only students benefit from service learning projects. Faculty and universities and also the community realize some benefits, as well. As we mentioned before, students deepen their understanding of the skills and knowledge taught in class, often improving their grades and refining with writing skills, problem-solving capabilities, and critical thinking abilities. Concerning to the faculty benefits, the opportunity to witness

students' application of knowledge provides a clearer assessment of the students learning. Faculty may themselves gain greater awareness of their field and community and develop networks outside academia. And, lastly, the community benefits as well from service learning. The most obvious benefit is the free assistance in delivering the service or completing a project for non-profit organization. Thus, students may bring new energy and creativity to the organization (Gallagher, 2007).

But there are also difficulties related to service learning projects. For instance, students may have the perception that a service learning project is additional workload to the course. They may have unproductive teammates or may encounter organizational supervisors who are less than helpful. If the reflection activity is not well structured, they may fail to make the connections that the project is intended to elicit. The most cited difficulty faced by faculty concerns the time needed to develop and monitor the service learning projects as most of the time they do not received any help or assistance for the development of service learning activities. Community organizations may face difficulties when participating with service learning projects. Students may not be mentally and academically prepared for the service; their attitudes and schedules may inhibit their performance and limit the potential benefits to both parities. There is also a time investment for the organization to train and supervise students (Gallagher, 2007). However, taken into account the rapidly growth of service learning implementation within all level of educational institutions, it is undoubted that benefits are larger than difficulties. This paper demonstrates an important example of not only the impact of service learning from the educational point of view but the impact of service learning on role that universities must play in the society. For the purposes of this project, student learning objectives were identified as being culturally experiences, ability to work in teams, ability to conceptualize the big picture, and ability to support sustainable practices in communities and businesses.

The following section presents an ongoing service-learning project focusing on supporting sustainable business enterprises through the creation of a Green Map by students and faculty Pace University (New York). This project is expected to be a model for similar Green Map project focusing on service-learning and sustainability at the Universidad de Sevilla.

The format of the following sections will be: 1) description of Green Map Systems and the importance of community mapping, 2) description of the international field site for the service-learning project focusing on sustainability, 3) phases of the project, and 4) outcomes in terms of student learning/behaviour.

*3.1. Green Map System*
Green Map System constitutes a global project based on community mapping that began in 1995 and has evolved into a vibrant sustainability project. The Green Map System organization (GMS, http://www.greenmap.org) represents a global movement of citizens who chart their natural, cultural, and green and sustainable resources in 474 cities of 55 countries around the world. The mission of Green Map System is: 1) to strengthen local and global community networks, 2) to expand the demand for greener choices, 3) to promote inclusive participation in sustainable community development around the world, using mapmaking as the medium. The motives for Green Mapping

can be as varied as the communities themselves. Today there are 600 locally-led Green Map projects in 55 countries that bear Green Map icons featuring: green economy, mobility, technology and design hazards and challenges, land and water, flora and fauna, cultural character, outdoor activities, eco-information, public works and landmarks, and more. These universal icons, that include 170 different icons that constitute the heart of the green map, are provided by GMS and have been created by citizens from around the world for use as a universal language in the development and use of Green Maps. Icons are used to mark specific locations of interest on Green Maps around the world and give consistency to the Green Mapping initiative as a universal language.

Community mapping is not just a product, but rather a process where in the community becomes involved and has a voice in identifying unique and authentic characteristics they would like to feature about their community. That process contributes to the respect for the authenticity, culture, natural resources and history, all which is considered key factors within the tourism sustainable development. Because of that the involvement in the creation of maps becomes a good opportunity to join efforts from communities, governments, companies and all kind of organizations in the tourism sustainable development. Thus, the strength of Green Mapping is based on the involvement of a community. Through the process of community mapping, the stakeholders not only gain a voice about the nature of their community, but also become empowered to make decisions about what they want their community to be (Parker, 2006). In the green map projects different type of professionals, as designer, architects, engineers, social workers, and students, and also all kind of organizations and governments and NGO's are involved. Most of those green maps are created in workshops or in the classrooms of all level of educational institutions.

*3.2. The International Field Site: Paraty, Brazil*
The location for this project is the Brazilian Atlantic Rainforest, located between Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. This rainforest is considered to be one of the most ecologically endangered in the world. Continued business development and the spread of tourism are presenting challenges to social and ecological sustainability in this area. Specifically, this Green Map project is based in Paraty, Brazil, a 16th century colonial Portuguese fishing village and has been nominated to be a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) destination.

In Paraty, as in many destinations in the Brazilian Atlantic Rainforest, there is concern that increasing tourism is beginning to destroy the environment and to stretch communities beyond their capacity. A number of Paraty business entrepreneurs and host community citizens have expressed a need for their community to focus on sustainable development practices to protect their fragile environment as it related to social, cultural and environmental issues such as water supply, waste removal, and infrastructure. The Paraty Green Map Project is as a public-private global service learning project involving students, businesses, non-profit organizations, government, and local citizens. Since the beginning, Paraty's mayor, who is very interested in sustainable development, supported the Green Map project by encouraging the community to participate with the interviews. Student activity was supervised by Pace University faculty. Green Consensus, a Canadian based non-profit, developed and maintains the website and has also trained the faculty to be able to update the website. All work on this project has been through unpaid volunteers. This project combines

student use of "high technology" in the form of GPS and digital mapping with "high touch" experiences where students work in multicultural teams to conduct face-to-face interviews with local stakeholders in Paraty.

The goals of the Paraty Green Map Project are: 1) to provide students an opportunity to develop global competencies through a service learning project, 2) to educate all stakeholders about environmentally sustainable practices, and 3) to encourage appropriate economic growth of a rural community in the Brazilian Atlantic Rainforest through promotion of sustainable tourism features on the World Wide Web. A major component of this project is sustainable practices and how to introduce those practices into these destinations.

### 3.3. Phases of the Project
### 3.3.1. Phase 1: Research on Paraty Brazil- Research on Location
In January 2005, the Paraty Green Map Project began in the classroom in New York City when Pace University students from the disciplines of political science, English, accounting, finance, marketing, hotel management, entrepreneurship as well as international management began their study of Brazil. This interdisciplinary approach provided the opportunity for students and faculty across disciplines to create linkages and work collaboratively on global competencies, environmental sustainability, and economic development through tourism with Brazilian counterparts.

To prepare for the project, students conduct extensive research on Paraty via Internet sites, research and lay journals, historical references, and travel journals to identify potential locations for the Green Map. Students are introduced to the process of Green Mapping through various readings and visiting the website. The founder and director of Green Map System (GMS) meets with the students to share the vision of GMS as a global initiative to promote sustainability and community participation in the local natural and built environment. The class applied for and received approval from GMS to become the official Green Mappers of Paraty. Core to the process of Green Mapping is the use of standard, internationally accepted Green Map icons that identify the nature of the locations from cultural sites to historic destinations to green businesses.

### 3.3.2. Phase 2: Survey Instrument Development
For a destination, site, or business to be included in the Paraty Green Map Project, the entity needs to have "green practices" which might include the use of local resources, hiring local people, recycling, or other sustainable business practices. GMS categories for documentation include: examples of sustainable economic development, culture and design, renewable resources, information, nature (fauna, flora, land and water), mobility, infrastructure, toxic hot spots and pollution source, and other miscellaneous. To assess the extent to which each potential business/site/destination incorporates these practices, students developed a survey instrument which is administered by teams of students in Paraty. Teams of students interview local businesses, artists, cultural locations, and various destinations.

### 3.3.3. Phase 3: Data Collection in Paraty Brazil (skill development)
After arriving to Brazil, the students work in teams to interview business people and citizens in the Paraty region and record interview and geographic data. On each team, members assume specific roles as: 1) the interviewer, 2) the technology expert, 3) the

photographer, or 4) the translator (who is fluent in Portuguese or Spanish) as few people in Paraty speak English. Teams are assigned to specific geographic regions of the Paraty area and begin the process of data collection through survey interviews with local business people and citizens as well as collecting waypoints using the geographic positioning system units (gps) to identify the exact coordinates of these locations.

### 3.3.4. Phase 4: Data Management
Following the data collection period, the survey interviews and geographic positioning units are returned to a central location. Survey and technical data are recorded and evaluated. Data are uploaded and manipulated to provide layers of information. For the locations within the city of Paraty, Google Map is used to locate the destinations. Universally recognized Green Map icons, made available through GMS, are added to the specific coordinate intersects of the designated locations. These icons provide a degree of standardization for all Green Maps globally. Responses to the interview survey data are entered into a spreadsheet database format. The responses included: type of site, location, name of manager, languages spoken, accessibility, history and description, and sustainable (green) features.

In 2009, the faculty and students determined that the Paraty Green Map Survey should be augmented by a tool which would help evaluate "how sustainable" a business or location was. As a result, they developed an evaluation tool that would weigh various aspects of sustainability (Paraty Green Map and Evaluation Criteria for Paraty Green Map available upon request). Each business or location would earn a score based on their sustainability. To be included on the Paraty Green Map, one must have a score of at least 70%.

### 3.4. Outcomes in terms of student
During the service learning trip, students reflect on the daily experiences pertaining to culture, business, and their expectations. After returning to the classroom in New York City, they complete a survey which consists of quantitative and qualitative questions. Further reflection is completed during the final days of class when students summarize and report on their service learning experience.

The assessment of the impact of the global service learning project is comprised of quantitative student evaluations and qualitative student reflections. A standard student evaluation form is used to assess the students' impression of the experience on the field study using a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the most satisfied and open ended questions. Questions evaluated: 1) whether the student expectations were met for the field experience, 2) the level of involvement of the professor and partners in the project, and 3) the overall satisfaction with the international experience. During each day of the service learning project, there is a dialogue between the students and faculty. Students have the opportunity to reflect of the experiences encountered and how they perceived those experiences.

## 4. Results
The project produced several outcomes in that: 1) students began to develop global competencies; 2) students learned about and used both "high touch" methods to communicate with business people and host community citizens about sustainability and "high technology" geographic positioning units and digital mapping to record

information about business, destinations and sites that were considered to have "green practices"; and 3) Paraty businesses and host community citizens participated in a Green Map project that celebrated and promoted sustainability and promoted economic development and benefits through increased tourism by being included in the worldwide Green Map System.

Through this project, students were able to develop global competencies of becoming culturally aware and culturally conscious, of being able to work in multicultural teams, of being able to negotiate (understand the rules of the game in a different environment), of being able to develop a global mindset, and of being able to understand, experience, and document examples of environmental sustainability.

The results of the qualitative assessment and the student reflections demonstrate that students felt empowered by the opportunity to experience working on a community project in another country. In many instances, their pre-conceived notions about sustainable business practices were challenged. The average scores of the quantitative assessments of level of student satisfaction with their expectations of the field experience, the level of involvement of the professor and partners in the project, and the overall satisfaction with the international experience were 4.9, 4.9 and 5.0, respectively.

## 5. Conclusions

The Paraty Green Map Project demonstrates a method to introduce the concept of sustainability and give students the tools to support sustainability in a service-learning project in an international environment. It provides two tools for gathering information on the sustainability and the history of local businesses and locations (Paraty Green Map Survey) as well as criteria for evaluating the survey (Evaluation Criteria for Paraty Green Map). This project also demonstrates an interdisciplinary approach for incorporating sustainability through service learning in an international environment.

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