

Community Strategies for Rural Tourism

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Nancy Nye

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Why should rural communities care about Tourism?

- Huge market that is growing (10% of economy, 10% of workforce)
- It is already happening in many rural areas
- Rural areas have what urban and suburban people want (open space, close to nature, less commercialized, authentic experiences)
- Offers economic diversification and export opportunities without leaving home
- Local tourism taxes provide revenues for local services



Problems of Tourism

- Mass tourism creates huge demand for the most popular sites
- Leads to over use, degradation of the sites and environment, over commercialization
- Seasonality
- Many jobs are low wage service jobs
- Concentration of ownership to achieve economies of scale, outside ownership prevalent
- As a result, there can be little positive local economic impact
- Competitive market, requires lots of promotion
- Culture clash between urban and rural, residents and outsiders, intrusion at peak times

Types of Tourism

- Many types of tourism based on markets (coastal or mountain), duration (destination or on the way), type of tourist (age, level of activity, etc.)
- **Mass Tourism** – aka conventional (theme parks, resorts, recreation, sports, shopping, package tours, cruises, etc.)
- **Alternative Tourism** -- aka *soft* tourism, *green* tourism, *nature* tourism, *sustainable* tourism, *community based* tourism, *integrated rural* tourism (builds relationships between urban and rural people)
- Includes agrotourism, ecotourism, cultural and heritage tourism (tourism niches)
- Alternative Tourism is more developed outside the US – Italy, Austria, France – extensive agrotourism, Australia – national ecotourism strategy



Elements of Alternative Tourism

- small scale
- low impact
- local participation and ownership primary
- preserves the biologic and cultural diversity of the area
- place-based, builds on local sense of place
- “the ordinary becomes the extraordinary for the visitor”
- local partnerships and linkages are essential to prevent economic leakage and to capture tourist revenues for the community and locally owned businesses



Roles in Support of Rural Tourism

- Facilitate a community visioning process, identify the values, goals and strategies and where tourism fits in (if it does)
- Convene and focus community interest in tourism development (invite a full range of stakeholders, assure that the interests of workers and low income residents are included)
- Coordinate the community planning process
- Identify community strengths and opportunities, tourism themes, resources, infrastructure needed



Roles in Support of Rural Tourism, cont.

- Develop a tourism strategy with a process and criteria to evaluate projects (e.g. encourage diversification and value added)
- Assess environmental and economic impacts (e.g., number and kind of jobs)
- Assess community readiness, tourism products, individual entrepreneurs' capacity
- Identify local providers to limit economic leakage (restaurants, food, transportation, lodging, linens, crafts, guides, etc.)
- Coordinate partnerships of business, nonprofits, public sector, community interests



Roles in Support of Rural Tourism, cont.

Provide Technical Assistance:

- Product and services development
- Financial planning, management
- Grant writing
- Financial resources (loans)
- Skills and training, customer service, quality standards
- Marketing and promotion (local identity, logo, websites, networking, booking system)
- Event planning and coordination



Roles in Support of Rural Tourism, cont.

- Make links to government agencies (Tourism, Parks, Agriculture, Economic Development, etc.)
- Make links to public relations firms, tour operators, tourism services
- Advocate for/ develop adequate affordable housing for tourism employees (employer assisted housing, etc.) and to prevent displacement or being priced out of the community