

PARTNERSHIPS PANEL:

NATURAL RESOURCE PARTNERSHIPS:

LITERATURE SYNTHESIS AND

RESEARCH AGENDA

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This paper presents a summary of an annotated bibliography on natural resource partnerships. Resource areas and management functions addressed in the partnership literature are examined. Partnership research is summarized and broken into categories including: Partnership outcomes, assessing the potential for partnerships, characteristics of successful partnerships, constraints to partnership success, and stages of partnership development. A research agenda for future partnership research is offered.

Introduction

"Partnerships have become a way of life. You simply don't have any choice if you want to get things done."

Bureau of Land Management employee

In this era of reinventing government, many natural resource managers are turning to partnerships to stretch limited tax dollars while attempting to meet the expanding public demand for quality recreation opportunities. Managers entering the murky world of

cooperative agreements, memorandums of understanding, and challenge-cost share arrangements usually navigate by instinct and gut feelings. But, help is on the way. An emerging body of literature in the natural resource management field as well as in the management sciences is beginning to establish some general principles and guidelines for initiating and sustaining effective partnerships. The following literature review is based on an annotated bibliography of partnership-related research and other professional writings on partnerships. While dominated by descriptive case studies, the partnership literature is expanding to include systematic research examining the dynamics of partnerships. A review of this literature is presented which first examines the resource areas and management functions addressed in this body of literature. Next, a summary of selected partnership research is presented. The paper concludes with a research agenda for future partnership research.

Resource Areas Addressed

Table 1 illustrates how pervasive partnerships have become in natural resource management. Clearly, partnerships are the means by which resource management agencies are responding to a host of non-traditional issues. From Native American policy to cultural resource management, agencies are developing and implementing policy through the use of partnerships. Partnerships have been used less often in managing timber resources on public lands.

Management Functions Addressed

Table 2 demonstrates how partnerships are being used by resource management agencies to accomplishing a number of management functions. One usually thinks of partnerships as a voluntary association of agencies and interests with a mutual interest in a common issue. However, it is interesting that, increasingly, partnerships are being mandated in federal legislation. For example, for a state to receive federal funds for a scenic byway project through the recent transportation bill (ISTEA), a strong local coalition must provide matching resources. Figure 2 illustrates how agencies are using partnerships to address both traditional and emerging management functions.

Table 1. Resource areas addressed in the partnership literature.

Community Recreation (McLean 1993)
Cultural Resource Management (Heid 1990)
Fisheries (Lunn, Begalka 1990)
Historic Development (Heid 1990)
Interpretive Programs (Hoecker 1990)
National Parks (Reinhardt 1993)
Native American Policy (U.S. Forest Service 1990)
Range Management (Tippets, Anderson 1991)
Research Natural Areas (Greene 1985)

Rural Recreation (Long, Keiselbach 1987)
State Parks (LaPage 1994)
Timber Management (Lunn, Begalka 1990)
Trail Management (Jacobi 1983)
Tourism Development (Wallace et al 1990)
Urban Parks (Tindel, Overstreet 1990)
Wilderness (Tippets 1992)
Wildlife (Nelson, Raml 1989)

Table 2. Management functions addressed in the partnership literature.

Administration (Hansen 1989)
Communication (McAvoy, Schatz, Lime 1991)
Compliance with new regulations (Kunert 1992)
Conflict Resolution (McAvoy, Schatz, Lime 1991)
Customer Service (Longan 1988)
Developed Recreation (Long, Kieselbach 1987)
Ecosystem Management (Mott 1985)
Education (Bishop 1991)

Fundraising (Decker 1991)
Marketing (Zeiger, Caneday, Baker 1992)
Planning (Gordon 1988)
Public Affairs (Crowley 1988)
Public Involvement (Heid 1990)
Research (Bishop 1991)
Resource Protection (Vento 1985)
Special Uses (Brown 1986)

Summary of Research: Partnership Outcomes

Predictably, a number of articles have attempted to document the advantages or benefits of partnerships to the participating agencies and interests. Fewer studies have isolated the disadvantages or costs of partnerships to the respective interests. Hansen (1990) described several partnerships initiated between

the USDA Forest Service, commercial outfitters, and other professionals in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. These partnerships involved contracted services for wilderness maintenance, public education, architectural planning, and law enforcement. In all cases, partnerships were touted as powerful management tools and providing significant cost savings to the

Forest Service. Other benefits cited included involving the maximum number of people in the "ownership" of the wilderness area and providing a better understanding of wilderness maintenance issues by all those parties involved. On the negative side, concerns were raised about the managers' ability to control the activity of the partners. Examples of these include verifying the performance of private contractors and substandard or even destructive work by well-meaning volunteers.

Kunert (1992) recently reported on his experience with partnerships on the Los Padres National Forest in California. A core group of Forest Service employees convened to form an Access Team (The 'A' Team) whose vision was to make the Los Padres National Forest accessible to all constituencies. With the battle cry, "how can we help you?", the 'A' Team has been the catalyst for initiating a number of partnerships that have designed and constructed accessible facilities. Summarizing the human payoffs of these partnerships, Kunert noted that understanding increases with participation and that partnerships create an expanding pool of resources, the most valuable of which is the partnership itself.

Assessing the Potential for Forming Partnerships

One line of partnership research has tried to assess the potential for forming partnerships. For example, Norman, Lime, and Roggenbuck (1990) conducted a survey of commercial river outfitters and National Park managers on three popular rafting rivers in the Eastern United States. The researchers had subjects rank the severity of different problems on the rivers and then rank potential solutions to those problems. The researchers concluded that, in many situations, partnerships were feasible because Park Service managers and commercial outfitters had similar views about the severity of problems and finding cooperative solutions. For example, both groups identified litter along riverbanks as a problem and agreed to sponsor an annual river clean-up day.

In another study, Jacobi and Wellman (1983) examined successful partnerships existing between hiking clubs and respective resource management agencies. The researchers explored managers' perceptions regarding performance, administrative considerations, cost-effectiveness, communication, and political considerations. Based on results from extended personal interviews, the researchers concluded that considerable potential existed for expanding partnerships between resource management agencies and the nonprofit sector and that these partnerships could help provide quality recreation opportunities in a time of government retrenchment.

Characteristics of Successful Partnerships

Another stream of emerging research is examining those structural characteristics that typify successful partnerships. A study by Selin and Chavez (1994) is representative of this work. The researchers examined three recreation partnerships—a community project in Eagle, Colorado to construct a visitor information center, an interagency effort in Utah to develop a state scenic byway system, and a community project in St. Maries, Idaho focusing on interpreting the logging history of the area. Key informant interviews were conducted with all the primary players in each partnership. Participants in the study attributed the success of their partnership to many factors including personality traits, ability to compromise, support from administration, and the importance of having a written plan of action. Characteristics of partnership success were grouped into four categories: personality, interpersonal, organizational, and operational.

In another study, Darrow, Vaske, Donnelley, and Dingman (1994) conducted a content analysis of 25 partnerships initiated or supported by the National Park Service. Based on their analysis, the researchers concluded that successful partnerships were characterized by broad-based participation, a written plan of action, identified partner roles, and a plan for involving the public in partnership activities.

Constraints to Partnership Success

With all the euphoria over the benefits of partnerships, less attention has been given to the causes of partnership failure. Yet, research has shown that partnerships are fragile and need to be nurtured at each stage of development. A number of potential constraints have been identified in the partnership literature. Selin and Chavez (1992), in their study of three community partnerships, identified several organizational and operational factors that constrained partnership success at various stages. Organizational factors mentioned by respondents included restrictive personnel and financial accounting policies and revolving door hiring practices that led to a lack of continuity in partnership support staff. Operational constraints identified included lack of a binding cooperative agreement and a loss of momentum when partnership tasks were delegated to people not on the steering committee. There was also a tendency for partnership steering committees to rest on their laurels once initial goals were achieved.

Stages of Development

Finally, research has shown that partnerships are not rigid sets of relationships among organizational interests. Rather, they are dynamic and evolving. Further, partnerships naturally evolve through sequential stages that can be identified. Selin and Chavez (1992) describe a number of economic, social, and political factors that typically lead to partnership initiation. These factors include existing networks, crisis, leadership, incentives, mandate, and a common vision. Once initiated, partnerships were observed to evolve through a problem-setting, direction-setting, and structuring stage of development. The implication for managers is that partnerships may require different facilitative skills at each stage of development. For example, the managerial skills needed to convene a group of strong-willed interests is quite different from those skills needed to maintain partnership momentum once initial objectives have been achieved.

Research Agenda

While descriptive case studies and exploratory research has started to unravel some of the complexities of partnerships, more empirical research is needed to develop general principles and guidelines for initiating and sustaining effective partnerships. Many research questions remain untested. For example, why do some partnerships fail? And, why are partnerships so fragile? How do we measure or define success in partnerships? What are the social, economic, and political factors leading to partnership initiation? What social and organizational factors facilitate partnership continuance and expansion? Research is needed to develop a model of the life cycle of partnerships and to develop a typology of partnerships. Finally, it has been suggested that by involving the public in partnership activities, resource management agencies may be creating a new constituency that will support agency policies in the political arena. Research is needed to test this hypothesis. How do partner attitudes towards the agency change over the course of their partnership involvement?

Empirical research on partnerships has been dominated by descriptive case studies and analysis. Other research designs and levels of analysis are needed. Longitudinal research is needed to examine the life cycle of partnerships and how partner attitudes towards the agency change across the life of the partnership. Our understanding of the dynamics of partnerships would also benefit from a combination of qualitative and quantitative designs. Partnerships should be empirically examined at several levels of analysis including the individual, the organization, and the network. Finally, interested scholars should be careful not to reinvent the wheel. Researchers from a number of social service fields, notably in organizational sociology and organizational behavior, are empirically examining partnerships. This rich body of literature should be consulted before selecting research topics and designs.

Conclusions

The rising tide of interest expressed by managers and academics in partnerships is encouraging. LaPage (1994) provided a lofty vision at the Northeast Recreation Research conference. Partnerships have the potential to "reconnect" our natural resource management agencies to the larger community. Partnerships offer a positive alternative to closures, reduced hours, and minimal staffing as an agency response to downsizing. And, partnerships not only allow agencies to improve service on a smaller budget, but move the agency towards greater control of its destiny. However, partnerships are not a panacea. Managers must do more than give lip service to partnerships. They must create an organizational environment where employees are encouraged, rewarded, and provided the time available to engage in partnership activities. Social science research can help illuminate this managerial path.

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