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Balancing Tourism Development and Sustainability: A Multi-Stakeholder Approach in Tofino over 15 Years

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Abstract: The narrow conceptualization of capitalism is increasingly challenged as destinations recognize the need to integrate equity and resilience into tourism development. Increasingly, destinations have been using tourism to move away from extractive industries and there is no shortage of literature outlining the need for a more inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach to ensure that sustainability is at the forefront of tourism development considerations. Whether destinations are actually moving towards the more sustainable development of tourism is not always evident and rarely are studies of destinations undertaken over time. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to examine qualitative research spanning 15 years using a multi-stakeholder approach to understand impacts, issues, and solutions relating to tourism development in Tofino, Canada. Tofino has achieved notable advancements in financial, natural, and social capital but continues to face gaps in addressing other dimensions of the Community Capitals Framework (CCF). Insights from this research to focus on social, human, and built capital earlier on in tourism planning and development may help other destinations who partially or fully depend on tourism for their livelihood. This paper addresses real-world tourism development challenges and encompasses multiple stakeholder views on sustainable development, socio-political responsibilities, governance, leadership, destination management, policies, and other practices.

Keywords: sustainable tourism development; community capitals framework; Tofino; Canada; destination management

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1. Introduction

The narrow conceptual idea of capitalism has come to be tested when destinations realize that efforts towards equity and resilience cannot be afterthoughts. Increasingly, destinations have been using tourism to move away from extractive industries such as mining, and there is no shortage of literature outlining the need for a more inclusive, multi-stakeholder approach to ensure that sustainability is at the forefront of tourism development considerations. As these communities are now dependent on tourism for their livelihood, long-term sustainability through a local, multi-stakeholder process is necessary for destination management. A stakeholder is defined as any individual or group who can affect the firm's performance or who is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives [1]. Through the examination of stakeholder perceptions and roles, destination studies have identified challenges to achieving more sustainable tourism due to politics, economic considerations, coordination between stakeholders, and the accountability of all stakeholders, among others [2–5]; however, the cultural, social, natural, economic and other assets of the community are not always considered as an integral part of the overall management and governance of tourism communities, and therefore,

this interconnectivity is vital to understanding such assets and shifts between them. This paper, therefore, investigates a small community destination based on Canada's west coast called Tofino to understand the following research question: using the Community Capitals Framework (CCF), what is the longer time view of sustainable tourism development to understand the successes and challenges to move towards more sustainable tourism and governance in a tourism community? The research question seeks to understand these challenges and seeing them over a 15-year time perspective could add insight into how sustainability is considered within planning and development for both this destination as well as many others who have used tourism as a development tool.

2. Literature Review

The tourism system has been defined as a complex adaptive system [6]. One way to examine this complex system in a destination or community is through the Community Capitals Framework (CCF). The CCF suggests that there is a need to adopt an approach which adapts a systems level approach to effectively manage natural and cultural resources that may be undermined by local needs for immediate resources [7]. The CCF offers a structure to analyze resources and capabilities within a community and depending on the structure, refers to a number of separate capitals [8–10], namely natural, social, human, financial and built—all of which are interconnected and can potentially affect, weaken, or strengthen one another [11].

A key consideration for this framework is that these interpretations of capital incorporate a wide range of community resources which can relate to tourism. This consideration is also used in a sustainable livelihoods context to explain that sustainable development must have balanced capitals. The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) is considered an approach centered on people and their livelihoods. This approach is a difficult balancing act as different power and relationships are intertwined [12]. Similar to a multi-stakeholder approach, SLA emphasizes that the local people have a voice and their interests and needs are considered for more sustainable development to occur. It is also adaptive as it depends on the situation and context at hand [13,14]. Having a multi-stakeholder approach, i.e., representation from all stakeholder groups or representation of all capitals facilitates resource decision making to ensure interaction and representation of capitals [15].

For this paper, the seven community capitals are used to outline the shift (or lack of) over a 15-year time frame to determine vulnerabilities in Tofino. Capital is defined as resources people and/or communities possess such as "any asset, or group of assets, with the ability to render a stream of present or future benefits" ([15] p. 226). Vulnerability refers to the susceptibility of a 'system' to harm ([16] p. 14). The capitals are portrayed in Table 1.

The CCF literature is considered a more holistic and inclusive way to assess community livelihoods than the SLA [7,18], as it encompasses cultural and political capitals in addition to the main ones outlined by the SLA. There are, however, some critiques of the Community Capitals approach in that it may not equally value all capitals and that tourism can contribute costs as well as benefits [19], especially in that "using tourism as a tool for diversification often leads to a shift or diversification of traditional economic systems to those driven by cash" ([18] p. 13). This paper uses the CCF to examine these issues over a 15-year time frame to monitor to what extent capitals have been represented and it is a useful tool to examine more sustainable tourism development. The research question for this paper seeks to understand the impacts, issues, and solutions relating to tourism development using the seven capitals.

Table 1. The Seven Community Capitals.

Type of Capital	Definition
Natural	Landscape, forest, climate, water, air, soil, biodiversity of animals and plants, environmental systems and level of protection
Social	Informal and formal relationships, values, history, art, group dynamics and interactions, social networks, trust and connections between people
Human	People, skills and abilities, education, health, leadership
Financial	Monetary assets available for investment
Built/Physical	Infrastructure, superstructure, tools, equipment and buildings
Political	The policies and legislations, political supports, governance processes, and formalized institutions that facilitate the transformation of the other capital assets into tourism developments.
Cultural	The practices, traditions, and resources that are central to a people's identity and the means and processes to maintain these

Sources: [7–9,17].

Tofino, Canada

The destination known as Tofino is a remote community located on Vancouver Island on Canada's west coast. Today, it is a world-renowned tourism destination due to its location and unique positioning in the biosphere region of Clayoquot Sound which is also adjacent to Pacific Rim National Park. Tofino, a town of approximately 2500 residents, is surrounded by Canada's rugged natural beauty among ancient rainforests, sandy beaches, and pristine lakes and is considered a hub for outdoor activities as well a range of budget to high-end accommodation offerings along some of the county's most pristine and undeveloped beaches. Activities such as storm watching, sport fishing, wildlife viewing and surfing have capitalized upon the advantage of the natural amenities that exist within the area [20]. Since moving away from traditional resource economies such as fishing and forestry in the 1990s, the town of Tofino has relied upon tourism for its economic benefit [21] and the industry has continued to grow. In 2012, the town had an average annual accommodation occupancy rate of 56%, and by 2019, this was 70%. In recent years, hotel occupancy has reached as high as 96% in the summer months [20]. With such unique attractions, businesses in the region have also grown. The percentage of business licenses that are issued in the Tofino and Ucluelet region for all accommodation services have increased from 26% in 2016 to 38% in 2020 and licenses issued to short-term rental services and bed and breakfast businesses in Ucluelet and Tofino increased by 112% between 2016 and 2020 [22]. Tourism is now the main source of income for the town and provides employment to many residents. The 2021 statistics indicate that the tourism industry has generated 3600 jobs, making CAD 110 million in wages for the residents of Tofino [23]. To put this into context, tourism, retail trade and food services sectors employ over one third of Tofino region's workers.

Tofino has steadily received a large number of tourists which puts pressure on the approximately 2500 residents. Tofino visitation reached a peak in 2019, and despite dipping, has climbed steadily again since the pandemic. Latest arrival numbers suggest over 600,000 visitors per year [24]. Due to this growth, stakeholders of the area including businesses, residents, Indigenous nations, government, non-profit organizations, and

employees have also been discussing the need for more sustainable tourism development and the destination has come to a crossroads on how to balance tourism and the importance of preserving the environment. Crowds, queues, resident-visitor tensions, cost of living, and housing have all been highlighted [25–27], and Tofino has increasingly been challenged by a combination of visitor-induced development pressures and a limited governance capacity to manage the use of its natural endowments in more sustainable way [4,28].

3. Methods

Tofino has achieved notable advancements in financial, natural, and social capital but continues to face gaps in addressing other capitals. The purpose of this research was to examine tourism development in Tofino over the past 15 years. This is a follow-up study to a study completed by the researcher in 2009. Qualitative methods, using in-depth interviews as well as content analysis, was undertaken to determine the impacts of tourism in Tofino as well as understanding the issues and opportunities within Tofino and how this relates to tourism development.

As qualitative research may be fraught with bias and uncertainty, multiple steps were undertaken to ensure reliability, consistency, and credibility. Questionnaires were piloted to assist with reliability and construct validity was undertaken by asking questions in many different formats with the aim to lessen the degree to which an inference occurs. To ensure the validity of the responses, managers or owners were approached for their participation. Each potential interviewee was screened using an informed consent form to ensure their role within the organization and to assess that they could provide the relevant information needed. Consistency was obtained through iterative questioning and asking the same questions to multiple people to determine whether similar answers were given. To manage bias as well as ensure the non-dominance of singular voices, this study employed methods of triangulation, which used multiple data sources to produce understanding and analyst triangulation to review coding and illuminate potential blind spots in the analysis [29]. The nature of asking the same questions over a period of time as well as engaging multiple stakeholders explicitly sought to add depth and scope to the analysis. While it is difficult to ascertain respondent neutrality, contacting senior-level employees such as owners and managers from all organizations and businesses and policy officials. In order to address integrity, objectivity, and confirmability, interviews were also undertaken by only one researcher to assist with reliability, and results were triangulated back to written policies and plans.

Between November 2023 and April 2024, 36 semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with a variety of stakeholders in Tofino, including business owners and operators, residents, employees, Indigenous, non-profit organizations, current and previous politicians, and the District of Tofino staff. Questions were determined based on qualitative research interviews undertaken in 2009 when the researcher asked the same questions to multiple stakeholders. Questions included barriers, threats, and opportunities to tourism development in the destination as well as issues, opportunities, and threats to sustainability (see Appendices A and B). Wherever possible, the same people contacted in 2009 were interviewed; however, some people had changed jobs, left the region, or new stakeholders were considered for the 2023/24 interviews to ensure that a wide variety of viewpoints were obtained. This, therefore, is more of a pragmatic longitudinal study. The sampling method included working with the destination's tourism marketing and management organization's destination stewardship manager to obtain a list of key varied stakeholders from different sectors were represented and cross referencing them with the list obtained in 2009. Once a wide range of stakeholders was obtained, then snowball sampling undertaken. Once the

researcher was given the same names by multiple people, it was deemed that key stakeholders were reached. Interviews for both periods of time lasted between 1 and 2 h in length.

In both 2009 and 2023/24, interviewees were contacted multiple times and interviews were offered in person or via telephone (or in 2023/24 via Zoom) to suit the person's schedule. In addition, series of six Travel Beyond podcasts by Destination Think (released in 2024) was also referenced for the purpose of this research, as it represented additional views which were similar to questions posed during the interviews and included many indigenous perspectives which, in some cases, had not been obtained during the interview process.

This study also undertook the method of participatory action research which involves, as part of the process, to send aggregated responses back to all stakeholder interviews to obtain the verification of facts and to ensure that all issues and topics had been covered. The purpose of this process was to ensure that responses were accurate and representative and to also provide a cohesive document to the local government for future planning initiatives. Inputs received from this process showed that all stakeholders agreed that the collaborative findings were a fair representation of all stakeholders' views. A report of all findings and recommendations was provided back to the government, NGO's, the destination DMO, as well as all stakeholders who requested this information, and it is currently being used in future planning and decision making.

4. Findings

There was a general consensus among respondents on almost all successes, issues, opportunities, as well sustainability considerations in the town. Key themes emerged from the research and comparisons are outlined in themes below under the themes of the Community Capitals Framework. Positive and negative elements are described for each.

4.1. Positive Community Capitals

4.1.1. Natural Capital

Many businesses in Tofino have achieved an Ocean Friendly Business Certification, which shows increased environmental responsibility, and WildSafe certification, which represents minimizing the risk between wildlife and humans. Most organizations (business, non-profit, indigenous, and community organizations) also support these organizations financially or in-kind and several businesses are providing staff with opportunities to volunteer for similar initiatives. Visitors are also being seen to assist NGOs with beach cleanups and other conservation efforts.

There is also increasing evidence of circular economy practices since 2009. Most surf companies are catching rain water to rinse wetsuits, old wetsuits are being upcycled into yoga mats, and initiatives focused on removing and reusing foam surfboards and marine debris from landfill are evident.

4.1.2. Social Capital

Several interviewees indicated that there can be tension between tourists and locals, citing parking or long lines at restaurants as examples. Businesses and community members all agree, however, on the success of tourism but that the town needs to find a better balance between tourism, community and environment, and that there is a need for a larger collective effort to educate tourists before they arrive to communicate that, when they are in town, they are stewards, not just consumers.

Furthermore, interviewees are in alignment with the future direction needed in the destination. Respondents are conscious of the town's capacity and limits to growth, therefore, there is an overall desire to redefine success beyond economic measures so that it is more value-based. There is also agreement that there is a need for more housing and infras-

tructure improvements and an understanding that these are difficult to achieve because Tofino is a small town.

Since 2009, there have been shifting values among stakeholders towards sustainability as well as an awareness of climate change and its impact on Tofino. Almost all interviewees understand that the concept of sustainability includes responsible and equitable development, as well as environmental conservation efforts, whereas, in 2009, the environment was the main focus with little to no mention of equity and inclusion.

4.1.3. Cultural Capital

There are two main indigenous nations involved in tourism in Tofino, the Tla-o-qui-aht and Ahousaht. There is strong support from almost all interviewees for the increasing presence of indigenous offerings in the tourism sector and many noted the establishment of new Indigenous-owned businesses as well as the Tribal Park Allies program. The Tla-o-qui-aht Tribal Parks Allies program started in 2018 and it has grown significantly, with approximately 128 businesses becoming members since it launched. Organizations voluntarily give 1% of revenues to the Allies program, and funds are used on sustainability initiatives, including destination stewardship such as maintaining trails and ecosystems, and removing marine debris, as well as cultural initiatives such as working to restore local Tla-o-qui-aht language.

> *"[Tofino has an] opportunity to be a leader in Indigenous tourism. Tofino has Indigenous owned attractions, accommodation etc. and there is a lot of Indigenous support and interest to use tourism as a development tool."* (Respondent 7)

> *"There is also an opportunity to work closer with the Tribal Park. We do think we have begun bridging the gap and the conversations have started. There is a lot of opportunity to grow. . .. there was a great workshop to speak on how surfing is an indigenous sport at an event called Nayu. It was a cultural experience and a trial for the tourism community—it was really well received by the town and guests and has lots of potential to grow."* (Respondent 12)

The Ahousaht Nation has increased its business presence through social enterprise. Ahousaht Adventures is one example which is a social enterprise offering ecotourism and cultural tours. The businesses are in trust which means that monies are reinvested into the community with no individual dividends. The Nation have also launched a stewardship service fee which is collected from tourists visiting Ahousaht territory and used on projects that monitor and steward their land and water [30].

4.1.4. Human Capital

Tofino today boasts over 40 non-profit organizations and respondents outlined the positive work being performed by many, including Redd Fish Restoration Society, Clayoquot Biosphere Trust, Wildsafe BC, and Surfrider who are working on restoration, conservation, and promoting sustainability efforts in town. Newer organizations such as Coastal Queer Alliance and the Tofino Food Guild have also been addressing inequity and the West Coast Ambassador Program aims to educate new businesses and staff. Increasingly, these organizations work alongside First Nations and the approach to stewardship is more inclusive.

Business owners and community members identified the shared need to teach potential and current visitors about the infrastructure limitations in town, sustainable/responsible behavior (e.g., water usage particularly for visitors booking Airbnb), to educate about nature preservation and, with more visitors coming who may not have an affinity or pre-existing knowledge of the natural environment, how best to enjoy and interact with nature and wildlife.

"I was a tourist the first time I came here and there is an opportunity to educate people before they come here." (Respondent 8)

4.1.5. Financial Capital

Overall, from an economic perspective, stakeholders felt that tourism in Tofino is successful financially.

"It's exploded. There was significant growth in 2009 and continued to see exponential growth—especially when it became the surf capital of Canada." (Respondent 21)

Visitors to Tofino have also changed over the past 15 years. Many are seeking softer, shorter nature-adjacent experiences compared to the more rugged outdoor and longer duration adventures of the past. Visitors also are seen to have less pre-existing knowledge about nature and are less adventurous than tourists of the past. Some respondents find that, since the pandemic, tourists have become entitled and that they visit Tofino because it is "the" place to go or they saw it on Instagram, as opposed to visiting because they truly appreciate nature.

"...When the Wikk was established, Tofino was a rugged, lower end hard core adventure destination—it was people who wanted to come and do the extremes—now it is the fair-weather clientele. Once the Wikk was established this was a nod that a higher end clientele could be attracted and it became a destination by 2010 with more food options, adventure and accommodations. Kayaking was one of the 1st adventures which became mainstream as the kayak guides were with you. Then surfing started to become mainstream—changing in a hotel room rather than a gravel parking lot—this elevated the experience to the mainstream traveler. . . . Perhaps the direction we are going is guest who want to be adjacent to nature but Tofino tries to incorporate nature rather than disturb what is here." (Respondent 35)

Tofino is now attracting wealthier tourists due to the high-end development of exclusive accommodations and increasing costs of visitation. The arrival of Airbnb also changed accommodation options, and with the rise of social media and influencers, visitors have changed how they make travel decisions. Social media has also changed how tourism businesses market themselves; instead of using solely brochures or print media, there is a shift towards Instagram and other social media accounts. Stakeholders want to attract tourists who understand nature and culture, but some tourists are now seen as 'viewers', those coming to town simply to take photos.

"We see more demand with air—more people are flying here ...The traveler is changing—Europeans want to see Canada and they do stuff but the Canadian traveler just wants to hang out and sit. You slap remote on it but you don't have to do much—that's what people really want. Authentic experiences are not as easy to sell as you think they should be. People want the picture rather than the experience—this isn't everyone but its increasing. There is an increase of people asking about how to get Netflix—these people come to this amazing place but sit inside and watch TV!"

There are two new separate initiatives to augment funding for sustainability initiatives in the region. First is the Tla-o-qui-aht Tribal Parks Allies program noted above. Membership to the Allies program is voluntary and overall well supported; however, some respondents outlined that tactics of bullying have taken place to get business to join. Some businesses that have not joined Tribal Park Allies have formed the West Coast Sustainability Alliance, which also collects a 1% fee from accommodation revenue to use on sustainability initiatives.

4.1.6. Built Capital

There has been a significant increase in new infrastructure in recent years, including the new sewage treatment plant which is due to be completed in 2024, with improved recycling capabilities, the rollout of organic residential composting, and the launch of commercial composting starting in 2024, a multi-use path now stretching from Tofino to Ucluelet, a new park/playground in town, improved sidewalks, trail maintenance, and increased bathroom facilities.

A new Biosphere Centre will also soon be built, which is meant to be a gathering place for First Nations, Tofino, and Ucluelet community members. The center will act as a knowledge hub for science education and training, as well as a place for workshops and learning [30].

Respondents are very supportive of the improved transportation, recently including a free shuttle bus that runs in town during the summer (funded by parking revenues collected by the District), and the arrival of public transportation, which launched in April 2024 and will provide access from Tofino to Ucluelet, including stops at First Nations communities. The new multi-use path makes cycling an option for active transportation and many respondents were positive about the increasing access to e-bikes and scooters.

4.1.7. Political Capital

Several positive efforts in recent years were noted by stakeholders including Tofino being the first municipality in the province to ban single-use plastics. Items regulated include check-out bags, plastic drinking straws, polystyrene foam for prepared food packaging, and single-use plastic utensils [31]. In April 2024, the District also banned any single-use plastic bottles under one liter [32]. The Surfrider Foundation was mentioned by the majority of interviewees, whose efforts were applauded in working with businesses to make changes to operations so that they are making more sustainable choices (e.g., using ocean-friendly soap, reducing the use of plastic bags).

The last Official Community Plan was written in 2021 and differed greatly from previous iterations as it focused on restraints to growth. The recent OCP is more focused on climate concerns and sewer/water capacity. The town also completed a water masterplan in 2024, and Canada released the Truth and Reconciliation report in 2015 which aimed to address inequities with Indigenous peoples [33].

4.2. Negative Community Capitals

4.2.1. Natural Capital

Interviewees all noted that climate change was a concern which has increased significantly since 2009; however, there was a mixed response to addressing it. Almost every respondent noted the recent water shortage and the forest fire which shut the road in 2023; however, these issues were not always linked to climate.

> *"We have seen more shoreline erosion, drier seasons."* (Respondent 35)

> *"[There are] more extremes season to season. It is really rare to have cold winters but these have become a lot more common and over the last three years we have had negative temperatures . . . our infrastructure can't handle the cold. We are also seeing warmer temperatures in summer—this summer we put in an air conditioner to help our laundry staff and more and more guests are asking for air con. . . .Climate is a proper discussion and town wide."* (Respondent 13)

There are a number of reasons for climatic changes. Changing weather patterns, less fog, or less precipitation all impact water availability. The changing climate is also affecting

habitat and food availability for wildlife, such as bears and salmon, which in turn affects the viability of tourism businesses connected to wildlife viewing.

> *"After 2006, they built more storage for water. The same two sources get piped over and [there are] more storage facilities but even with the increased storage if the lake isn't refilling then there is still an issue. With climate change it is becoming more frequent. The long-term picture is that a lot of salmon runs have completely dried up. In the 1980's there were counts of 20,000 Chum but last year the counts were 280. Kennedy Lake used to have a big sockeye run but there is nothing now. For context—salmon return on 4-year rotations so this year [2023] was a good return but the last three years were poor. In 2021 there was an atmospheric river—really cold and wet—which wasn't conducive to good berry crops. In April, 2023 we had 200 more mm rain than the average rain but then the average for the next three months went down from an average of 270 mm to 30 mm."* (Respondent 21)

All stakeholders also noted water supply as an issue. Due to prolonged and historic drought conditions in 2023, Tofino reservoirs reached very low levels and conservation restrictions were put in place to minimize unnecessary water consumption, including replacing the use of public toilets with port-a-loos, closing off visitor access to laundry facilities and dishwashers, and using eco-friendly takeaway dishes and cutlery instead of washing dishes [34]. There was also a water shortage in 2009.

The recent water shortage in 2023 required conservation restrictions to be established, such as using dunk buckets to rinse equipment, using port-a-loos instead of public toilets, and encouraging shorter showers for guests at short-term rentals [34]; however, some interviewees said conservation efforts were not being followed by visitors. A current water report has recently been released by the District and many stakeholders are involved in finding and establishing solutions to supply.

> *"I am on my fifth day of using no water but the Airbnb next to me has a family of 7 there taking 15 min showers each!"* (Respondent 32)

Another capital at risk is wildlife. Wildlife in the area has been affected by both increasing development and increasing visitation numbers. Fifty bears have died in the past four years, 38 due to public safety, and 12 were hit by vehicles [35]. Climate change and erratic weather patterns are also affecting wildlife populations. The 10-day-long heat dome in 2021 burned berry crops, which resulted in higher wildlife conflicts. Salmon returns and bird migration have also been affected by changing climate conditions. This, however, has positively resulted in more businesses engaging with wildlife safety training for staff.

4.2.2. Social Capital

Climate change is also seen to be driving tourism visitation. When tourists cannot visit other destinations in the province because of lack of snow for ski holidays or wildfires restricting access to other areas, those travelers are choosing to come to Tofino and respondents have seen a bump in visitation during the off season when ski resorts are lacking snow.

> *"We experience water shortages and there has been more seismic activity off the coast but people don't think about it. Actually, Tofino has benefitted b/c it has been so hot elsewhere in BC."* (Respondent 5)

There are two views with regard to development, but both sides agree that development must be carefully considered in terms of capacity. One view is that development needs to be reined in and the community's needs must be put before commercial needs while others feel that development should continue albeit carefully. Some stakeholders outline that developing property in town can be expensive and time-consuming, and obtaining support from the local council for new development, even staff housing, can be challenging.

These stakeholders feel that restrictions related to local zoning and bylaws are discouraging for many who have attempted or would like to develop new staff housing. The need for a tourism masterplan was also an issue brought up in the 2009 study.

> *"Lot of places got rezoned into commercial zones and the beach has been bought up. There was no original strategic plan and this has hurt the town. The original people guiding tourism were not invested in the community—it was more commercially minded and now I feel that tourism is in its saturation phase of the life cycle."* (Respondent 4)

4.2.3. Cultural Capital

All respondents recognize the need for greater inclusion of Indigenous peoples in tourism efforts, community building, environmental protection, and sustainability initiatives. This includes opportunities for business development and work experience. Several respondents state that First Nations have not benefited equitably from the success of tourism in town and the disparity of wealth is tremendous. Issues to address include the need for social support as well as business support—facilities that can be used to address trauma and healing with programming that runs year-round. Support such as child care, that aligns with hours for those working in the tourism industry, and mentorship for Indigenous youth and young adults to develop and progress along a career path is also needed.

> *"First Nations have lost many of the economic benefits and have spent money on protection—protected the water source on Meares Island, which supplies visitors and the town."* (Respondent 13)

> *"I think we put tourism ahead of our community. We [First Nations] live in a different space—not all of us had the opportunity to be born into money or education. Sometimes the education required or the know-how to write a business plan, or to be a minority to go to the bank to apply for funds—it's a long shot. There are supports but they are hard to get."* (Respondent 20)

4.2.4. Human Capital

Due to many of the other capitals being prioritized, the cost of living has been affected in the destination. The 2023 living wage for Clayoquot Sound is USD 26.51, the highest in the province [36]. Not every business can afford to pay the living wage, and because of the makeup of employees in town (single, child-free), the living wage requirements (a family of four, including two children) do not apply to many tourism workers in town; however, the cost of living is seen as high.

> *"The living wage is difficult to achieve. . . .wages have gone up 30–35% (10% per year)."* (Respondent 5)

This issue was also outlined in 2009. Some business owners currently find it difficult to pay a living wage given rising costs for supplies and many residents have moved as they cannot afford to stay. Additionally, many staff struggle to find accommodation, and if they do not have housing, they often leave Tofino.

4.2.5. Financial Capital

Although there is consensus about the need to shift from growth, many respondents identified the difficulty in this shift. For example, Respondent 1 claimed: "It is hard to look past the short term and focus on benefits rather than cost".

Another negative is the lack of understanding regarding funds from the municipality and resort tax. Not everyone understands the regulations on MRDT and RMI funds and how they must be allocated. MRDT can only be used in tourism marketing and projects and affordable housing. RMI supports only tourism infrastructure. (It should be noted

that Tofino was the first community to be granted an exception to funding restrictions to develop its sewage treatment plant). Many respondents feel that taxation money could be spent on adding indoor amenities, such as a recreation center and swimming pool, in town to improve the quality of life, but this funding cannot be reallocated as such.

> *"Why did we use municipal tax to build a visitor center which we didn't need but not to fix our water system?"* (Respondent 25)

Some stakeholders feel that there is an opportunity to also communicate to residents and businesses and other stakeholders about the regulations for what Resort Municipality Incentive (RMI) and Municipal & Regional District Tax (MRDT) money can be spent on and how collected funds have been used. The MRDT is an up to 3% tax on short-term accommodation sales. It can only be used on tourism marketing programs and affordable housing [37] but cannot be used on projects such as local sustainability initiatives. The RMI is a program administered by the provincial government to support tourism infrastructure in resort municipalities, and is a performance-based program tied to MRDT growth [38]. Some of this funding has gone towards housing.

4.2.6. Built Capital

Interviewees noted the lack of amenities in the town and would like to see the development of infrastructure that will have a lasting impact on the community such as a community center, recreation center, or swimming pool, as well as infrastructure for indoor activities addressed that would benefit both residents and tourists. These things were also brought up during the 2009 study.

One capital that every respondent noted was the increasing housing crisis. Business owners outlined that they struggle to house their staff, making it challenging to find and keep staff, which is tied to business viability and success. Since the pandemic, there has been an increase in remote workers using Tofino as their home base as well as people buying their second homes in Tofino, which have contributed to an increase in housing prices. The rise in interest rates has also made it more challenging to borrow money and to build new housing. There has been an effort to build affordable housing, with three buildings due to be completed by 2024, although many feel that this is not enough. Housing was also identified as an issue in 2009.

Access to Tofino is of the foremost concern for many business owners and community members. Due to the Cameron Bluffs wildfire in June of 2023, Highway 4 was closed for 19 days, which is the only roadway in and out of Tofino. During this road closure, a detour was provided via a logging road that added several hours to the journey. Many respondents stated that the recent road closure dramatically impacted tourist visitation. The single road access also impacts getting goods into town in a timely and economical way. There has been talk of an alternative, secondary, route to Tofino that would likely go through the Comox area. The issue of access was also noted during the 2009 study.

> *"We have always marketed that we are at the end of the road and a unique community, but we now really realize how vulnerable we are."* (Respondent 12)

While respondents acknowledge the climate impact of air travel, respondents have welcomed the increased access to flight options in and out of Tofino. For more details on current carbon emissions from travel, please see recent report released in 2023 by 4VI [39].

Several interviewees stated that the reliance on visitation by car does not align with sustainability goals and creates congestion in town, which can lead to tension between locals and visitors. Currently, 80% of arrivals are by personal vehicle. Existing electric vehicle infrastructure is minimal and much of what exists is privately owned (e.g., on hotel property). It was noted that the charging station operated by the District is not functional.

There is some concern that the timing of enforced paid parking does not align with when people need to use spots (e.g., parking early in the morning for an 8 am water excursion, but not being able to pay for parking until 9 am). Respondents, however, are pleased that the fees from paid parking are being used to fund the free shuttle during the summer. Many would also like to see the return of the ride share that used to operate in town. The service, called Whistle, was shut down due to regulations but the original owner is considering re-establishing it.

4.2.7. Political Capital

Although the last Official Community Plan was written in 2021, it differed greatly from previous iterations as it focused on restraints to growth. Stakeholders would like alignment between the OCP and zoning bylaws, which were last updated in 1997 (they are currently in the process of being updated).

> *"The new OCP sets out development due to land use. Land is sandy south of Industrial Way and rocky north of Industrial Way. It is also hilly north of Industrial Way which makes it more expensive to build. . . . 20 years ago, decisions were made based on the town wanting tourism development. Today, as more information about capacity for water and sewage are available, decisions are being made differently based on future climate resiliency and environmental management. Twenty years from now infrastructure decisions will hopefully be increasingly made from an asset management point of view."* (Respondent 33)

There are challenges perceived in terms of bylaw enforcement and planning and there are differing views from stakeholders. Most of these issues were also noted during the 2009 interviews. While some stakeholders are eager to see development made easier and the permitting process more efficient, others would like development slowed down. In addition, multiple interviewees outlined the inconsistency in planning decisions and feel that the District is not consistent in enforcing bylaws.

> *"There are currently a lot of bespoke zoning decisions."* (Respondent 34)

> *"There is turnover and the town is small but some by-laws aren't applied fairly to everyone. E.g., a by-law comes in re parking for ratio of tables (and one can purchase extra parking for 50% of table allowances) so one business goes to pay for by-law but another business doesn't. But not everyone will complain and it is a complaint-based system."* (Respondent 9)

> *"In the summer of 2023 they implemented paid parking in town. They did consultations but then implemented this halfway through June—we had no idea what to tell guests who were going out on tour—it was very last minute for something that had major ramifications for tourism. . . . There was so much backlash that they then changed parking from four hours to six hours in August. . . . I don't trust the town—they are so biased and don't understand the type of tourists. . . tourism is taken for granted here especially for activities downtown."* (Respondent 15)

Despite it being a small town, some interviewees feel that Tofino planning staff may not be adequately prepared for the requests they receive from the community and for the changing needs of the town. Respondents would like planning decisions made with a generational perspective in mind, thinking about how today's decisions could impact the community in 20 years.

> *"There is turnover and the town is small but some by-laws aren't applied fairly to everyone. E.g., a by-law comes in re parking for ratio of tables (and one can purchase extra parking for 50% of table allowances) so one business goes to pay for by-law but*

another business doesn't. But not everyone will complain and it is a complaint-based system." (Respondent 9)

The arrival of Airbnb has also impacted housing availability. In March 2024, Tofino opted into the provincial Short-Term Accommodations Act, which limits short-term rentals to primary residences. This regulation will affect two multi-unit strata buildings used for short-term rentals. This may shift short-term rental stock into long-term housing options, but there is some concern that the new regulation may not make available as many housing units as hoped. There was also varying understanding of how many short-term rentals actually existed in Tofino. At the time of writing, Tofino had 224 short-term rentals, 48 B&B's, 2 guest houses, and 36 temporary accommodations.

"Legislation was that you can own a second home and vacation rental but you had to have someone as a host—Tofino already had a bylaw which allowed for a caretaker—the south Chesterman condos are difficult to enforce and there are lots of illegal rentals. Ike Street Landing and Fred Tibbs building—both have zoning for vacation rentals but these properties will lose the ability to short-term rent now. A lot of people got their start this way so its impacting people. The messaging [from the District] has been confusing and visitors think now that there are no short-term rentals in Tofino. It was a knee jerk reaction by Council and those properties will likely just get sold and locals can't afford to buy them—most people can't afford them. We really need housing at the lower level—the cooks, the surf instructors—those people are getting left out." (Respondent 32)

5. Discussion

Since the original study in 2009, a broader meaning of sustainability has emerged and the understanding now encompasses a greater inclusion of the Indigenous community, land stewardship, equity, and community benefits. In 2009, the focus was mainly environmental and sustainability was a consideration for the future rather than an immediate issue. This shift of focus illustrates how a more balanced approach of the Community Capitals has taken place. Unfortunately, not all capitals have equal focus. Figure 1 summarizes the capitals which have shifted in focus.

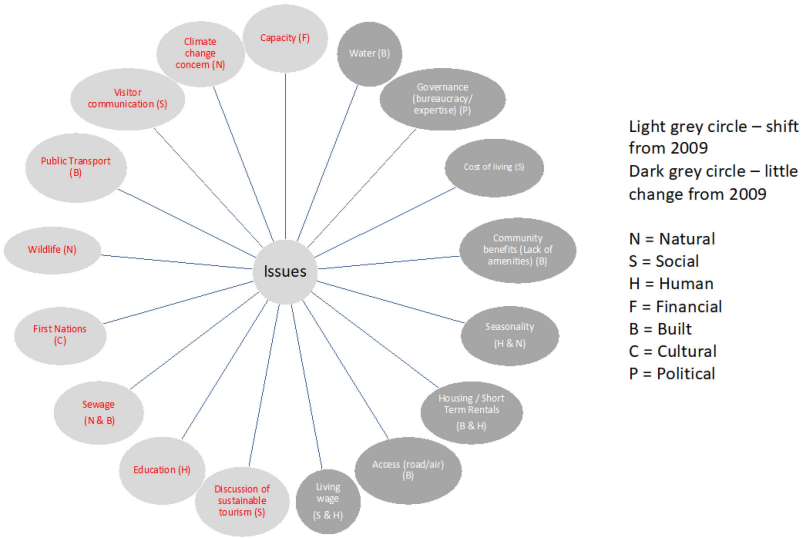

Figure 1. Changes from 2009 to 2024: Issues relating to sustainable tourism development. Note: Light grey circle = shift from 2009. Dark grey circle = little change from 2009.

This paper and the findings shown in Figure 1 support much of the research of the CCF in that financial capitals have often overpowered other capitals [19] and an adaptive

management approach is needed to systematically evaluate and ensure the flow of assets from one capital to another [18]. Findings also suggest that there are challenges of governance, especially in an environment of uncertainty and complexity [40]. The relationship between natural assets, community livelihoods, and tourism are often changing and require adaptation, listening, and patience to maintain relationships between these and other stakeholders [17,41]. The authors in ([18] p. 16) eloquently outline that thoughtfulness and a broader viewpoint of systems thinking in understanding is necessary for better long-term solutions.

This study also supports many of the findings from 2009. First that the natural environment is also the feature most directly threatened by potential overexploitation and that "sustainability is a necessity rather than just a hope" ([4] p. 9). Since the original study in 2009 [4], there has been a distinct shift from solely economic returns and visitor numbers, which supports a more balanced approach to the capitals. For example, environmental and social considerations have become more balanced (such as the recent focus and building on more affordable housing which links to social, financial, and built capitals). In addition, there has been more stakeholder inclusion (social capital), especially with Indigenous peoples, which has shifted the focus of 'community' to be more inclusive. There has also been a visible shift toward natural capital through the allocated funds toward infrastructure improvement, although not all livelihood concerns for residents have been addressed. Finally, there has been an evident shift to move towards the successful and adaptive management of tourism in Tofino, as there is now a more inclusive and cohesive approach to management, rather than solely discussing a long-term vision.

When examining the community capitals, it is interesting to note that, in stakeholder responses, there was little focus on financial capital apart from the discussion of capacity and the number of tourists; however, the issues that have arisen mostly arise from the financial imbalance. For the future of Tofino, it is evident that communities or destinations must place a more equitable focus on all capitals. From this research, the following list of recommendations (Table 2) was put forth by stakeholders, many of which focus on the social and human capital to help balance them.

Table 2. Recommendations put forth by stakeholders.

Recommendation	Type of Capital
• Update the tourism master plan.	Political and social
• Update district by-laws	Political
• Create better messaging and pre-arrival tourism information for the general public about visitor responsibilities and need to preserve and steward the town and its environment.	Social and natural
• Improve messaging around MRDT/RMI use to the broader community.	Social
• Involve more visitors in destination stewardship, clean ups, and responsible behavior.	Human
• Establish a more collaborative working relationship with First Nations and other communities in the region and formalize relationships between Chamber, DMO, First Nations, and community.	Human and cultural
• Build indoor amenities.	Built
• Examine limits to growth/capacity.	Financial, social, and cultural

6. Conclusions and Future Research Direction

The Tofino case study is an example of how theory and practise can intersect to effectively address sustainable development, making this study an important addition to the ongoing discussion on sustainability in tourism destinations. This study used the CCF to assess long-term impacts, successes, and shifts in the tourism destination and town of Tofino, Canada. The early focus from interviews in 2009 mirrored many issues that were highlighted 15 years later in 2024, many of which have been exacerbated. The early focus on growth by many businesses who were more focused on preserving the ecosystem (natural capitals) while neglecting human needs and/or social capitals (e.g., community building and indigenous inclusion) may have contributed to community natural and social capital alienation from other community capitals. The cause and effect, for example, in the lack of housing, has not only increased the issue of financial affordability in the town, but it has also caused labour issues to become an increasing problem. The multiple scenarios outlined in this study have inhibited community development in the long term, although there has been a realisation that the lands and ocean that people play in, visit, and make money from also have to be protected and cared for. Using the CCF, social, human, built, financial, and social capitals provide a useful framework to assess the interconnectivity needed for governance, while also highlighting the need for an adaptive, inclusive approach. This approach also showcases that these issues are complex, long term, and that ignoring issues does not make them go away in the future. Future research is needed on policy change from a longer-term time frame to understand the linkages between organizational frameworks and the community capitals. In addition, further research examining sustainability through this framework would be useful to drive the holistic goals of sustainability and the SDGs which would allow for more intersections between capitals to occur. Finally, further research on other destinations at different stages of their life cycles and in different locations would allow for comparability and replicability.

7. Limitations

While this research presents strong evidence for using the CCF to examine tourism destinations over a long-term time frame, this method has some limitations. Over such a timeframe, leadership changes, as do key stakeholders, and while every attempt was made to re-interview the same stakeholders, some changed. In addition, this is yet one study and further research is needed in other destinations to assess whether this framework is useful across multiple case studies. This type of research is critical to understanding collective change across a community and further studies at different levels including the provincial or state level could be performed on a comparative level to ensure this method is useful to identify the collective goals of sustainability.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data is unavailable due to privacy.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A. List of Interviewees (Note: Organizations Are Alphabetical and Do Not Correspond to Respondent Numbers to Ensure Anonymity)

Organization Type	Organization Name	Role of Contact	2009	2023/23
Business	Breakers Café	Owner	x	Not in existence
Business	Chesterman B&B	Manager	x	Not available
Business	Chocolate Tofino	Owner	x	Cancelled
Business	Common Loaf Bakery	Owner	x	x
Business	Harbour Air	Manager	x	Not available
Business	Hotel Zed	Manager	Not in existence	x
Business	Jamie's Whale Watching	Manager	x	Not available
Business	Long Beach Lodge	Manager	x	x
Business	Middle Beach Lodge	Manager	x	Not available
Business	Maquinna Inn	Manager	x	Changed ownership
Business	Pacific Sands Resort	Manager	x	x
Business	Pacific Surf Company	Owner	x	x
Business	Remote Passages	Manager	x	Interviewed as Tofino Marina
Business	Rhino Coffee	Manager	Not in existence	x
Business	Shelter/Shed	Owner	Not in existence	x
Business	Surf Rider Pacific Rim	Owner	Not in existence	x
Business	Surf Grove campground	Owner	Not in existence	x
Business	The Whale Centre	Owner	x	Not available
Business	Tofino Beach Homes	Manager	x	No longer in existence
Business	Tofino Bus c/o Vancouver Island Connector	Owner	x	Not available
Business	Tofino Homes Realtor	Owner	x	x
Business	Tofino Resort & Marina	Manager	Different owner	x
Business	Tofino Sea Kayaking	Owner	x	x
Business	Weigh West	Manager	x	Not in existence
Business	Wildside Grill	Manager	x	Not available
Business	Whalers on the Point Guest House-HI Hostel/Tofino YHA	Manager	x	Not available
Business	Wickaninnish hotel	Manager	x	
Business	Wickaninnish hotel	Owner	x	x
Business	Vincent Coffee Shop	Owner	x	Not in existence
DMO	Tofino-Long Beach Business Association	Board member	x	x
DMO	Tourism Tofino	CEO	x	X and podcast
DMO	Tourism Tofino	Destination Stewardship Manager	Position not in existence	x
DMO	4VI	Manager	Not in existence	x
DMO	Tourism BC	Manager	x	Changed position

Government	District of Tofino	Manager	x	x
Government	District of Tofino	Manager	x	x
Government	District of Tofino/NDP MLA	Former Mayor	x	x
Government	District of Tofino	2023/24 Mayor		x
Indigenous	Ahousaht First Nations	Manager equivalent		X and podcast
Indigenous	Tin Wis	Manager	x	x
Indigenous	Ahous Adventures	Manager	Not in existence	x
Indigenous	Tla-o-qui-aht First Nations	Elder	x	Podcast
Indigenous	Tla-o-qui-aht Tribal Park Allies		Not in existence	X and podcast
Non-profit/NGO	BC Partnership for Sustainable Tourism	Manager	x	Not in existence
Non-profit/NGO	District of Tofino	CAO from 2012–2019	N/A	x
Non-profit/NGO	Chamber of Commerce	Manager	x	x
Non-profit/NGO	Clayoquot Biosphere Trust	CEO	x	x
Non-profit/NGO	Coastal Queer Alliance	Manager	Not in existence	x
Non-profit/NGO	Friends of Clayoquot Sound			
Non-profit/NGO	Parks Canada	Manager	x	x
Non-profit/NGO	Redd Fish Restoration	Manager	Not in existence	X and podcast
Non-profit/NGO	Tofino Botanical Gardens	Manager	x	No longer running as such
Non-profit/NGO	Tofino Housing Corporation	CEO	Not in existence	x
Non-profit/NGO	Tofino Uclulet Culinary Guild (TUCG)	Manager	Not in existence	x
Non-profit/NGO	Wildsafe BC	Manager	Not in existence	x
Resident/community	Hotel Developer	CEO	N/A	x
Resident/ community	Tofino Tourism board member (2009) and board member Clayoquot Sound		x	x
Resident/ community	Tofino resident and hotel employee		Not living in area	x
Resident/ community	Misc	Resident	x	No longer in area
Resident/ community	Misc	Resident/former Board of Tourism Tofino	x	Not available
Resident/ community	Misc	Resident, kayak guide, Surfrider, WildSafeBC and volunteers with Strawberry Island Research Society.	Not living in area	x

Appendix B. Interview Questions

Semi-structured interview questions:

1. Please tell me a little about your organization
2. How successful do you believe tourism in Tofino is? How do you define success?
3. How important do you consider climate change to be in determining the future viability of Tofino's tourism industry? Please explain
4. How important do you consider sustainable tourism development to be in determining the future viability of Tofino's tourism industry? Please explain

5. What are the major threats and challenges associated with tourism in the destination?
6. What are the major threats and challenges associated with sustainability and tourism?
    a. Prompts: water shortage, fire in 2023, climate?
7. Do you see opportunities for Tofino's tourism industry with respect to sustainability?
    a. With respect to: overall economic development, tourism policies?
8. Do you see your tourism product shifting?
    a. due to weather conditions relating to climate change
    b. other issues in Tofino?
9. What action has the area taken to address these issues?
    a. (Prompts: developing policies? Introducing educational programs? Certification? Carbon calculators)
10. What action is your organization or other organizations considering the issues we have discussed?
11. What other factors currently limit or prevent Tofino/your org from taking action in response to issues of sustainability
    a. (Prompt: overtourism? liveability? climate change? sustainability in general?)
12. Are you aware of any tourism plans or sustainable tourism management/development strategies for this area? On Vancouver Island? In British Columbia?
13. Do you think consumers' perceptions and behaviors are changing in regard to sustainability in tourism?
14. Do you know of any tourism organizations or operators that have an internal sustainability procurement policy or initiatives?
    a. (Prompts: water? energy? GhGs? social? EDI?)
15. What is your organization's role within Tofino's tourism industry?
    a. Are you responsible for any tourism monitoring?
    b. Involved in any committees which deal with tourism?
16. Are you involved in tourism development or marketing for the Tofino region? How is sustainability communicated?

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