

Local Planning for Recreation and Tourism: A Case Study of Mountain Biking from New Zealand's Manawatu Region

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At the local level, planning for recreation and tourism is not necessarily a straightforward process. Local policy makers may be unable to reflect the complexity of the planning process, particularly when it should consider a variety of views representing different stakeholders. In addition, those involved in planning for recreation and tourism have often treated such activities in isolation from other factors which make up the social, environmental and economic fabric of a region. One of the reasons for this may be lack of data, and the research in this article seeks to redress a similar lack in relation to mountain biking in the Manawatu Region of New Zealand. The recent increase in the number of mountain bikers world-wide has prompted studies in the USA and New Zealand, which have indicated a growing concern with environmental impacts, demonstrated attitudes of other recreationalists to mountain bikers and identified a number of management issues. This article presents research conducted in association with the Palmerston North City Council. It suggests that planning for recreation and tourism is often an *ad hoc* and reactive process and recommends the adoption of a more iterative approach.

Introduction

Without planning, human activities would be at best haphazard, formless and disjointed. The roots of modern planning are found in the response to the problems of rapid urbanisation in Britain during the latter part of the eighteenth century (Gunn, 1988; Veal, 1994). At this time planning was primarily a reactive process. Today, planning is generally more proactive. However, it still tends to view issues in isolation rather than in an holistic manner (Butler & Hall, 1998).

The planning process adopted in the recreation and tourism fields tends to display the same characteristics as those found in planning more generally. It is often disjointed and reactive. It is complicated by the fact that the process may involve a variety of landowners, public bodies and private providers, as well as different user groups (Veal, 1994; Williams, 1998). This means that the process is complex and at times difficult to operationalise.

This article considers planning generally and then focuses specifically on recreation and tourism planning in New Zealand via a case study of mountain biking in the Manawatu Region of the country. The main urban-based local government body in the region, the Palmerston North City Council (PNCC), was involved at an early stage in the research. Partly in response to the research findings, the PNCC became active in attempts to manage mountain biking in the

Manawatu region and the article discusses the nature of this involvement. The article also critiques the conventional planning process and suggests an alternative approach to local recreation and tourism planning in the form of a model based on the mountain biking research.

The Nature of Planning

Modern western-style planning can be traced back at least two hundred years to town planning in the UK (Gunn, 1988; Williams, 1998). Town planning emerged when the population became increasingly urbanised and was, largely, a response to the increasing 'evils' of urban living in terms of social and environmental impacts (Gunn, 1988). This rationale for planning is still important today. As Williams (1998) suggested, without planning there is the risk that an activity will be unregulated, formless or haphazard and likely to lead to a range of negative economic, social and environmental impacts. Gunn (1988) made a similar point when he claimed that the absence of planning can result in serious malfunctions and inefficiencies.

In its early stages modern planning may have been largely reactive but as Gunn (1988) suggested, it now requires 'some estimated perception of the future' (Gunn, 1988: 15). Williams (1998) concurred with this view and claimed that planning today is a forward-looking process for anticipating and ordering change. Although planning experiences vary across the globe, some form of official planning has taken place almost everywhere (Gunn, 1988).

In relation to the objectives of modern planning, Williams (1998) suggested that it seeks optimal solutions to perceived problems and that it is designed to increase, and hopefully maximise, development benefits, which will produce predictable outcomes. However, Gunn (1988) indicated that planning may be viewed as rather an abstract concept, and does not necessarily imply action. Gunn (1988) employed the ideas of Lang (1985) to differentiate between strategic planning and conventional planning. Lang (1985) suggested that conventional planning separates the planning from the implementation stage, has only vague goals, is reactive rather than proactive, periodic rather than consistent and fails to consider the values of those individuals and organisations involved. Strategic planning, however, according to Lang (1985) is action-oriented, focused, ongoing, proactive and considers the values of those involved. Gunn (1988) made use of these ideas when he argued the need for greater strategic planning, particularly in relation to tourism.

Leisure Planning

For the purpose of this article, leisure is seen to include both recreation and tourism (Hall & Page, 1999; Spink, 1994; Veal, 1994), particularly as the focus is on activities which can be considered as either outdoor recreation or tourism. The more specific planning framework for this article therefore falls within leisure and the provision made by the public sector at the local level. Traditionally, there has been a split between outdoor recreation and tourism provision, with the former being provided by the public sector and the latter by the private sector (Hall & Jenkins, 1995). However, since the mid-1980s this distinction has largely disappeared in western countries.

Within the British context, Veal (1994) identified three phases of leisure planning: the demand phase 1960–1972 in response to a rapidly growing population base; the need phase 1973–1985 where the focus was on the needs of particular groups; and the enterprise phase 1985 to the present, which has seen the rise of private providers, with the government seeking to distance itself from leisure provision. Veal (1994) identified ten different approaches taken to leisure planning and the outcome sought by each approach. Of particular relevance to this article are the approaches suggested by Veal (1994), which seek to meet the needs of the community or provide a range of leisure experiences. These include the Hierarchies Approach, Priority Area Analysis, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, the Community Development Approach and the Issues Approach (Veal, 1994). Veal (1994) also suggested that planning within the context of recreation has often been focused on the day-to-day management of facilities and open spaces in urban areas, particularly where the provision is the function of local councils and hence in the public sector.

Spink (1994) introduced the concept of leisure action spaces, which range from the home, through the local neighbourhood and the region, to national and international levels. Within these spaces, individuals have the choice of pursuing various leisure options, including visiting heritage sites, resorts and the countryside. He argued that most leisure activities in the UK take place within urban areas, including the urban fringes such as country parks, green-belt areas, footpaths and bridleways.

In relation to tourism, most of the early planning was very site-specific and linked to the supply side (or destination end) of tourism activity (Gunn, 1988; Williams, 1998). This geographical focus helps to explain the rationale often provided for tourism planning. Williams (1998) provided such a rationale when he stated that there is now enough evidence around the world to suggest that unplanned tourist destinations are those associated with negative impacts. In seeking to justify a rationale for tourism planning, Jenkins (1991) argued that all countries should have a planning process in place, to make use of resources in a wise and efficient manner.

Williams (1998) suggested a number of general aims for tourism planning. He indicated that it can help to shape and control physical patterns of development, conserve scarce resources, provide a framework for active promotion and marketing of destinations and can be a mechanism to integrate tourism with other sectors. More specifically, Williams (1998) suggested that tourism planning has a number of key objectives. He indicated that it provides a mechanism for the structured provision of tourist facilities over quite large geographic areas. Another objective focused on co-ordinating the fragmented nature of tourism and made particular reference to accommodation, transport, marketing and human resources. Williams (1998) also linked planning to the notion of sustainability and argued that sustainability requires certain interventions to conserve resources and maximise benefits to the local community. He indicated that the most common form of intervention is a tourism development or management plan. Furthermore, Williams (1998) argued that planning can lead to the redistribution of tourism benefits and hence can be used to assist in the development of new tourism sites or the economic realignment of places that tourists have begun to leave. Two other objectives for tourism planning were considered

important by Williams (1998). First, he suggested that integration gives tourism a political significance and hence provides legitimacy to an activity that has not always been accorded this status. Second, planning can be an attempt to match supply and demand for tourism services/activities.

However, planning for recreation and tourism is not necessarily a straightforward process (Coccosis, 1996; Gunn, 1988; Spink, 1994; Veal, 1994; Williams, 1998). Williams (1998) suggested a major problem is that planning operates at a range of scales, from national, through regional to the local level. This can contribute to problems of co-ordination. Williams (1998) suggested another problem of tourism planning is that it encompasses many activities and, although it may address physical, economic, environmental and business concerns, it does not necessarily blend these together well. Coccosis (1996) concurs with this view and argued that until very recently one of the activities relating to tourism planning, environmental conservation, was seen as being a threat to economic and social development. Similar concerns are associated with outdoor recreation planning, where the increasing pressures on limited environmental resources have led to environmental degradation (Chavez, 1997; Hammitt & Cole, 1998) and conflict between different user groups (Hendricks, 1995; Moore, 1994; Ramthun, 1995; Watson, 1995).

The previous paragraph indicates that the context for recreation and tourism planning is one where conflict may occur. Reference to conflict infers that tourism planning is a political process. Gunn (1988) and Veal (1994) confirmed this view and suggested that planning for recreation and tourism relies heavily on values, and they argued that community values are particularly important. A recreation and/or tourism policy should therefore reflect the values of stakeholders and interested parties (Gunn, 1988; Veal, 1994).

Fennell (1999) argued that tourism planning requires a policy that states the aims and objectives to be implemented in the planning process. In addition, Gunn (1988) suggested that, for plans to be implemented, governance is required and Fennell (1999) stated that implementation is usually done by governments. However, Lickorish (1991) claimed that government has often viewed the responsibility of tourism policy as lying with the private sector. Williams (1998) and Hall and Jenkins (1995) also discussed this problem, and indicated that recreation and tourism planning increasingly involves both public and private sector bodies. Gunn (1988) suggested that this mix of private and public sector responsibility for planning is one of several reasons why tourism planning has not been as effective as planners may have wished. Some of these issues are also pertinent to the New Zealand situation.

Planning in New Zealand

The key piece of legislation relating to planning in New Zealand is the Resource Management Act (RMA), which became law in 1991 and replaced 59 previous resource and planning statutes. The RMA provides a legislative framework for managing land, air, water, coastal, geothermal and pollution issues under one umbrella. The overall aim of the RMA is to promote sustainable management, whilst at the same time developing and protecting resources which enable social and economic well-being (Gow, 1995). One of the key

changes from previous legislation is that the RMA is primarily concerned with the effects of land uses on people and/or the physical and biological environment, as opposed to actually determining land use (Gow, 1995).

Page and Thorn (1997: 64–65) suggested that 'the RMA should encourage public sector planners to adopt a more holistic view of development and the way in which tourism affects the environment and population within a sustainable framework'. Under the RMA, the management of natural and physical resources is delegated to regional and local authorities. Locally, the district or city councils are responsible for developing a district plan, which identifies community objectives over a ten-year period and specifies the processes for achieving these (Page & Thorn, 1997). The Conservation Act 1987 requires the Department of Conservation (DoC) to prepare management plans for all the land under its jurisdiction, which currently is around one third of New Zealand. This is important because a significant amount of outdoor recreation and tourism takes place on the conservation estate. In some areas of New Zealand, DoC land is adjacent to local or regional council land, which may require some co-operation between agencies in terms of the policies and practices adopted in each area.

Leisure Planning in New Zealand

Much leisure planning in New Zealand has been associated with the provision of sport and recreation facilities in the form of playing fields, recreation centres and swimming pools (Department of Tourism, Sport and Racing, 1994). However, whilst local government allocates money to managing these recreation facilities and open spaces, only a small amount tends to be invested in planning. This has resulted in an *ad hoc* approach to leisure planning, rather than an approach which involves integrating a number of information sources, so as to ensure policy decisions are based on informed decisions (Department of Tourism, Sport and Racing, 1994). Over the past ten years issues associated with sustainability have emerged in recreation planning. With the socio-economic and political changes occurring in urban and regional areas of New Zealand have come questions of not only environmental but also social and economic sustainability. It is, therefore, argued that leisure planning needs to be seen in the wider political context and integrated with local and regional planning, rather than be regarded as an optional extra (Department of Tourism, Sport and Racing, 1994).

Most initial approaches by recreation and tourism providers are made to local councils, as they are responsible for determining the effects of land use under their jurisdiction according to the RMA. Page and Thorn's (1997) study suggested that research with respect to tourism is undertaken by over half of all councils in New Zealand. The majority of this research focused on visitor numbers, with little being conducted in the area of resource sustainability or visitor satisfaction. Dymond (1997) came to similar conclusions in his research and his findings suggested that 'local resident satisfaction is only being measured within a third of local authority areas ... indirect sources are dominant, for example local authority strategic plan consultations and resident satisfaction surveys' (Dymond, 1997: 289). He concluded that more research needed

to be centred on supply-related issues, which consider the sustainability of the tourism resource base.

In relation to tourism, planning is often regarded as something that appears to be conducted retrospectively rather than in a proactive manner (Gunn, 1988; Williams, 1998). In the New Zealand context, Page and Thorn (1997: 70) suggested 'that tourism is identified as an activity requiring promotion, rather than something which requires strategic planning'. This finding is supported by both Butler (1991) and Dymond (1997). Furthermore, the RMA encourages a focus on individual project impacts, which in turn has meant that local recreation and tourism planning often takes place on an 'as required' basis, rather than as part of an integrated approach (Page & Thorn, 1997).

Of particular importance in New Zealand is that the nature of regional and local planning rarely falls squarely into either urban or rural. More often than not local councils have to address planning issues associated with semi-rural or semi-urban environments. This in itself requires councils to take a broader approach to planning issues associated with their area than may be the case in, for example, the United Kingdom. Whether the planning issue under consideration is recreation or tourism focused, urban or rural, it appears that there is a need for an integrated proactive approach to planning.

Mountain Biking Research

Within the context of a rapid growth in outdoor recreation over the last 20 years, mountain biking is a relatively new activity when compared, for example, to tramping (hillwalking), rock climbing and kayaking. Mountain biking requires similar geographical characteristics to other outdoor activities and hence the pressures on public land have grown accordingly. In addition to this, technological advances of mountain bikes have enabled riders to access areas not possible previously (Chavez *et al.*, 1993). The numbers involved in mountain biking have increased rapidly in the past decade and accompanying this growth has been the development of clubs to represent mountain biker needs to managers, as well as providing competitive and social activities for their members (Hollenhorst *et al.*, 1995). As a different type of outdoor activity, mountain biking requires different management approaches, which to date have often been reactive rather than proactive (Hendricks, 1997).

An important result of the rise in mountain biking and the associated pressures on natural resources has been increasing public scrutiny (Hollenhorst *et al.*, 1995). However, academic research into mountain biking is a recent activity, dating from the late 1980s/early 1990s and therefore little is as yet known about its impacts and relation with other activities. Consequently, there has been little research into management implications of mountain biking. The majority of the research that has been conducted has occurred in the USA. This has been concerned mainly with the characteristics, preferences and attitudes of mountain bikers, although a small number of studies has focused on management implications (see Chavez *et al.*, 1993; Hollenhorst *et al.*, 1995; Chavez, 1996a; Chavez, 1996b).

Within the USA there has been a focus on rider satisfaction (or lack thereof), the conflict between different user groups, resource impacts, safety issues and

regulation (Hollenhorst *et al.*, 1995, Chavez *et al.*, 1993, Moore, 1994). A study by Hollenhorst *et al.* (1995) indicated that the majority of mountain bikers in national forests were young, highly educated affluent males from urban areas. They tended to be day users who mountain biked with their friends in an informal manner.

Management concerns relating to mountain biking in the USA have been researched by Chavez, (1996a; 1996b; and see Chavez *et al.*, 1993). In the 1993 study (Chavez *et al.*, 1993) Chavez reported that most Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management areas used by mountain bikers had no designated mountain bike areas and only a few had specific management plans. These recreation managers were primarily concerned with conflicts arising between mountain bikers and other user groups, followed by environmental degradation associated with mountain biking. Moore (1994), in his synthesis of a number of USA-based studies, also noted the issue of conflict on multi-use tracks. He identified that conflict is due to a number of factors, which need to be taken into consideration by recreation managers in order to maintain user safety, protect the natural environment and provide opportunities for high quality user experiences.

The findings from Chavez's (1996a) survey of national forest managers suggested four distinct approaches for managing mountain biking within the Forest Service. These are as follows:

- ... direct, which includes limiting use and law enforcement;
- ... indirect, which includes education and information provision;
- ... visitor management/resource hardening, such as track maintenance;
- ... bridge-building, which looks at co-operation between different parties involved and volunteerism.

Chavez's (1996b) study supported her earlier findings, with the addition of safety issues and accidents playing a more prominent part in specific management problems associated with mountain biking. In this study, managers were particularly concerned about environmental impacts (Chavez, 1996b). The main environmental impacts of mountain biking are well summarised by Chavez (1997). She divided the environmental impacts into damage pertaining to the trails, the soil, the water, the vegetation and issues related to users. Chavez (1996a, b) also called for research into ways partnerships could alleviate conflict, minimise resource damage and have an effect on community development. Widmer (1997) indicated that the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) promotes formal mountain bike rules, which are aimed at reducing both environmental damage and user conflict. These rules are as follows:

- (1) Ride on open trails only;
- (2) Leave no trace;
- (3) Control your bicycle;
- (4) Always yield the trail;
- (5) Never spook animals; and
- (6) Plan ahead. (IMBA cited in Widmer, 1997: 24)

Within the British context, Ruff and Mellors (1993), conducted a survey through clubs affiliated to the British Mountain Bike Federation to establish a

profile of mountain bike riders, their preferred locations for cycling and any problems encountered. They also suggested that 'there has been little solid evidence to suggest that mountain bikes are any more damaging to bridleways than many pairs of feet or horses hoofs though in some cases they can contribute further to problems caused by over-use' (1993: 105). The management suggestions resulting from their research included the need:

- ... to recognise mountain biking as a legitimate form of outdoor recreation;
- ... to improve signage;
- ... to provide more information to managers and planners on mountain biking; and
- ... to raise the image of mountain biking.

Mountain Biking Research in New Zealand

Mountain biking is becoming increasingly popular in New Zealand. The first National Mountain Bike championships were held in 1986 with 45 competitors and in 1997 it was necessary to limit entries to 1000 (Parker, 1997). A small number of studies of mountain biking have been conducted in New Zealand. Cessford (1995a, b) working on behalf of the Department of Conservation (DoC), conducted what can be considered the most comprehensive studies to date. His first study reviewed the literature on the physical and social impacts of off-road mountain biking. Cessford (1995a) concluded that the physical impacts of off-road mountain biking were no more damaging than, for example, trampling by feet. Instead he suggested that the focus should be on safety issues and social impact. Cessford's second study (1995b) involved working in several locations near Wellington, where he investigated the characteristics of mountain biking participants, the perceived impacts of the activity and the management implications. He found that participants were predominantly young males (aged 18–30), who generally belonged to biking clubs. In relation to the management issues Cessford (1995b) indicated participants believed reports of impacts were exaggerated; they called for self-regulation rather than external regulation and wanted access to new natural and semi-natural areas.

There have been a number of other studies, which have contributed to the understanding of mountain biking in New Zealand. Horn's (1994) study of mountain biking based near Christchurch indicated that conflict between different recreation user groups was perceived as a real issue for those involved. She found bikers were disliked more by trampers (hillwalkers) than vice versa. A similar asymmetrical relationship between mountain bikers and walkers was found by Watson *et al.* (1991) in the USA. Horn suggested that one reason for conflict is that bikers are 'activity focused' (1994: 137) while walkers are more likely to be 'location focused' (1994: 138). Horn also claimed walkers felt less in control of their experience and hence felt threatened by bikers.

Coughlan (1996) investigated the relationship between mountain bikers and trampers (hillwalkers) in the greater Dunedin region and reported similar findings to Horn (1994). Coughlan, however, reported that the perceived conflict between the different user groups was greater than the actual conflicts. He suggested that both mountain bikers and walkers/trampers appreciate the natural environment and wish to conserve it as much as possible. In his study

walkers/trampers accepted that mountain bikers needed areas to recreate in and that sharing was an option. He pointed to increased understanding between user groups, as well as information and education as tools for reducing conflict between the groups. Litten (1992) also noted similar concerns in relation to potential conflicts between mountain bikers and other recreational user groups in Central Otago.

While elected bodies in New Zealand have not been particularly quick in responding to increasing demands for mountain biking, there have been exceptions. In 1992, the Christchurch City Council acknowledged that there was demand for mountain biking opportunities and a lack of information regarding existing areas, when it drew up a discussion document entitled 'Mountain Biking on the Port Hills and Christchurch Urban Area' (Sara Gerard & Associates, 1992). The main findings of the report included reference to a lack of suitable tracks for beginners, and to the fact that available tracks individually were too short. There was also a lack of information regarding where to go. Private landowners had concerns about recreational use of public routes which went through their land. The report identified that track maintenance and upgrading would be required by the Council if tracks were to be used more intensively. Negotiation with private landowners regarding access was raised as an issue. Increased on-site signage was also seen as a necessity. The report suggested three options that land managers could consider regarding mountain bike use of public lands: retain the status quo; ban mountain biking from public lands; 'identify suitable routes and encourage mountain bikers to use them through education and promotion' (Sara Gerard & Associates, 1992: 13). This last option was the preferred one as it provided for mountain biking opportunities and was aimed at resolving conflict between user groups, as well as reducing environmental impacts.

Partly in response to the Cessford (1995b) research discussed above, Wellington Regional Council proposed a draft policy on off-road mountain biking (Wellington Regional Council, 1995). The aims of the policy are to seek the facts surrounding mountain biking problems and help clarify the impact of mountain biking on the environment and other track users. The policy suggests that in most areas environmental impacts of mountain biking are minimal, but where there is significant impact on tracks it is manageable and no more than the impact by other track users. The Wellington Policy Document suggests that the 'social' impacts of mountain biking pose the biggest problem. Walkers, however, perceive the danger to other users to be significant but in reality it is not matched by recorded incidents. The policy also suggested that mountain bikers are at risk themselves, particularly when travelling at speed or racing downhill. The goal identified in the policy is for mountain biking to be accepted as a legitimate recreation activity on suitable lands within the Region as well as being undertaken and managed in an environmentally and socially sustainable way (Wellington Regional Council, 1995).

The hire of mountain bikes, and associated track development, has become prevalent in many New Zealand rural centres, including Rotorua, Turangi and Queenstown. The same can be said for towns in the English Lake District and rural areas within the United States of America including, for example, Vermont. As mountain biking has grown in popularity there has been increasing concern about its real and potential impacts on the environment (Cessford, 1995a; Chavez

et al., 1993; Hollenhorst *et al.*, 1995). However, in New Zealand and in other parts of the developed world, mountain biking is also being viewed as an activity that has the potential to contribute to sustainable tourism. It has been perceived as non-polluting, attracting 'quality' educated visitors who appreciate natural environments and as being small scale (D. McGahan, Personal Communication, 3 March 1998). These qualities have also been recognised by Destination Manawatu, the organisation promoting tourism in the area. This organisation indicated in its 'Strategic Plan to 2005', that the Manawatu has a central location within New Zealand, offering a rural/urban mix which offers the opportunities for outdoor recreational activities (Destination Manawatu, 1998). One important strategy outlined by the Strategic Plan is to develop packages of experiences for a number of identified target markets and Destination Manawatu has identified outdoor pursuits as one of the product groups they wish to develop links with in order to promote tourism packages to the region (Destination Manawatu, 1998). It is within this strategy that the tourism development of mountain biking in the Manawatu should be seen.

The Study Setting

Manawatu Area and Palmerston North

The Manawatu region is located on the North Island of New Zealand (see Figure 1). It is characterised by its low, rolling plains and is bounded by the Ruahine and Tararua ranges in the East and the Tasman Ocean in the West. The Manawatu River, which flows from north east to south west, is a major geographical feature of the region. Palmerston North, with approximately 75,000 people, is the major city of the region with Wellington, the capital city of New Zealand, being two hours drive south. The Palmerston North city area itself is relatively small, being approximately eight kilometres by eight kilometres. It houses Massey University, the Manawatu Polytechnic and a number of government research centres. The smaller communities of Feilding and Ashhurst are also part of the Manawatu region. Traditionally, the Manawatu has not been a major tourist attraction within the context of New Zealand.

Mountain biking research in the Manawatu

The authors are not aware of other research focusing specifically on mountain biking in the Manawatu Region. In a survey of outdoor recreation in the area around Palmerston North, Denton (1993) noted that the demand for outdoor recreational opportunities in the Manawatu was growing and one source of conflict was between walkers and mountain bikers.

The starting point for the research related to the authors' desire to obtain local material on outdoor recreation and tourism activities for teaching purposes. In particular, the authors were interested in local information on mountain biking to supplement national (Cessford, 1995a, b; Horn, 1994; Coughlan, 1996) and international (Chavez *et al.*, 1993; Chavez, 1997; Moore, 1994; Ramthun, 1995) research, which suggested that user conflict and its associated management were growing issues in the field. This led them to contact the Palmerston North City Council (PNCC) for information. The response was that, despite there being a recreation policy, no research had been conducted to determine numbers of

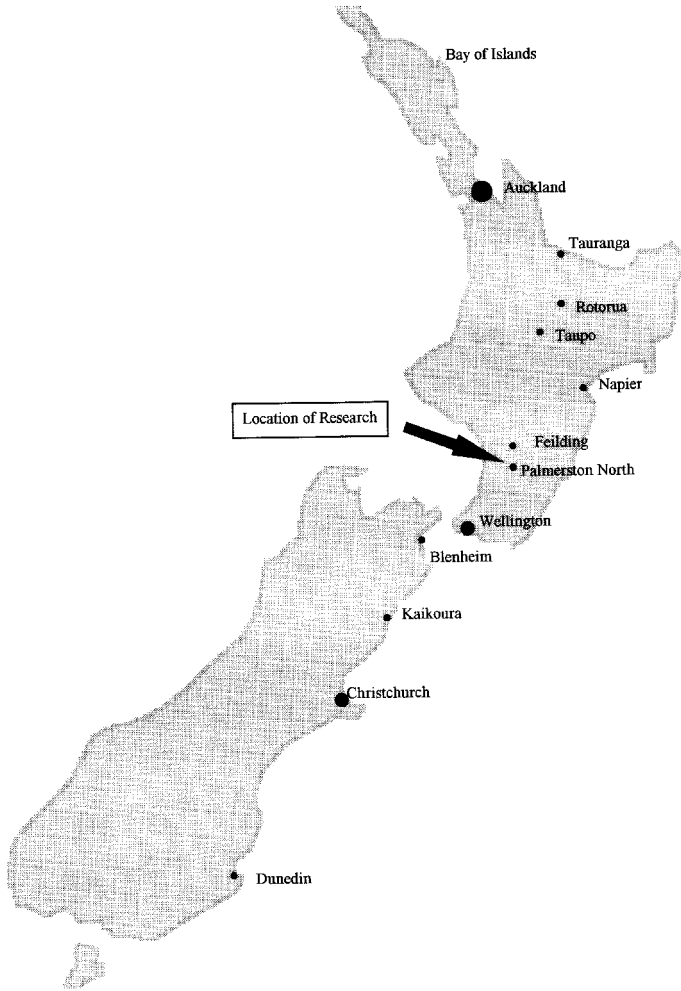


Figure 1 Map of New Zealand

participants and related issues in the area of outdoor recreation. This presented the authors with a dilemma in relation to the intention to use local case study material in their teaching. In an attempt to redress this situation, discussions took place between the authors and PNCC Recreation and Community Development staff. This resulted in the authors, supported by the PNCC, undertaking research into the characteristics and preferences of mountain bikers, as well as the management issues associated with mountain biking.

The council staff of the Recreation and Community Development Unit indicated that they would be very interested in the results of the research. This research was perceived by staff as providing data to support existing policy statements and to assist in the creation of new policy to 2003 (A. Bywater, Personal Communication, 1998). However, they were not in a position to offer any financial incentive to conduct the research as their total research budget was only NZ\$2000 per annum, most of which had already been used. The council did,

however, confirm that they would be able to offer staff time, equipment and resources for the printing, distribution, collection and processing of the questionnaires, as well as the provision of a room and facilities for the focus groups, which followed on from the questionnaire survey. They also offered to fund the publication of the research findings in the form of a report.

Discussions between the authors and the Recreation and Community Development Unit staff led to the decision to target the research at a key stakeholder in mountain biking within the area – the Manawatu Mountain Biking Club. The Club had been established in 1988 by a few enthusiasts and in 1998 had a membership of 80 (L. Carne, Personal Communication, 1998). The Club had been active in encouraging people of all ages and abilities to participate in fun rides and activities. It had also been involved in promoting the Mountain Bikers' Off-Road Code, as well as negotiating with local bodies and private landowners to gain access to areas considered attractive to mountain bikers.

The first stage of the research consisted of a postal questionnaire, which was sent to all current members of the Manawatu Mountain Bike Club together with a post-paid reply envelope. Participants had the option of taking part in a follow-up focus group by signalling their interest at the end of the questionnaire. The response rate represented 58% of total Club membership. Subsequent discussions with the President of the Club indicated that the sample of respondents was generally representative of the membership in terms of age and gender, although the proportion of female respondents was slightly higher than that in the club as a whole. It should be noted, however, that this specifically-targeted questionnaire survey involved only a small number of participants, which is a limitation of the study. Nevertheless, as is discussed below, the findings were very similar to other mountain biking studies in New Zealand.

Summary of Findings

Detailed findings of this research have been reported elsewhere (Leberman & Mason, 1998; Mason & Leberman, 1998). In the context of this article, however, a number of significant findings relating to planning and management issues are presented and discussed.

Respondents were asked to indicate from a list of thirteen features which five were their most preferred. Responses showed the five most important features of mountain biking in descending order were:

- ... skill challenge;
- ... exercise/fitness workout;
- ... exploring new areas;
- ... physical challenge;
- ... riding/socialising with friends.

Participants were asked to provide their opinion on a number of statements relating to their enjoyment of mountain bike riding. The statements and the response scale were adapted from Cessford (1995b) in order to make it possible to compare this survey's results with those he obtained for the Wellington region. The five features most referred to in the Manawatu study were as follows:

- (1) riding on narrow tracks/paths;

- (2) doing downhills which are steep;
- (3) travelling through native bush/forest;
- (4) doing downhills which are gentle;
- (5) doing uphill which are gentle.

In relation to 'favourite riding conditions' in the Manawatu study, there was a preference for forested areas, with a mix of uphill and downhill on single tracks with some technical difficulty. The riding times indicated a timeframe between two to three hours as being preferable.

In order to obtain participants' opinions on management issues relating to mountain biking, 15 statements were provided. Participants were asked to indicate on a Likert scale (1–5) how much they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The statements receiving the highest degree of agreement in descending order were:

- (1) responsible riding and attitude would reduce conflicts;
- (2) information on alternative places to ride would reduce conflicts;
- (3) a few irresponsible riders cause most problems with riders;
- (4) riders should follow voluntary codes of behaviour (safety/impact);
- (5) environmental damage by mountain bikers is overestimated;
- (6) walking tracks with many walkers are unsuitable for riding;
- (7) mountain biking is compatible with walking on tracks.

The statement provoking the greatest degree of disagreement was 'mountain bikes should not be allowed on established walking tracks'.

In relation to other track users, all but two of those questioned indicated that they were aware of other users of mountain bike tracks. The main users identified were walkers, followed by trail bike (motorcycle) riders and trampers, with these categories referred to by at least half the respondents. Four-wheel drive vehicles and horse riders were also noted as significant 'other users'. In the focus groups, a number of comments were made about other users in relation to areas used by mountain bikers. Much discussion centred around the image that other users had of mountain bikers and the difficulties encountered when mountain biking. Motor bikes and 4-wheel drive vehicles were identified as being the worst problem for mountain bikers, because of the damage caused to the tracks. The difficulties with horse riders and walkers/trampers were mainly confined to the fact that it is difficult to hear them coming along the tracks. This leads to stress. As one participant put it: 'Because I might meet a walker I can't quite relax and that creates a different type of biking trip'. It was also acknowledged that the same goes for walkers who cannot hear or see the bikes, particularly on windy tracks.

According to the respondents, mountain biking was taking place at 16 sites around the area, but some sites were more popular than others. Four sites in particular had been used by between half and two thirds of respondents. Three of these coincided with the 'favourite' sites of mountain bikers. Just over a half of those questioned indicated that access was a problem for them as mountain bikers. Respondents wanted to be able to ride on particular roads, but were unable to do so because of access problems. Apart from the need to improve the existing areas, a need for more accessible mountain biking venues was highlighted in the focus groups. Currently, it is necessary to have a car to get to moun-

tain biking venues around Palmerston North. Whakarewarewa Forest in Rotorua was given as an example of a mountain biking opportunity practically in the centre of Rotorua. Possible locations were identified, including an area reclaimed by the diversion of the Manawatu River, a redundant landfill site and part of a bridle track adjacent to the Manawatu River.

At the end of the questionnaire an open-ended question asked for other important issues. Two key issues arising were the need for more tracks and more information about mountain biking opportunities. It was suggested in the focus groups that some form of signage on the local multi-use tracks would be very useful in trying to reduce the potential for conflict between different user groups. There was also some suggestion of introducing a one-way system on tracks so that all users were going the same way. Coupled with this was a perceived need for more detailed information in the form of maps of the actual locations, and more general information as to where mountain biking could occur in the Manawatu.

A third issue raised in the questionnaires concerned the need for increased consultation with landowners and the Department of Conservation. A fourth point raised was the damage done by four-wheel drive vehicles and horses.

In the focus groups, the link with tourism was also made, which was well captured by one participant who said:

We need to push for good areas to mountain bike around Palmerston North to attract tourists. For example, a lot of people travel to Rotorua just to visit the Whakarewarewa Forest to go mountain biking.

One important recommendation made by respondents to the questionnaire survey, and in the focus groups, was the establishment of a mountain biking forum. This was intended to provide an opportunity for ongoing discussion of mountain biking issues, particularly those relating to management, education and promotion of the activity. Staff from the PNCC Recreation & Community Development Unit met with the authors approximately a fortnight after the publication of the report. The council officials indicated that they intended to act on the report's recommendation to establish such a mountain biking forum.

The first meeting hosted by the PNCC and chaired by staff from the Recreation & Community Development Unit was held on September 11th 1998. A number of stakeholders were invited to the meeting by the PNCC staff. In addition to the two Recreation & Community Development Unit staff, those who attended were two members of the Manawatu Mountain Biking Club, a member of a local tramping club (also a mountain biker), a representative from the environmental organisation, Forest and Bird, and a married couple who own and run one of the four bicycle shops in Palmerston North. The meeting started with a summary of the main findings and recommendations of the report and a wide-ranging discussion followed. However, a particular focus was on whether there should be a dedicated mountain bike area or multiple use tracks in the Palmerston North area. It was decided to investigate the possibility of sites within Palmerston North for a dedicated mountain biking area. The main outcome of the meeting was a decision to meet in early October and visit three possible sites for a dedicated mountain bike site in Palmerston North.

As a result of this meeting, three sites were visited in October 1998. A redundant quarry adjacent to a sports field was selected as a suitable site by those who were involved in the visits. This location was chosen as it was viewed as relatively central, allowing access for a high proportion of residents. Council representatives also indicated that it should be possible to establish this as a dedicated mountain biking area. The site was viewed as having the potential to involve children and families. It was seen mainly as a beginners' course, but could also have some technically challenging areas.

At the time of writing, the mountain bike forum has decided to opt for a dedicated mountain biking area, centrally located in Palmerston North, to enable access for both beginners and more experienced riders. However, a final decision on the use of this site is still pending and will be made in consultation with local residents.

Developing an Applied Recreation and Tourism Local Planning Model

Table 1 is an attempt to summarise the approach used in the mountain biking research project, set against what appeared to be the PNCC's response to planning decisions in the recreation/tourism area prior to this.

Table 1 Applied recreation and tourism planning model

	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>
	<i>Council Approach</i>	<i>Mountain Bike Research Approach</i>
<i>Need for Policy</i>		
Initial planning response	Create policy without data	Independent research: questionnaire and focus groups (one user group involved)
Initial consequence	Policy inaccurate?	Recommendations based on research findings
Long-term consequences	(a) User group conflict (b) Needs not met (c) Lack of consultation (d) Lack of involvement	(a) Establishment of a forum (b) Informed discussion (c) Views heard (d) On-going involvement
Time dimension	Quick? (quick fix)	Slow? (continuous monitoring)
Cost dimension	Cheap?	Expensive?
Local political dimension	Satisfies elected council	Satisfies user group

Column A shows the PNCC approach. It is suggested in Table 1 that such a policy is unsatisfactory for the following reasons:

- (1) This approach appears to lack an explicitly stated rationale for the management of recreation/tourism issues.
- (2) The actions of the Council can be seen as reactive, not proactive, and decisions have been made without the necessary data to support them (Gunn, 1988; Hall & Page, 1999; Williams, 1998).

- (3) The consequences in terms of views not being heard, needs not being met and the potential for user group conflict are indicated (Middleton & Hawkins, 1998). The Manawatu-based research suggested the importance of acquiring the views of stakeholders.

The only perceived advantage of such an approach is that it does not involve detailed consultation and is therefore potentially relatively inexpensive. Expediency, rather than what may be perceived as time-consuming data gathering, appears to be the guiding principle. In addition, the political process often requires the compilation of strategies within tightly defined time-frames, which is not necessarily accommodating of the suggested 'research approach' shown in Column B of Table 1.

In contrast to Column A, Column B summarises the approach used in the mountain bike research. This 'research approach' is viewed by the authors as a far more desirable approach to recreation and tourism planning for the following reasons:

- (1) Here, the decision-making was based on the gathering of data relevant to the issue.
- (2) Informed discussion took place. The views of one user group, the Manawatu Mountain Biking Club were stated via the questionnaire survey and the focus groups. The views of the club were also reiterated at the mountain biking forum meetings. Additionally, some indication of the views of other user groups, stakeholders and interested parties, including the council staff, mountain bike retailers and members of the environmental group Forest and Bird, were heard and noted at the mountain biking forum meetings.

Such an approach, as indicated in Column B of Table 1, suffers the disadvantage, however, of being slow and hence perceived as expensive.

There was, however, another limitation to the mountain biking research approach summarised in Column B of Table 1. The 'research approach' described in Column B had only been used in the context of the study of mountain biking. Nevertheless, the authors believed it could have applications in other recreational and tourism contexts. Shortly after the mountain biking research was completed, an opportunity to test the approach was provided in relation to the Manawatu River Walkway and Bridle Track, where the results are pending.

Conclusions

This article has indicated that planning for recreation and tourism is often an *ad hoc* and reactive process. In addition, this conventional planning approach does not necessarily involve an implementation phase (Gunn, 1988). Strategic planning, where a policy will actually be implemented, has been advocated in the fields of recreation and tourism (Glyptis, 1994; Gunn, 1988; Williams, 1998). However, the reality of local government can mean that implementation is not a straightforward process. This is due to local government being tasked with meeting the demands of national government and at the same time responding to the views and needs of the local electorate. Expediency, particularly in terms of

time and cost saving may, therefore, become the guiding principle, at the expense of hearing and reflecting local stakeholders' opinions.

The mountain biking research has suggested that an alternative approach to conventional planning and policymaking could provide opportunities for greater involvement of user groups when making decisions on recreation and tourism activities. As Middleton and Hawkins (1998) argued, it is very important that the views of consumer groups in a tourism context are heard and heeded, rather than these groups having decisions forced on them. Sustainable tourism is unlikely to occur in a situation where community preferences are ignored (Middleton & Hawkins, 1998). The research has also sought to address some of the issues raised by Page and Thorn (1997) and Dymond (1997), in the New Zealand context, with respect to resource sustainability.

Hall and Page (1999) indicated that the planning process should be an iterative process. This means that planning systems should be able to adapt and change. As Hall and Page (1999: 256) state:

they (planning systems) *learn* how to be effective in terms of the most appropriate set of goals, objectives, actions, indicators, institutional arrangements, and practices.

The authors suggest that the model shown in Table 1 has been based on an iterative approach, similar to that advocated by Hall and Page (1999). It is argued that the planning process adopted in Column B of Table 1 may lead to a more sustainable form of recreation and tourism, as the views of one user group have been heard and heeded, rather than this group having decisions forced on it.

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Note

1. This article has been collaboratively developed and written with equal input from each author.

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