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VISITOR IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT:
PERCEPTIONS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

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of Master of Business Studies
in Management at
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Mary June Logie

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the Brundtland Report there has been strong focus on the need for effective environmental management to achieve sustainability and this has intensified since Agenda 21.

Changes caused by increasing visitor numbers and easier access are causing concern in traditional recreational areas such as the chosen case study. Piha is easily accessible to almost one million people in the Auckland metropolitan area. In this fragile coastal environment there are many different perceptions of visitor impact. Conflict amongst user groups and residents is unavoidable unless the issues concerning environmental impacts are clarified.

The key issue is the necessity for baseline environmental assessment that takes into account the perceptions of all stakeholders. Once any conflict of interest has been identified there is a better chance that conservation and development will be balanced and visitor impacts controlled.

A method rarely used in the context of environmental planning is Trochim's Concept Mapping System. This project shows how the system can be applied to clarify environmental perceptions using stakeholder focus groups to clarify and rank important environmental issues. A traditional survey based on issues revealed by the concept mapping process and targeting a different population is used to test the concept mapping findings.

The results of this study show concept mapping to be a useful resource planning tool not only for issue identification but also for providing a readily understood visual system to allow stakeholders to understand the complete picture in order to reach the understanding needed for useful involvement in a planning process. Used alone or alongside other planning techniques, it is shown to have a useful place in a planning system.

Limits of Acceptable Change is a possible community-based planning framework for using the Concept Mapping system to incorporate stakeholders' perceptions. An adaptation of this framework may help achieve sustainable visitor impact management.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person where due reference is not made in the text.

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