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# A BIPOLAR VIEW OF ISLAND TOURISM PLANNING. A CASE OF MALDIVES ISLANDS

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## ABSTRACT

The left/right approaches to tourism planning was an allegory in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The bipolar view of tourism planning views matters through recurring patterns of binary separations depending on whether the approach is primarily concerned with an industry focus (rightist) or whether its main aim is addressing social development (leftist). This paper takes Peter M. Burns tourism planning a third way's bipolar view of tourism planning approaches (2004) and applies them to the context of island tourism. This paper further elaborates this view of planning with examples from the Maldives Islands.

**Key Words:** development, island tourism, tourism planning, Maldives.

## INTRODUCTION

Island tourism may not be different from other forms of tourism in the context of various dimensions of 'tourism' alone, but the issues that surround the phenomenon of island tourism are diverse and complex (Poetschke, 1995). They range from the policy and planning issues spearheaded by the government to the day-to-day management and operational issues faced by the individual service providers (Hall & Oehlers, 2000; Conlin, 1996; Wilkinson, 1996). One of the major concerns is that micro islands are physically so small that development potential on them is constrained (Sinha & Bushell, 2002; Mausoom, 1998). There is a general agreement that the development of tourism in the small island destinations is difficult.

### Bipolar View

Bipolar View of Tourism Planning Approaches

The leftist "Development First"	The Rightist "Tourism First"
Sustainable human development	Economic enlargement
Tourism-as-system	Tourism-as-industry
Tourism-as-culture	Tourism-as-consumerism
Modern World System	Globalization
Periphery	Core
Underdevelopment	Modernization
Aiming for an independent, differentiated destination with minimal dependency on the core.	Aiming to maximize market spread through familiarity of the product, undifferentiated, homogenized product development on core with a focus on tourism goals set by outside planners and the international tourism industry
Focus on sustainable human development goals as defined by local people and local knowledge. The key question driving development is "what can tourism give us without harming us?"	
Holistic	Economistic

Tourism Planning a Third Way, Peter M. Burns ( 2004)

The above table illustrates the two ends of planning spectrum. The model views matters through recurring patterns depending on whether the approach is primarily concerned with an industry focus (the rightist - tourism first) or whether its first aim is in addressing social development (the leftist - Development First) (Burns, 2004, p.27). The above table will be used as a framework to discuss planning approaches in island tourism. To further the discussion of tourism planning from a bipolar viewpoint the model will be looked at through the lens of island destinations specifically the Maldives. The Republic of Maldives is a group of atolls



in the Indian Ocean south-west of India, stretching over a total area of 900,000 km<sup>2</sup> but with a total land area of 298 km<sup>2</sup>. There are 26 atolls containing 1190 individual islands. Two hundred of the islands are inhabited, with a total population of 300,000, of whom one-quarter live in Male, the capital island. The principal economic activities are tourism and fisheries. The Maldives are known internationally for their beaches and reefs, and tourism provides 60% of foreign-exchange earnings, 20% of gross national product and 10% of employment (Buckley, Ralf, 2003, p.201). In 2004 the Maldives contained 87 micro enclave resorts with total bed capacity of 16, 858.

Nearly 86 percent of tourist accommodation facilities in Maldives are based on a one island one resort concept which is called enclave tourism. The total tourist arrivals in 2004 reached 600,000 which are close to double of local population. Most tourists come from one region, i.e. Western Europe, and their main interests are relaxation on the white sandy beaches, the tropical island environment, scuba diving or snorkeling. In 1970's resorts were very basic with minimal facilities, some facilities were made entirely of coconut rafters and thatch, while most of the structures were made of coral stone, coconut palm leaves. Today the lodging facilities at resorts are similar to urban hotel rooms with tiled roofs and floors, air conditioning, television, telephones and mini bars, although exteriors still maintain an island cottage look. By the mid 1980's the Maldives became known and still is today for their introduction of water villas or bungalows, built on stilts over the reef flats.

While the Maldives have enjoyed success in their tourism sector, by 2003 several factors came to bear on the present system of tourism planning in the Maldives. These were the impacts of the Tsunami, a shooting incident involving security forces and inmates in the capital that sparked political unrest, and social problems associated with over population in the small capital of Male. This intern resulted in much criticism of the government and president who had been in power for the last 28 years. This has now given rise to a new period of political and social reform that has begun to influence the way tourism is planned and developed in the Maldives.

#### **Leftist:**

The leftist approach or the development first school (Burns, 1999) is concerned primarily with the vision of a destination with minimal dependency on the core and a differentiated product (Burns, 2004). This view also looks to rely on local people and local knowledge to drive tourism goals. It is known that small island states tend to depend on tourism more than non-island destinations (Ellul, 1999; McElroy and Olazarri, 1997; Liu and Jenkins, 1995; Hein, 1990 and UNCTAD, 1990). It is expected that greater community integration in tourism planning leads to increased economic benefits for all or, at least, for many to share. A community with a high level of tourism control and management would ideally have, among other characteristics, a broad-based and open democratic structure; an equitable and efficient decision-making process; a high degree of individual participation (including influence) in decision-making; and a high amount of local ownership (Mitchell 1998:2). The process for planning community tourism destinations tends to be overly simplistic or in many cases non-existent. Frequently, tourism destinations are created through the imagination of an entrepreneur, private firm, or national government, and any planning that occurs is usually from that perspective (Reid and Sindiga 1999). What is critical here is that all those affected by the plan must be systematically brought into the planning process (Fuller and Reid 1998) and not simply in a token way (Arnstein 1969). Many authors (Campens 1997; McIntyre 1993; Reid and Van Dreunan 1996; Wharf 1992) refer to this issue as community capacity building with a focus on education, or leading the community to self-awareness (Freire, 1970), so that the community can undertake further projects with independence and skill. Since tourism aims to alleviate poverty and bring well being and progress to a community it is important that they be involved in the planning process as they will know what they want to be established in their community.

When tourism started in Maldives in 1972 it was not planned and government did not regulate it. As a consequence tourists mainly from Italy used spear guns to catch fish, damaging coral reefs and also taking along with them corals, shark fins, and turtle skeletons as souvenirs. Early tourists also used dynamite to blast the coral reef and catch fish. However, when German tourist started visiting Maldives during late 1970s they voiced their concerned to the resort owners and to the government. As a result government has to come out with regulations that would control the activities of the tourists and protect the ecosystem of the Maldives. As a result spear fishing, coral dynamiting were banned along with the export of shark fins and coral. At the same time tourists mainly back packers staying in islands where locals lived were banned. This was to minimize the negative socio-cultural impact of tourism on the society. Since then the idea of planned development was conceived by the government as well as the private sector. As a result the first tourism law was introduced by the parliament on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1979 after 8 years of development. It was during 1986 the Ministry of Tourism came out with the regulation for tourism development, defining minimum standards (Niyaz, 2002). It was



during 1983 that Maldives government implemented first 10 year tourism master plan (1983-1992). These plans did little in terms of tourism income distribution. It wasn't until late 1990s and early 2000 that people indeed raised voice for better distribution of tourism benefits. Therefore, the ministry of tourism carried out some surveys during early 2000 to identify atolls that are suitable for tourism development. Within the last two years of the survey project period, 9 atolls were surveyed to identify areas/islands that are suitable for hotel/resort development. The aim of this was to identify resort development areas and to expand and maximize tourism benefits to locals in the future (Ministry of Tourism, Maldives, 2004). The Maldivian Government's initiative to expand tourism to all the atolls of the country by opening 11 new resorts will also facilitate income-generation opportunities and open up employment opportunities for a large number of Maldivians, when these resorts become operational in the coming year 2007 (Ministry of Tourism, Maldives). Maldives is at the end of implementing the Tourism Master plan 1996-2005 and the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation is embarking on the development of the new Tourism Master plan. According to the Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation, this process will include wide consultations with local industry members in order to ensure that the new vision for the tourism sector is based on the knowledge, experience and aspirations of the stakeholders. The Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation also stated that the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation will utilize the assistance of foreign experts in formulating the new Master plan. In 2005 Government of Maldives decided to develop a 200 bed hotel in the Fuvammulah which is one of the most southern islands close to equator. It is first time that government decided to introduce tourism in an island where locals live other than the capital Male'. The resorts in operation in Maldives do not have locals living in the resort other than the work force. A new generation of educated Maldivians have completed their further studies and some are already in the high ranking government positions. This has led to formation of various interest groups. For the first time in the history of Maldives some locals opposed to the tourism development project. More than 2000 islanders from Fuvammulah signed a petition saying that it would create negative socio-cultural impacts (Haveeru News Paper, November 17, 2005). In the same article a local farmer from Fuvammulah expressed his dissatisfaction of hotel development saying that he would lose his farming land which enabled him to build a six room house and pilgrimage to Mecca three times. This view does not represent majority of the Maldives citizens as almost the entire population understand the importance of tourism. At the same time they are also very concerned about its negative impacts. The increase connectivity to external sources further broadened the understanding of the tourism industry due to easy access to internet and cable TV and mass media. The recent Hotel in Fuvammulah Island and resort in Hankeda in Addu Atoll was awarded based on a new bid evaluation criteria laid out by the ministry which gives emphasis on employing locals. It was noticed that both the hotels were awarded to new local business owners who are new to the tourism industry. The awarding of island to these new entrants to the tourism industry will make the ownership of resorts wider. It will give a positive image to the government's initiative to help new entrants, small and medium size tourism related companies in the Maldives. The person who owns a resort in a particular atoll in Maldives can control the votes of that atoll. Hence, that person can play an important role in politics. Therefore it is important that resorts be awarded based on a fair and transparent process. As of 2004 December, There are 68 resorts with 13,282 beds leased to locals out of which 49 resorts (10,344 beds) are indeed operated by locals. In the same period 5 resorts (548beds) are leased to foreign companies and 25 resorts (3,774 beds) are operated by foreigners. It is inevitable that local population will be more critical of future tourism development in Maldives.

The dependence of small island destinations on tourism means, amongst other things, that a large proportion of employment occurs in the tourist industry or in tourism related activities. It is not always possible to give precise estimates of such employment because it does not only occur in areas usually associated with tourism, such as hotels, restaurants, airports, seaports, transport, travel agencies, souvenir shops and restaurants, but also in agriculture, fishing, banking, printing, and other activities with which the tourists come in contact, including sections of the public sector (Briguglio, L., & Briguglio, M., 1996, p.1). As mentioned in Briguglio's article from a leftist planning approach it is important to ensure that local community is benefited through the jobs created in the main focal point and subsidiary industry for tourism. There were 67,000 people working in Maldives during 2004 out of which 17,117 people were employed in tourism sector. Almost 44 percent of tourism sector employment is occupied by foreigners, while many locals are unemployed. On the other hand Addu Atoll people seem to be more excited about the government's decision to introduced tourism in Addu Atoll islands. One of the senior government officials was quoted as saying that his island people are in favor of developing a hotel in the Hankede Island. As it would create employment and bring much needed economic benefits (Haveeru News Paper, November, 17, 2005). According to many articles published in the daily news papers recently people were concerned about negative socio cultural impacts that might lead due to opening up hotels in islands where locals live. There are few reasons that could have led to such a mentality. It could be due to Maldives being a Muslim country traditionally allowed non-Muslim practices on tourist only islands, such as the drinking of alcohol. A more related concern could be that from 1972 onwards its only exclusive



island where tourists can enjoy their holiday where locals do not live. Those resorts are exclusively developed for tourism. Hence only tourists and the resort staff reside in the island.

The central government maintains strong control over land tenure and exacts rather substantial lease fees from resort owners, but it has also provided access to education, healthcare and internal telecommunications for Maldivian nationals. Local residents in the atoll of North Male itself say that these services are available to everyone, but it has been reported elsewhere that the benefits are strongly concentrated around Male and that residents in more remote atolls have gained little (Robinson, 2001) (Buckley, Ralf 2003. p 199). The tide seems to be shifting where acceptance of island resort development was accepted without question, it is now scrutinized and challenged to determine if it provides real benefits with direct impact for locals. Due to introduction of multi party democracy during 2005 and increased protests over public dissatisfaction a voice for communicating grievances to the government has been born. For the first time in the history of Maldives an opposition party held a demonstration during the internal Labor Day on May, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006, where locals carried banners in the capital Male which called for more equal job opportunities, health insurance, social security and more worker rights.

### **Rightist:**

The rightist or tourism first approach is concerned about economic growth, relies on trickle-down or multipliers for development (Burns, 2004, p.27). “The benefits of tourism development have largely been seen in economic terms, as in tourism’s ability to generate income, jobs and corporate profits, bring in foreign exchange, boost tax revenues, diversify the economy and aid regional development” (Pearce, 2002, p. 4). However, it is argued that the rightist approach gives the benefits to international tourism industry and local elites according to Burns article. Many island nations have taken up tourism as a means of economic development. Tourism is often regarded as “a passport to development particularly for countries with fewer natural resources other than sun, sea and sand” (Edwards, 1998, p. 1). Tourism is an industry that has the potential to be developed out of what is inherent to the country, namely the natural beauty, and culture. Furthermore, the smallness, isolation and seclusion of islands, which may discourage other industries to be located, provide a positive setting for tourism. It may be easier to market island destinations because of the association of islands and water with holidays and our fascination with the mysteries of islands (Lencek & Bosker, 1998; Baum, 1997). Countries whose economy has been based on a monoculture for years, such as fishing has been in the case of the Maldives, a second industry with huge growth potential appears to get both popularity and economic significance rapidly. One of the reasons could be that the decision on the ‘best usage’ of the island destinations’ limited resource base often becomes a personal and a political decision rather than a patriotic decision. Politicians also tend to have short-term horizons bounded by the need to seek re-election and also their respective personal agendas that may influence decisions concerning the fair sharing of or the best utilization of the resources (Hall, 1994; Middleton & Hawkins, 1998). This is one of the disadvantages of rightist approach of island tourism planning. The question in the case of Maldives is whether the initiative to open up new islands for resort development in 2006 is to help with recovery from the tsunami or to gain political support in the aftermath heavy domestic and international pressure for more democratization.

The number of Maldivian nationals (or companies owned by Maldivian nationals) hold lease of 69 resorts, where as 50 resorts are operated by Maldivians. This indicates that compared to 58.5 percent in 2002, 59.7 percent of the total resort beds from the industry were operated or managed by locals in 2003. All the rest are managed by foreign companies or joint venture by Maldivians and foreign companies (Ministry of Tourism, Maldives, 2004). This leads to foreign companies taking away the tourism revenue and employing foreign management. In addition foreign owned resorts have their own marketing departments and contract out their rooms to large international tour operators leaving local travel agencies at a disadvantage. Villingili Island at Addu Atoll has been leased during August 2000 to a joint venture company formed with the government of Maldives for development of a 500 bed resort (Ministry of Tourism, Maldives, 2004). In addition to local elites in some cases the government also partners with international hotel chains to develop and operate tourist resorts in Maldives. One of the examples was Maldives government forming a joint venture company with Shangri-La Hotel Chain. In 2006 the government of Maldives formed a public company in the name of Tourism Development Corporation which has 55 percent public share and 45 percent government share. The company will develop 15 resorts out of the 35 new islands that planned to be developed from 2006 onwards. The local news papers were critical of the fact that the government appointed local tourism elites to top posts of this company. They mentioned that it might create a conflict of interest as those appointed have their own resort operation in Maldives. Some resorts dissent to the fact that government owned company will be competing with local resorts. This also means that the government’s previous policy of facilitator role for tourism could change more towards competitor or constructive development partner.



For some island destinations, the foreign exchange generated through tourism can be as high as 70 percent (Archer & Fletcher, 1996). Contrary to the suggestion that “social and environmental concerns may be prioritized and tourism development may not always be encouraged” (Williams & Shaw, 1988, p. 231), island destinations often seem to put tourism development ahead of social and environmental concerns. In the case of the Maldives the distribution of individual wealth is highly skewed, with some individual residents owning several resorts and yachts, whereas the average annual salary for resort staff up to lower-level management is reported at US\$ 1200 per annum (Buckley, Ralf 2003. p 199). What is important here to understand who gains and who losses. From a rightist point of view most of the gain is for the local elites who own, or manage island tourism planning and development. With the share of tourism contribution to the GDP of Maldives in the year 2003 close to 32 percent it is quite substantial (Ministry of Tourism, 2004). The chairman of the company that currently has the most number of resort beds in Maldives used to be a close family associate of the president. In fact the government was the guarantor for a World Bank loan given to the same company to develop the biggest resort in Maldives. In fact he is loved by many Maldivian due to his philanthropic work.

In a capitalistic sense, it can be assumed that the private sector would be rather interested in making as high a profit as possible within the shortest time frame (Burns & Holden, 1995). Hence, expecting the private sector to be ‘self regulated’ for long term benefits to the nation may be an optimistic theoretical possibility, which may never be achieved unless the government intervenes (Hall, 2000a). However, when the government also desperately needs tourism revenue, and particularly executive decision makers have a stake in tourism, the hard question is if the government is effectively regulating the tourism industry for the benefit of the nation giving deserved respect to its environment, society, religion, and culture. The private sector is comprised of a limited number of wealthy individuals whose main motive is to make profit without paying much attention to the social well being of the community. In fact some of the biggest Maldivian resort owners have started investing nearby Seychelles and Sri Lanka due to unpredictable political environment in Maldives and also to take advantage multi destination package. It could also be the beginning of Maldivian resort chains gateway to broader international hospitality industry. It could also be due to increased lease rent offered to the government by resort bidders. Maldives is becoming more an upscale destination.

With the signing of the agreement for the Farukolhufushi Island Resort (a former Club Med Island) in the Maldives, Abdul Hameed, the Deputy Minister of Tourism (6<sup>th</sup> November, 2005) said that in the second bidding the highest price was offered by Shaakir. Then rental cost of the island is 11,004,800 US dollars. According to Hameed Shaakir had presented 50 percent of the rent, 5.5 million dollars and given the bank guarantee of the other 50 percent, to the Tourism Ministry, within the ten days allocated for him (Haveeru News Paper, 2005). The private sector of Maldives has been critical of governments bid evaluation procedure which allocates too many points for the rent to the government from the resort. This leads to bidders resorting to high end resorts and constrains small business been competitive in the bidding. This obviously creates a situation where the rich elites become even richer while the small and medium businesses don’t have a fair competitive environment. When local companies offer such heavy rent for the island at the end they don’t have the capability to develop the resort. This leads to sale of the management or development of the resort to wealthy foreign companies or large local resort owners. Such acts of the government lead to negative criticism. It shows that the government is rather interested in generating income rather than sustainability or distribution of tourism wealth.

Some island destinations have committed themselves to tourism to the extent that other industries are getting sidelined and traditional industries are being drastically reduced (Henderson, 2001). One of the industries that have been sidelined in Maldives due to tourism is commercial fishing. Local fisherman and blame government for not fully utilizing fishery sector. Until early 2000 the fish processing industry has been controlled by a government owned company. In the year 2005 there were lot of rifts between the fisherman state owned fisheries company due to the companies inability to meet increased supply of fish from local fisherman. In other words the private individuals have invested in larger fishing vessels while the government owned company hasn’t expanded at the same speed. This again creates a negative impact on the social well being of the island community. Past development planning in the Maldives has been pragmatically dominated by economic forces. This has resulted in a centralized mode of development focused around the capital city Male’ (Nethconsult, 1996). Even though an objective financial analysis may not be possible, a superficial analysis may suggest that indicators that work against the principles of economic sustainability, such as leakages are significant in island destinations. This can be reasoned on the basis of many factors, including the high number of the foreign ownership of tourism supply; level of imports; and expatriates employed in the island destinations (Long & Wall, 1996). Furthermore it is apparent that many industries have declined and the ‘native skills’ of people to do traditional jobs are either lost or not gained in the first place because of tourism, thus giving reason



to question the economic sustainability of tourism in small island destinations (Coccosis, 2001; Wilkinson, 1996). Sometimes those skills are lost because most of the items are imported to the island destinations.

One aspect that constrains the tourism development of island destinations is their self-insufficiency to provide access. Many island destinations may "...find themselves in the unhappy position of having to rely on the services of (many foreign owned) air-lines and shipping companies which make decisions in the best interests of the share holders and which do not consider the very real concerns of islands" (Conlin & Baum, 1995, p. 6).

Tourism in small islands tends to create undesirable economic effects. One of these relates to foreign control of tourism and tourist related activities. Inward tourist traffic is often controlled by foreign tour operators, who often have enough bargaining power to dictate matters related to tourism in the host countries. Also larger scale tourist establishments on islands tend to be foreign-owned, and this may lead to developments which are not in the long term interest of the island itself (Briguglio, L., & Briguglio, M., 1996, p.3). However, The Four Seasons Resort and Club in Las Colinas reached out to help its family halfway around the world in the Maldives. The floods produced by December's tsunamis washed away the jobs of about 400 employees on the tiny island of Kuda Huraa in Maldives. While it is being rebuilt, manager Armando Kraenzlin has been busy finding jobs for his employees. Nearly 200 are working at resorts around the world, and 12 have just come to Irving. "It is a good company, and they take care of us," said Imran Adam a Maldivian. Several employees are working in Chicago, Palm Beach, Fla., and the Hawaiian island of Maui, along with a few other U.S. cities ([www.hotel-online.com](http://www.hotel-online.com)). In this case it shows the international chains can help Island tourism destination at times of difficulty and provide locals means of income and develop skills in their sister companies overseas.

The Shangri-La Maldives Resort & Spa (planned to be open 2006) is stretched out across the beaches of Villingili Island. The Resort is going to be divided into 3 distinct accommodation concepts, offering a range of spa and leisure activities and an array of exciting dining and entertainment facilities ([www.shangri-la.com](http://www.shangri-la.com)). It is argued that while locals in the area lack some basic infrastructure and facilities the tourist see at as paradise and international chains make millions of dollars of profit, while the distribution of tourism revenue to the locals is often negligible. However, the resort will employ a large number of Addu Atoll residents who will be able to commute to work from home rather than choosing to relocate for job opportunities (Aafathis News Paper, November 5, 2005). So the issue to date is whether expanding tourism to new islands in the Maldives is really driven by expanding the economic benefits to locals living away from the capital island or just another way for multinationals to expand tourism and extract its economic winnings.

### **Third Way**

The third way approach as suggested by Burns (2004) provides platform for sustainable growth and human development. Third way approach is more participatory approach than master planning. It takes into consideration various stakeholders of the tourism industry. For a small developing island tourism destination sustainability of the tourism sector is vital, and developmental goals could be achieved through more community participation. The Maldives are in a state of great political and social transition. If the best approach is not applied it could danger the very foundation the whole Maldivian economy is based. The third way approach highlights the importance of the role of various civil institutions. For geographically diverse island nation like Maldives it is essential that tourism planning is intra-sectorally active. All sectors both the private and public need to play real role in guiding the development of the Maldivian tourism industry.

The Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI) represents the private sector travel and tourism trade in Maldives. MATI provides an input to the formulation of marketing campaigns by MTPB through the auspices of the Tourism Promotion Advisory Council, and have also contributed to the preparation of the First and the Second Tourism Master Plans and the 3rd Master Plan which is underway. To date there hasn't been any active non- governmental tourism organization providing input or a civic voice to the government's plan. There is very limited participation in terms of tourism planning by the local island community. This is currently one of the weaknesses of the Tourism Master Plan of 1996-2005. The philosophy behind the Third Way represents the current situation which reveals the loop holes that need to be answered for the growing call for better democracy and civic engagement in Maldives. A participatory planning approach identifies not only benefits to the Maldives but also its problems. Unlike other countries tourism contributes almost 32 percent of DGP directly. Tourism Industry being the biggest industry in Maldives has left many educated and training local ready to take a leadership role in planning. Burns (2004) suggests that if limitations of tourism plans are known beforehand then false expectations will not be raised. Tourism being the most dependable industry in Maldives, there needs to be criteria against which success of the plans can be evaluated. For example, the leakage of tourism receipts



and its contribution to the national development of Maldives. There is no income, capital gains, value added, or corporate tax in the Maldives. Duties are levied on all imported goods with the exception of fixtures, fittings and building materials for the construction of resorts. The liberal fiscal policies in the Maldives mean that foreign businesses are estimated to be able to repatriate 70% of their turnover, and expatriates are allowed to repatriate 100% of their salaries. Officially the net retention of foreign exchange within the country is thought to be 21% although in reality this could be much lower according to preliminary analysis for the third tourism master of the Maldives.

The Third Tourism Master plan for Maldives 2006-2010 will formulate a national long-term strategy for tourism development in the Maldives and will seek to reduce economic leakage from the tourism sector in order to generate more benefits for local inhabitants. It will lead to the reduction in poverty levels throughout the country by increasing national employment levels, work opportunities for women, and by improving human resources development and training within the tourism sector. The plan will seek to maximize the opportunities for community-based tourism. The project will also increase the capabilities of the government to be able to manage the national tourism sector. While these goals are admirable they lack any direct input from the general public, and may not be based on what the citizens want in the of Maldives. The Third Way if applied will spend more time and attention in the pre-planning phase while involving a cross section of tourism institutions.

A more participatory approach to tourism planning could be the answer to rectify some of the flaws in tourism planning in Maldives. If applied it would seek to develop number of systems each supported by appropriate social institutions that would encourage inter and intra-sectoral cooperation and the development of tourism that has capacity to satisfy a full range of actors. This would help address many concerns raised by the political and social changes occurring now in the Maldives.

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