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PERCEPTUAL MAPPING: A CASE STUDY

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INTRODUCTION

A study was conducted in the five counties along the Maumee River in Northwest Ohio: Lucas, Wood, Paulding, Henry, and Defiance. The purpose of this study was to conduct a needs assessment in relation to each of the counties to determine the status of tourism as an economic, social, and environmental impact factor within each of the counties (3). Moreover, the aim of the study was to determine if a regional effort in tourism would be possible. The primary focus was to make recommendations on how to accomplish tourism development, assuming the needs assessment indicated that tourism is a viable option, especially for economic development (6). Sustainable development and its positive contribution to the community was an important part of the study (14). A perceptual mapping approach was tested to determine its effectiveness, especially in relation to a systems development approach for tourism.

Perceptual mapping, defined as the understanding of different positions in relation to one another, is not a new phenomenon (1, 9). This study developed perceptual mapping methodology by allowing the viewing of perceptions not in a linear, static position, but in dynamic positions that are layered and

more complex (2). Another important aspect was the understanding of how these perceptions were formulated. This provided some indication about conflict resolution techniques to help resolve problems (5, 8). It allowed individuals to understand common themes and to negotiate new positions in the planning process.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in three phases. Phase I was a content analysis of the current literature, both present and historical, to provide a background on the various perspectives being analyzed (4). 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 (7). Phase III was a mapping methodology to chart the perceptual positions based upon a dynamic mapping system that layers the perceptions of the opinion leaders (11, 12). As a part of this Phase III, once the positions were mapped, content professionals were asked to review the perceptual map as to where there are common and different dimensions, and where there might be common themes for development of a negotiation process for the conflict resolution. This provided individu-

als 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, a thematic content analysis of present and historical materials, was used to identify positions and groups as well as 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.

In Phase II, opinion leaders were surveyed using an instrument as 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. Information was also sought about the status of tourism, its future, and barriers to the implementation of a plan. Questions were also asked in regard to a regional approach and to tourism planning and how each of the counties would contribute to a regional approach. 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 who were initially interviewed. Opinions sought reflected economic, social, cultural, and environmental issues. Only three people were interviewed per county with the interviews being very intense and lasting over an hour in length. There were three individuals who conducted the interviews. The interview was conducted in a mini focus group format with the three individuals asking questions. Informational notes were taken to ensure the

consistency of each interview. A mini report was written to review the facts given by the individual and each of the interviewers was given a report to ensure that the summary of the interview was correct. The interviewers classified the data based on two-out-of-three criteria, and according to their position on issues that had been identified. In addition to interviewing the county or local level individuals, regional and state tourist specialists were interviewed using the same format to obtain a perspective that represented not only a local, but regional and state positions.

In the third phase, three content experts used a Thurstonian system of judgment 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 and included a time element that involves the evolution of the positions from a historical perspective. 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. A 2-out-of-3 criteria was used among the judges to place the perceptions on the map. Once the perceptual map was formulated, feedback was sought from content experts on the structure and nature of the map, especially in regard to the common elements that could be used to formulate a short- and long-term plan for tourism development. Where there was conflict, the information was also sought on how to mediate or negotiate this position. A position statement was developed based upon tourism that reflects these perceptual map situations.

In addition to conducting the county interviews, two intensive study areas were identified: Grand Rapids, Ohio, and Toledo, Ohio, which have had successful tourism development. The reason these two areas

were selected is that they are prime examples of successful tourism development along the Maumee River. In addition to the individuals identified in the initial leadership identification survey, business and community representatives and key quasi-public institutions representatives were interviewed for more in-depth secondary and tertiary information. In addition, interviews were conducted at the Grand Rapids Apple Butter Festival to determine visitors' and non-visitors' perceptions about this type of community-based tourism. Also, 50 representatives from the general public from both the Grand Rapids and Toledo area were interviewed.

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, having much history in terms of the Native American and the revolutionary periods of the United States. The Maumee River basin, as well as the Great Lakes area, played significant roles in 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 and to focus in particular on a case study on two areas: Grand Rapids, Ohio, and Toledo, Ohio.

The individuals interviewed were CVB Directors. The CVB Directors, especially on the regional and local levels, 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

The first observation from the individuals doing the interviews indicated that the most important resource in the five counties along the Maumee is the people. The people were very cordial and helpful and were very engaged in their communities through participation in a number of efforts and programs. Individuals were very gracious about sharing information and stories and resources about their community. Each of the communities seemed to have a piece of the puzzle for regional development and there are significant resources in each of the counties that could be developed to sustain a regional tourism approach. In fact, many of the counties are experiencing different types of tourism and many of the individuals within the counties do not know about or do not recognize these visitors as tourists.

There were 10 issues identified as being important to the five counties in relation to tourism development. The most important issue in each of the five counties was the development of Route 24 to open up the area to new visitors and get the necessary traffic, and have the necessary resources to implement a tourism plan. This issue invoked much emotion and frustration in terms of wanting the project completed and there being a number of barriers to the actual completion of this project. There were two other types of issues identified: one was economic development and the other one was quality of life issues that are concerned with cultural, social, and environmental impacts. Different counties had different positions on

each of these issues. Some counties seemed to be more economic development based, and others seemed to be more quality of life focused. Even though there was this wide disparity of attitudes on development, all of the counties could identify the potential of tourism and its importance to the development of their areas. The other important factor was that each of these counties has a tremendous amount of pride and wishes to tell the story about their community and its contribution to the historical development. The desire to tell their stories and showcase their uniqueness is the starting point of development of a regional approach and piecing together the picture of how the Maumee River, the canal, and the unique location of these areas have contributed significantly to the historical development of the state of Ohio, as well as the United States. The barrier to overcome is how to organize these stories into a consistent package for a bundle of attractions. They could be utilized to tell the story of this region of the Maumee and the Great Black Swamp. The other issues that seem to be on everyone's mind are the infrastructure that it will take to develop this regional approach to tourism, how this will be financed, and what impact this will have upon the community in terms of economic development as well as quality of life issues. The solution to this problem may not lie in the traditional planning approaches, but may lie in the development of Route 24, using this issue as a common bonding point to develop the highway and then to raise the question about the necessary infrastructure that will be needed to support the highway, as well as the necessary resources to develop the infrastructure for tourism. It is automatically thought that money is the key stumbling block, but money, in this case doesn't seem to be as big a barrier as in other areas. The barrier seems to be how to get the common story together, which pieces need to be developed, and in which counties,

to tell the fascinating stories that we have heard in our interviews.

The regional and state representatives indicated the importance of a regional approach to tourism. The primary attitude was that there are not any of these counties that could develop a comprehensive tourism program, but all of the counties together could develop a formidable base for the wide economic expansion of Northwest Ohio. Where industry has been the primary base, the focus with the necessary resources and attractions could be developed into one of the premier tourist attractions in the Midwest. The common perception held at the regional and state levels is that this part of Ohio, between Toledo and the Indiana line, is often a forgotten part of the state of Ohio, especially in terms of the ability to develop sustainable tourism projects. As these individuals contemplate the uniqueness of this area, it becomes more apparent that this region has a tremendous potential to be one of the premier areas in Ohio for the development of a sustainable tourism base, especially in economic development. The primary uniqueness of this area throughout, its history, has been its location and the development of a good transportation system for the movement of people and products. Another exceptional attribute of this area is its ecological base in terms of the Great Black Swamp and the timber and agricultural efforts that have been associated with this area. The water resources, in terms of the Maumee River, the Great Lakes, as well as the development of the canal is another unique attraction. The focus of this area is the people and their celebrations, such as the German Fest and the Apple Butter Festival. There are some examples of regional tourism. One is the Ohio Scenic Byway that stretches across the upper part of Lake Erie. This effort represents cooperation among counties to develop a consistent theme for attractions. The primary difference between this area

from the counties that we have studied is that tourism was already a base of their economy and they understand tourism very well. Some preparation work will need to be completed in terms of educating the counties, and the development of a first step of understanding tourism and its economic development. In addition, there must be some success in these initial stages in order to show the potential, and the growth that occurs must be done slowly. There must be a long-range plan developed, and the plan must be comprehensive and action-oriented.

When the leaders within the communities of the two were interviewed, there was a disparity of opinions between Grand Rapids and Toledo. The difference may be that Grand Rapids is more of a village and Toledo is an urban center. Leadership interviews in Grand Rapids indicated that businesses were primarily concerned with the small town type of issues and cannot determine all of the relationships in terms of the business processes. Leaders in Toledo have more of a systems perspective, that is, the ability to see the bigger picture, and have more of a dynamic perspective. The business community in Grand Rapids is polarized. This polarization focuses upon old ways versus new ways. A prime example of this is the controversy over the Apple Butter Festival, its future and what it has meant to the city of Grand Rapids. There is very little doubt that the Apple Butter Festival has had major impact and has brought a perspective to some individuals in regard to planning as a basis for tourism. The business individuals and leaders in Toledo were focused upon tourism and more on some type of industrial base of business that relates to the transportation or distribution industry. The focus was not upon service but upon products.

When the survey was analyzed in regard to the general public for Grand Rapids and

Toledo, it was found that both populations were interested in tourism development. Both indicated that they were in favor of festivals, such as the "Apple Butter Festival" and "Rally by the River." One of the very negative feelings about each of the festivals was the operational problems. These issues did cause some dissensions but the opportunity to participate in the festival far outweighed its operational problems. There was also a feeling among both client bases that the festivals need diversification in programs and quality.

When the interviews were conducted at the Apple Butter Festival, the results indicated that the clients enjoyed the Apple Butter Festival immensely and that it was a traditional event for many of the clients. Many wanted the Apple Butter Festival extended through the week, and there were some negative comments about the operational factors such as parking, diversity of program, etc. There was one group of residents that had some negative comments about the Apple Butter Festival but those negative comments were related to the number of people and the inconvenience on that weekend that disturbed their routine. There was also a contingent of residents that felt a great deal of pride about the Apple Butter Festival and individuals coming to their community in such large numbers. This gave the residents a chance to showcase their community and develop business relationships for non-Apple Butter Festival times of the year.

CONCLUSIONS

The results indicate that there is great potential for tourism in Northwest Ohio in the five counties along the Maumee River. There are barriers and infrastructural questions that have to be solved and there are educational programs that have to be developed so that

there is a consistent basis for planning. There are also a tremendous number of resources, within these communities, that have to be coordinated in order to achieve success. The starting place seems to be with community festivals and Community Pride programs in the historic sites and the development of pride within the community around these sites in order to elicit support for the uniqueness of each particular county. Tourism has also budded and developed, in

a city like Grand Rapids, and has been a basis of development for a tourism economy which started with the Apple Butter Festival, and this seems to be a good model for the other communities along the Maumee corridor. The most unique asset in the five county area is the people and their stories and celebrations. If these can be brought together in a comprehensive package, then tourism has a chance to have a significant economic impact upon the area.

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