

Elements of Stakeholder Support for Tourism in Rural Communities: The Case of Eastern North Carolina.

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Introduction

The decline of traditional rural industries such as agriculture, mining, and forestry over the past three decades has required many rural communities to explore alternative means to strengthen their economic base (Allen, Hafer, Long, & Perdue 1993; Gilbert 1989; Long, Perdue, & Allen 1990). Tourism has become one of the main industries identified as having the potential to assist rural communities in developing stronger economic diversity (McGehee and Andereck 2004; Hanssan, 2000; Long, Perdue, Allen 1990).

Rural tourism, however, cannot be considered a panacea. As with any industry, there are inherent negative impacts associated with rural tourism. Therefore, for tourism development to be successful it must be planned and managed responsibly (De Oliveira, 2003; Inskip, 1991; Martin, 1995; Southgate & Sharpley, 2002; Yuksel, Bramwell & Yuksel, 1999). Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, and Van Es (2001) developed a list of ten conditions that are needed for rural tourism to have the best chance for success and sustainability which included : “support and participation of local government, ... coordination and cooperation between business persons and local leadership, ...and widespread community support for tourism (Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, and Van Es 2001: 134).”

The purpose of this paper is to explore these three conditions, indicated by Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, and Van Es (2001). This study explored and identifies factors that comprise a stakeholder’s support for sustainable tourism development. These factors will provide an initial insight into the latent structure of stakeholder support for sustainable tourism development.

Methods

During the winter and spring of 2003 the study of tourism stakeholders described in this paper was conducted in two rural North Carolina counties. The counties selected for the study were Johnston County and Martin County. Stakeholders, which included the county residents, business owners, government officials and tourist, were mailed a questionnaire inquiring about their attitudes and perceptions of tourism development in their respective communities. The responses were collected and analyzed to discover what the main factors are that comprise a stakeholder’s support for sustainable tourism development in their community.

Findings

A multiple step process was conducted to identify the factors that are a part of a stakeholder’s support for sustainable development. Reliability analysis of the 25-item scale was conducted, and five items were discarded because they had a low (less than

.20) corrected item-total correlation. The remaining 20-item scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .83, and the corrected item-total correlation ranged from .18 to .60 with a mean of .41.

Exploratory factor analysis using principle component analysis with varimax rotation was performed on the 20-item scale to determine the latent structure of the set of variables. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic was .86 and the communalities ranged from .40 to .73. The scree plot and eigenvalues (greater than 1), five factors were retained. The five factors accounted for 57.87% of total cumulative variance. The factors were labeled (1) natural resources concerns (variance explained=26.35%), (2) planning (variance explained=12.95%), (3) economic concerns (variance explained=7.24%), (4) educational needs (variance explained=6.20%), and (5) awareness of tourism (variance explained=5.12%).

Five items loaded on the natural resources factor, with factor loadings ranging from .61 to .81. The corrected item-total correlation ranged from .43 to .62 with an alpha of .77. Five items loaded on the planning factor, with factor loading ranging from .51 to .75. The corrected item-total correlation ranged from .35 to .56 with an alpha of .72. Four items loaded the economic factor, with factor loading ranging from .53 to .72. The corrected item-total correlation ranged from .39 to .48 with an alpha of .64. Four items loaded on the education factor with factor loading ranging from .45 to .82. The corrected item-total correlation ranged from .33 to .58. Two items loaded on the awareness factor, with factor loading ranging from .79 to .85. The corrected item-total correlation for both items were .47 and with an alpha of .63.

A multiple step process was conducted to identify the factors of stakeholder's understanding for sustainable development. Reliability analysis of the 25-item scale was conducted, and five items were discarded because they had a low (less than .20) corrected item-total correlation. The remaining 20-item scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .83, and the corrected item-total correlation ranged from .18 to .60 with a mean of .41.

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- (1) Natural Resources Concerns
- (2) Planning
- (3) Economic Concerns
- (4) Educational Needs
- (5) Awareness of Tourism

Discussion

Stakeholder involvement is a critical part of sustainable tourism development. To involve stakeholders, researchers and planners must first identify and appreciate what elements comprise a stakeholder's understanding of sustainable tourism development in their community. Five factor (or elements) of a stakeholder's understanding of sustainable tourism development were identified. By identifying these factors planners can better recognize and understand the multiple dimensions of a stakeholder's

understanding of sustainable tourism and how those dimensions will influence the specific interests of individual stakeholders and stakeholder groups.

This understanding will allow planners to take into account the specific interest areas of the stakeholders in the community when planning and managing tourism. Planners will be able to identify the elements of sustainable tourism that need to be addressed and emphasized in the planning, development, and management processes. With this knowledge tourism planners and developers can better address the concerns in the community and plan developments that represent the interests of the residents, business owners, government officials and other stakeholder groups.

This study assists in the appreciation of the multiple elements that comprise a stakeholder's understanding of sustainable tourism development in their community. This is the first step in the process of the development of a tool for identifying the elements that comprise stakeholder support for sustainable tourism development in a community. Additional research needs to be conducted to validate and refine the factors including conducting the study on a broader scale. Additional questions must be developed to gain a better understanding of the awareness of tourism factor.

The factors of understanding can be used to develop a tool that will assist planners in measuring support for sustainable tourism development in their communities. This tool could become a barometer of stakeholder support for sustainable tourism development in a community.

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