Community Planning: A Perceptual Approach to Tourism Development

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COMMUNITY PLANNING:  
A PERCEPTUAL APPROACH TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

BY

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ABSTRACT

Tourism development requires professional planning and cooperation between political leaders and the community. Barriers to good tourism planning may be perceptual. Differences in perspectives from individuals and groups involved may impede the planning process. Conflict resolution involves understanding the perceptual issues of those involved in the planning process. The purpose of this study was to develop a perceptual mapping procedure, which could serve as a basis of conflict resolution. The individuals sampled were convention and visitors bureau (CVB) directors in Northwest Ohio in an area known as the Great Black Swamp. Data collection was conducted in three phases which determined similarities and differences among those CVB director interviews. Results formed a perceptual map of the Great Black Swamp as a case study to determine the feasibility of development of an industrial tourism approach using the Northwest Ohio resources.

INTRODUCTION

Planning at the community level in the United States has become more of an art than a science. Many communities do not have planning professionals but use trial and error as their basic planning procedure. Other communities have planning professionals, but find it difficult to deal with the political processes. Individuals who do not have an understanding of planning are potential roadblocks to more effective planning. In some communities, there is a marriage between the planner and politics and individuals in the community, and there is an effective planning process with successful outcomes. These communities often serve as models to other communities. Other communities that are not successful try to adapt these models; they are rarely successful because they have not used the planning process in cooperation with politicians and the general population (Hadley, 2001). This does not suggest that some communities do not have effective planning processes because they do not have the leadership of professional planners. Planning is an intuitive process that if completed in a systematic manner can lead to success, no matter if there is a professional planner involved. But with a professional planner, it is more likely to be successful.

Even with professional planners, if there is not the right environment built for cooperation, then success is not assured (Hadley, 2001). Success in community planning is a
direct result of having good leadership from planners as well as politicians, and setting goals that are consistent with the general population (Long & Nuckolls, 1994). A master plan can move the community toward these goals in a systematic fashion. The key is not to focus on the final product, but on the process that is used in dealing with the success. The same process that is used in one community can rarely be used in another. To ensure success, each community has to have a dynamic process in order to allow for the proper perspectives and time for negotiation of position (Ritchie, 1988).

Even when a planning process is deemed a success, many times it is static and difficult to make changes. Planning must be dynamic and change must be a part of the process. Change in this context is not for change’s sake, but for development of new ideas to meet the basic goals and objectives. The key to sustaining the dynamics is good leadership with vision (Long & Nuckolls, 1994). Vision is the ability to foresee changing conditions and how these are affected by trends in the society. Leadership must have the ability and confidence of the politicians and the general public enough to help them understand the nature of change and to have vision beyond the current success (Reed, 1997; Jaakson, 1985). They should understand that if change is not part of their basic structure, momentum is lost.

One of the key blocks to planning, in both the short and long term, is the existence of barriers. These barriers are primarily perceptual. There is a difference in perspective from individuals who are instrumentally involved in the community planning process (Maikhuri, et al., 2001). These perception problems can be detrimental because they are dysfunctional to allowing cooperation and the formation of common goals for a community (Weiss, et al., 1996; Gorkhali, 1986). Even if common goals are developed, there are dramatic perceptual differences; individuals and groups within the community are moving in different directions (Weiss, et al., 1996). It becomes extremely difficult to achieve the common goals established. Most planning processes do not allow for this type of conflict resolution based upon perceptions. Conflict resolution may be the most difficult element to overcome in the planning process (Roe & Benson, 2001). Many agencies have tried to overcome this conflict with participatory planning and incorporate each view to some extent in the final planning documents and objectives (Ritchie, 1988). This has helped reduce some conflict resolution; but in many cases, it has not and has only accentuated the differences among the positions. The positions therefore become more intense and more foundational. When this occurs, the planning process comes to a halt (Hammitt, 1988). In some cases, the planning for a particular project has to be stopped because the feelings are so intense. The individuals within the planning process are protecting their position and see no common ground on which to resolve problems with competing groups. There must be a stage before participatory planning is started to prepare for conflict resolution (Sönmez & Apostolopoulos, 2000). If this is not done, then the dominant group in terms of political power, money, and influence will be the group to win the conflict and the result will be a disenfranchisement of some of the community and a loss of the support base of any project.

Conflict resolution involves understanding the perceptual issues of the individual involved (Roe & Benson, 2001). Effective strategies to help in reducing conflict cannot be effectively designed without understanding the perceptual differences and common positions of all the groups involved, including those with little power and influence.
Most of the time, only those that hold political and financial power within the community are incorporated into any type of planning process, and if the other groups are involved, they are only involved on a public relations basis (Reed, 1997). In order to have a comprehensive planning perspective that serves the spectrum of needs of a community, conflict resolution demands that the various perceptions in the community be well understood on both a vertical and horizontal plane.

TOURISM PLANNING

The basis of most planning focuses on economic development. This has been the primary concern of most communities because without the financial or economic base, the community is not in the position to prosper or progress. It is now recognized that such factors as the social, cultural, and environmental aspects of the community are just as important to quality of life. These quality of life issues in very few instances are directly involved or given as much importance as the economic development factors. The primary focus is how to develop a plan that includes both a social and economic perspective.

One of the important economic development movements within the last 15-20 years has been tourism (Reed, 1997). Where industry has been a good economic investment, it is recognized that this leaves many social, cultural, and environmental problems. Tourism, if planned in a sustainable fashion, can have very positive impacts as an economic base, and can also have the necessary positive social, cultural, and environmental planning contributions to the community (Treuren & Lane, 2003). This interest in tourism has been spurred by the trends in society toward leisure activities. Leisure and travel are becoming more important parts of our economy, and there are more opportunities to develop an economic basis on tourism destinations. The models for this tourism development obviously have been resort destinations that have been successful (Jackson, 1990). Many times the planning process is by passed for the ideal of a particular model that has been successful, and it is assumed that because that model has been successful in one location that it will be successful in another. This has not been the case and often these tourism projects fail and, as a result, it sets the planning process back 10-15 years in an area, and it also has the impact of the community moving away from tourism to another type of economic development (Helmy & Cooper, 2002).

Those communities that have been most successful have been based upon an assessment of the uniqueness of their area and applying the planning processes and developing unique themes (Sönmez & Apostolopoulos, 2000). These themes have often led to very successful economic developments that have positive social, cultural, and environmental impacts that are sustainable (Jaakson, 1985). Sustainability is the key element to development. Development often is a direct result of situation prosperity. The evolutionary basis of this type of prosperity directly depends upon the nature of the economy. Sustainability in tourism is the development in the area that will have a continuous appeal and have a very positive impact upon the economic, social, cultural, and environmental basis of a community. This does not suggest there will not be downturns in the economy that will influence tourism. The general trend lately has been that individuals are willing to give up other items in their discretionary budget to engage in leisure activities. The quality of the activity will always have some appeal and have a sound economic base even during times of recession.
PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is the development of a perceptual mapping procedure that will serve as a basis of conflict resolution. Perceptual maps allow the planners and individuals in the community to understand the various positions and then negotiation programs to reduce conflict. This process can be more scientifically applied to help individuals understand common goals and procedures in planning.

METHODOLOGY

Perceptual mapping, that is, the understanding of various positions in relation to one another, is not a new phenomenon (Bitonti, 1993). This methodology allows the technique to be more fully developed similar to a cognitive mapping. This type of approach allows the viewing of perceptions not in terms of linear positions, but in terms of dynamic positions that are layered. The other important aspect is the understanding of how these perceptions were formulated on the map. This gives some indication about the necessary conflict resolution technique to help resolve the intensity problems. This also allows the individuals to understand common grounds and to negotiate new positions in the planning process.

The methodology used for the study was composed of three phases. Phase I was a content analysis of the current literature, both present and historical, to provide some type of background on the various perspectives being analyzed (Herman, 2001). Phase II consisted of interviews with opinion leaders to obtain their perceptual positions on tourism development and the types of development that should occur in their area (Khattri & Miles, 1995). Phase III was a cognitive mapping methodology to chart the perceptual positions based upon a dynamic system that layers the perceptions of the opinion leaders (Stoffle & Traugott, 1991; Zaralloni, 1975). As a part of this Phase III, once the positions were mapped, the opinion leaders were asked to review the perceptual map as to where there are common dimensions and different dimensions, and where there might be common ground for development to set up a negotiation process for the conflict resolution. This provided a database on which individuals who are designers of conflict resolution programs an effective basis of data for resolving conflicts and interactions that will bring commonality and cooperation on developmental projects.

Phase I (Contextual Analysis), a thematic content analysis, was used to identify positions and groups as well as identify the historical perspective of how these positions have been formed. The Thurstonian system of judgment was used where three individuals read the materials and common judging from two out of the three experts was used to develop consensus on the positions (Figure 1).

In Phase II (Results), opinion leaders were surveyed using an instrument as being the basis of community planning exercises. These interviews were from general to specific in obtaining the individual’s perspective on commercial and industrial developments and the relationship with tourism and future development ideas based upon a tourism model. The Convention and Visitors Bureau director was the primary interview and opinion leaders were developed from a list identified by the Convention and Visitors Bureau directors. Additional individuals were identified based upon the leaders that have been interviewed. Opinions sought reflected economic, social, cultural, and environmental issues. The Thurstonian system of judgment was used to classify the
responses and a “two out of three” criteria was used to develop the consistent position from the expert leaders (Figure 1). The third phase, the Thurstonian system of judgment involving three content experts was used to place the data collected from Phase I and Phase II in a perceptual map. This perceptual map was structured like a cognitive map and layered in regard from position to another and involve a time element that involved the evolution of this position from a historical perspective (Figure 3). A correspondence analysis was used to develop the map. If additional information was needed during this particular phase from the participants, they were asked if they could be contacted so that their position could be clarified based upon additional information that might be needed with the perceptual map. A “two out of three” criteria was used between the judges to place the perceptions in the map space. Once this perceptual map was formulated, feedback was sought from the participants on the structure and nature of the map, especially in regard to the common elements where ground could be formulated to develop a long- and short-term plan for tourism development for their community. Where there was conflict, the information was also sought on how to mediate or negotiate this position, especially in regard to those areas where there is common ground. A position statement was developed based upon tourism that reflects these perceptual map situations.

STUDY AREA

The study area was the Great Black Swamp in Northwest Ohio that extends from the Great Lakes on the northwest edge to Fort Wayne, Indiana. Historically, this area was a swamp, with much history in terms of the Native American and the evolutionary history of the United States from colonial times to present. The Maumee River basin as well as the Great Lakes area developed in terms of opening up the Northwest Territory of the United States. The purpose of this project was to develop a perceptual map of the Great Black Swamp area for a case study to determine the feasibility of development of an industrial tourism approach to these Northwest Ohio resources. Various states’ CVB directors were sampled based upon a convenience sample related to tourism in their communities to determine the status of tourism in the state of Ohio. A regional sample of CVB’s and important leaders were interviewed to determine the nature of the region. Perceptual maps were developed to illustrate the importance of perceptual mapping and to illustrate the importance of tourism and the use of a perceptual mapping methodology for effective planning.

The individuals sampled were CVB directors. The CVB directors, especially on the local level identified additional important opinion leaders in the community who have industrial, social, cultural, and environmental importance for their area or for the locality. Individuals were then interviewed and at the regional level only the primary level of opinion leaders were sampled. But at the local level in Grand Rapids and Toledo, the various layers representing primary, secondary, and tertiary individuals were interviewed to develop a more consistent perceptual map of the area.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

There are various steps that are needed to develop the strategic plan for tourism. One is the development of community identity. Most individuals in a community have some sense of the historical roots of the community and the families that many do not see the bigger picture and an educational pro-
gram is needed to develop this perspective. It is obvious that the basic leadership function is the governmental unit but it is also apparent that the leadership for this may directly fall upon the historical societies and the community service clubs within an organization. The identity function of a community must be institutionalized especially in terms of institutions such as the school and libraries. It is also essential that a motivation be instilled in the population through the various festivals and celebrations so that the community understands the basic purpose and why these events are celebrated. Ways must also be found to celebrate the everyday life as well as the ethnic heritage of the individuals that make up the different members of the community.

The second aspect is to develop a sense of the economic base of the community, especially the industrial heritage. The industrial heritage must be seen as a part of the community identity but it must also be understood in terms of the future of the municipality or the political subdivision. Many times these industrial heritages are so engrained in the community that they cannot see other avenues of economic development, especially tourism. Mechanisms must be found in order to allow for the community in terms of some type of participatory planning to engage in the long-range-planning process of determining the economic base of the community and to put this in perspective in regard to their heritage. One of the often forgotten economic development aspects is tourism and there is little understanding about tourism and how to develop tourism into an effective economic base for a community. It must also be recognized that tourism is an integrating process that brings the past, the present, and the future together and allows the participation of the community to express their identity and to develop the unique aspects of the community into an effective attraction base for tourism economic development. The leadership for this within the community must be the Chamber of Commerce and/or the Convention and Visitors Bureau because this is the entity, whether it is public or quasi-public, that has the community's interest in bringing individuals into the community.

A wider perspective must be taken in that the identity of the community must be related to the region because there may be a regional approach that may allow for the best development of a tourism base. Many times the historical or heritage resources are beyond political boundaries and it is these regional elements that are integrating factors that allow for a more comprehensive approach to tourism to be developed. Most of the time there is political infighting between various communities, especially those that are adjacent to one another and the perspective of regionalism is lost and the common heritage cannot be seen for the lack of territoriality. There are two approaches for leadership within regionalism. One is from the top, where various political units have some common interest to develop and this common interest blossoms into a cooperative effort. The other is private individuals who have a common interest across political subdivisions and they get together and provide a common base and they ultimately influence the political process for the development of a common approach to regional development.

There is a set of political barriers that are put in the way for development. Many times these political barriers represent status quo in the community in order for those in leadership to maintain their position. Many times, when the politicians are in power, they are defending their vested interest and they have sought political power in order to protect this interest. Sometimes the attitude
even extends to the point that these individuals assume that they know what's best for the community. These vested interests, and individuals who represent these vested interests, are very conservative and make decisions to maintain their position. This is when the politician becomes a political barrier to change and to progress. The most common condition, though, is politicians who have a vested interest, and this vested interest is developed at the same time the community's interest is being developed. In order to make change in this context, the pressure usually has to come from the outside, at the regional or state level, or the individual has to be educated to the point of how their vested interests can be incorporated into the future plans in regard to the development of the community and this as one of the bases, not the only base, for the development. Politics may be a self-correcting process is when the general public realizes that the individual is only representing a vested interest, the political structure changes within the community.

Many times another barrier is the leaders in the business community. There is a direct relationship and a very close relationship between the business leaders and the politicians. This relationship has been forged out of the same interest of maintaining status quo in the community because the business leader has a vested monetary interest in seeing the status quo remained the same to protect their financial resources. There is a dichotomy between the old and the new business interests and there is conflict, and this conflict results in no progress or change, or the change that occurs is in one direction for awhile then the other organization gets in power and the change goes in the other direction for awhile. Business leaders must be educated to their vested interests and how change within the community to look at as a new economic perspective will benefit them.

Often the business leadership problem is not self-correcting because the public cannot vote on the selection of these business leaders. The only thing that the public can do is make the economic conditions favorable so new industries will come in and the business leadership will have competition. Though these new business interests may obtain a dominant position, the old business leaders are still in control. Education is a very important process for them seeing their civic duty to allow the community to change and identify new ways of developing an economic base for the community.

Environmental and cultural concerns are another very important aspect of planning for the community. Many times there is friction in the community between environmental and cultural perspective and an economic perspective. Economic point of view dominates over the environmental and cultural interests. This radical difference in perspective sometimes leads to conflict and this conflict leads to battles and the result is no change occurs. Sometimes even outside interests dominate over individuals in the community upon the basis of environmental interests from a regional or a state perspective. The economic background of the community may be reaching far beyond its borders in having an effect on other populations, and as a result, these external interests come in and use legal processes to limit the industry and economic interest in a particular community. Individuals in the community have to be educated to a cooperative instead of a competitive process to work out solutions in both the short- and long-run so that there is not a sustainable influence from economic development upon the environment and culture of the community.

Resources seem to be a critical element to development. Sources of funding can be internal or external. The internal variety includes bond issues; the external variety in-
cludes bed taxes. Many communities impose a self-tax and this self-tax is used primarily for the community, but these facilities are also used for the inbound tourists. Sometimes funds are sought from the tourists in order to develop additional resources for new attractions and infrastructural items to allow for continued development on a long-range basis. A more practical approach sometimes is regional development allowing communities to specialize in specific attractions and infrastructural items. The region is put together as a total package, then the responsibility falls upon the region and the financial burden is shared. Resources are not only monetary, they relate to the heritage of the community and other factors that are necessary in order to develop a philosophical and foundational base for the development of attractions for the tourists. These resources may be far more critical than the financial resources. Without these resources, the attractions cannot be developed and there will be no tourist demand. The primary idea is that there may be any amount of money available for development, but if the attraction base is not within the community then tourism is not a viable option for economic development. The other aspect of this is many times the attraction base is not there, and if it’s not there then it is up to the community to develop a common theme that has a good attractive potential and develop this as an attraction base for economic development.

One of the most important items is image. Image relates to how individuals feel about the community and see themselves, and the other aspect of image is how others see them in relation to what their impressions are about the community. Image is very critical in developing tourism for the dimension of attraction. Even though the image may not be true, just the perceptions of that particular image may be enough to keep the tourists away. Whatever the image, there must be a constant process of change to improve and develop a very positive attractive condition that will allow the tourists to reflect positively and then spread by word of mouth that friendliness of the community that will allow the community to be a very desirable place to spend time as well as their money.

RESULTS

The results of perceptual mapping show a distinct difference of opinion about the position of City A in regard to a number of key issues (see Table 1). City A seems to have a very arrogant attitude, especially in regard to the other five counties along the Maumee basin and canal area. In fact, it does not even see the importance of these counties in this topic as a tourist issue. City A’s perception seems to be that it has all the resources that it needs and the other counties should look to it and share their resources in order to develop to a position of a regional basis. The perception exists of the father and the child perspective. The flashpoint seems to be the Route 24, which would open the other five counties in terms of their accessibility from Ft. Wayne. City A seems to be dragging its feet in putting political barriers in the way to completion of this project. It’s not that Toledo does not necessarily want this pull-out project, but they do not see it as high on their priority list enough to allocate the resources for its development.

There is a leadership continuum among the community. On the leadership continuum, County E is the most progressive (see Table 1). It has moved forward very aggressively in developing the concept of becoming a regional shopping and industry center. It has implemented a bed tax and sees itself as a regional leader. Because of its position of mid-point, it is becoming a regional center
that is generating taxes and dollars through these taxes. Its primary position is if no one else will move in the area, it will move because of its uniqueness and fills the void on a regional basis. Its attitudes are quite positive and very refreshing. Its primary position and attitude is a “can do” mentality.

County B (see Table 1) is at the other end of the continuum in that it has a great indifference toward tourism and does not see it as part of the economic development and it does not see itself as part of this basin region, even though one of the most prolific developments has occurred in Small Town City B, which is part of County B. It seems to be a very isolated pocket and is very fragmented in its economic point of view. It is a very diverse county, from agriculture to industry, and also based upon income levels. It has had economic success, but there is no consistent direction and it has a very conservative approach to any type of economic development and is aggressive about maintaining status quo and being very selective in its development.

County C (see Table 1) seems to be a very laid back and a very traditional agricultural community. It is probably more oriented toward Ft. Wayne than City A. It seeks services from Indiana as much as it does from Ohio. Its position is that there is not much in Paulding County, but what is there is primarily for the community and not for external consumption by tourists. In Paulding County, there is lack of direction and, to some extent, lack of leadership, but it is very positive in its approach to development. It wants to develop and it wants to relate to other counties, but it is one almost of an inferiority complex.

County D (see Table 1) is progressive and has started its economic development, especially industrial development. It is slowly changing its identity and sees itself as a very prolific industrial center. It also sees itself as an excellent location in relation to various industries, especially the automotive. Its geographical location is indeed its strong point and it sees this as a plus and is going to continue to develop industry based upon its uniqueness of location. It has a limited perspective in regard to other economic approaches to the generation of revenues for its county.

SIMILARITIES

The county’s perspective is that regionality is the best approach. The only exception to this is County A. Its perspective is that it must be the leader. The other counties see regionality as an equal partnership. Another common element is that each of these communities sees that it has resources but it does not have enough resources to develop a complete tourism package and very strongly believes in a regional approach. Another similarity is that all of the counties, with the exception of County A, see themselves as a product -- past, present, and future -- as a transportation route. Transportation was originally the Maumee River, then the canal, and then highways. All of the counties except County A see Route 24 as opening the area to industry as well as tourism. There is also the common perception that each of the counties, including City A, is closely tied to the automotive industry in terms of supplier and after market products.

DIFFERENCES

There is a difference in where each of the counties is in regard to their acceptance of tourism as an economic development tool. Another difference is in the perception about the resources in each county. Some think
they have a little and some think they have a lot. Another difference is in their perception of their geographic location and the importance of this geographic location to their economic development. Geographic location has a difference also in regard to where their sphere of influence is in terms of their shopping and expenditure of their dollars.

**IMPLICATIONS**

The results of this study suggest that perceptual mapping helps to identify and clarify the positions of various actors in regard to short- and long-term planning (Figure 3). It also was evident that it points directions to solutions and identifies where there are commonalties that can be built on and differences where there must be educational programs or mediation programs to help solve these differences to bring unity in terms of goals and objectives. It is obvious that the most salient issue is the development of Route 24. It also is obvious that with such passion about this particular route that the individuals involved that are cooperating in the various counties may indeed be a form for the development of regional tourism efforts and the development of infrastructure based upon this Route 24. It does not suggest that a regional planning authority would not be effective, but it only suggests that in trying to develop this concept where there is agreement about a regional effort that necessary political structure as well as the necessary dollars may already be in place and be able to be expanded and may be additional justification for the development of this Route 24 to open new avenues, not only for transportation but new avenues for economic development based upon tourism.
Figure 1
Ratings for Issues Scale

#1. Where are we
1. Not Interested
2. Just beginning
3. Some development
4. Half way there
5. Where we want to be

#2. Political barriers
1. Cannot overcome
2. Will work/Some prodding
3. Encourages new development
4. Half way there
5. Excited about new development

#3. Money
1. Does not understand the financial process for tourism development
2. Needs seed money
3. Needs new revenue source
4. Has money/bed tax
5. Has money/economic development

#4. Rt. 24
1. None
2. Little help in developing tourism
3. Some help in developing tourism
4. Good help in developing tourism
5. Excellent help in developing tourism

#5. Resources
1. None
2. Little
3. Some
4. Good
5. Excellent

#6. Understand tourism
1. None
2. Little
3. Some
4. Good
5. Excellent

#7. Understand community
1. None
2. Little
3. Some
4. Good
5. Excellent

#8. Cooperation with City A
1. None
2. Little
3. Some
4. Good
5. Excellent

#9. Vision
1. None
2. Little
3. Some
4. Good
5. Excellent

#10. Tourism development
1. None
2. Little
3. Some
4. Good
5. Excellent
Table 1

Issues and County Response

<table>
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<th>Issue</th>
<th>County A</th>
<th>County B</th>
<th>County C</th>
<th>County D</th>
<th>County E</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>3. Money</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>5. Resources</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>7. Understanding community</td>
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<td>9. Vision</td>
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<td>10. Tourism development</td>
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Figure 2
Affinity for Tourism Development for Counties
REFERENCES


