

**Geo-Tourism Conference
At Bristol Community College
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Scribed by: New Commons
Providence, RI
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This report represents the reflections and thinking of forty people, who participated in 6 learning cafes that were held to close the conference, which focused on evolving south Eastern Massachusetts as a geo-tourism destination. Each of the sections below represents the five pre-developed questions and the wild card, which gave folks permission to talk about anything they wanted to. Each section is divided into two parts. 1. The nuggets or the cream that rose to the top. 2. The full transcription of the café tablecloths.

I. Compare the current tourism strategy, including being a destination resort, with Geo-tourism: what are the benefits and drawbacks of each strategy?

Nuggets

- With a more holistic geo-tourism approach, we can plan to avoid the mistakes made elsewhere, enlist the stakeholders and target investment and message to result in a destination region with consistent quality, graphics, integrated stories, structure, career paths, measurable goals and objectives and demonstrated return on investment.
- Fall River has an opportunity to enhance its economy by developing a comprehensive geo-tourism strategy.
- Target marketing groups that have a very intense interest in a topic/subject that is well represented in our city or region.

Full Café Conversation

Current Tourism Strategy

We describe existing assets in advertisements in visitor guides and maps. Traditionally, we have marketed the obvious museums, sites and features. It is promoted as a series of discrete points. We have not thought of ourselves as a destination place let alone a destination resort – just a possible place to stop as a resort. Drawbacks are that the current approach does not really involve preservation and environmental focus – which includes an ecological economic system that has branding/quality/identity/structure/career paths/measurable goals and objectives/return on investment.

Current tourism's strategies: Traditionally, we have marketed the obvious and not far-reaching enough; may not include economic strategy. Tourism has not been effectively linked to economic development, thus not making it sustainable to the local community. Future strategies should include building and expanding features with an eye to surrounding communities.

Pros of current strategy: We do attract visitors to Whaling Museum or Lizzie Borden, or Cranberry bogs, but piecemeal approach has not demonstrated enough of a market cluster to attract the kind of private investment needed to optimize potential; very-focused for a venue.

Drawback – not inclusive or based on team playing (Maureen Estes)

Benefit of Geo-Tourism

Include maximizing financial investment and creating a complimentary economic community and adding new technology in connection with a human contact. We have some time and leeway to plan for a more holistic – ecotourism strategy.

With a more fully organized Geo-tourism strategy: Appeal of regional brand might attract more destination tourism. “The XYZregion” really has its act together. We would pay more attention to sustainability of authenticity and we have a native ethic that is inclined to do preservation rehab and enhance it as it needs to be nurtured.

There is a need to focus on generational shifts that may lose that sense of heritage and must use technology. Demonstrate on how geo-tourism is all about learning from the past about how to learn to live green in the future.

Using technology to connect to and make exploring fun for Gen-X/Gen-Y, “GTA;” “Geo-cashing” “Hostels...” Group tours built around special interests of group. Identify resources of a destination then package them for marketing.

Fall River needs an Office of Tourism...Currently, we are competitive must be co-operative win the future? How do we sustain their tourism system?

Need to make money and practice stewardship. The cultural coast is a prototype for regional collaboration. Incorporates Quincy, Plymouth County, Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, Nantucket and Bristol County.

We begin with marketing. We look at what exists and we try to package it. It's the path of least resistance. Benefit: generates business. Drawback: not seeing what is possible if we only look at what exists or what we have done in the past.

Are we missing the economic development potential by not having a strong strategy? We have great people who have passion and willingness to share their stories.

II. When geo-tourism is fully present/ a vision is realized, what will be different in South East Massachusetts...what will the area look like, what is going on?

Nuggets

- Use tourism to preserve community/special ties – patronize our businesses and activities.
- Integration/interaction if locals and visitors interact to cause. communication “totally – freely” very important.
- Seek to remold “tourist” as “visitor” or “guest” .
- Synergistic exchanges of history, festivals, culture – among locals – should be realized and nurtured.
- Attraction efforts must be started and owned by the local community.

The Full Conversation

Quality of life is enhanced in the cities and countryside. We have a better appreciation of our history. Ethnic culture is preserved. How to preserve it? Our historic resources (and buildings) are preserved. Have preserved our “realness” (not been Disney-fied). We have become positive in our attitudes towards Fall River & New Bedford.

We have developed a series of “pilgrimage” sites/trails. We have integrated destinations through a regional trail system. We have used our industrial mill buildings to tell stories about history, energy.

We have identified areas that must be protected and areas that can be developed. We have integrated a seamless economy/ecology of ocean and land. We have a regional vision in place for SE-MA. A constituency has been realized for eco-tourism.

Future vision/motto...South Coast, as a sustainable region, is a result of financial planning that illustrates profit margin for home, business and municipalities and also realizes experience-enhanced quality of life moving forward with concept.

Regional Trails...proper development of geographic indicators as an eco-green Region...unique features such as Freetown State Forest, beaches, 2 historic cities by the sea, ethnic, farms and waterfronts.

Protect culture: Portuguese...Guatemalan...French Canadian.
Heritage Farm Coast is an authentic heritage to preserve and promote character "stewardship." Land use planning that is about regionalism. Land as open space have owners that are concerned about city and cities concerned about open space - prevent suburban sprawl.

Alternate energies: Windmills, solar energy, use of water currents, retrofitting in old buildings in cities (agrie@cornellglass panels), urban farming. Make it a sustainable region for everyone and by everyone. Create positive image in minds of residents, educate the public about the preservation of natural beauty.

Pride in community to foster:

- Sustainability in tourism attractions
- Diverse cultural experiential options
- Greater economic equality
- More self-sufficient
- Regional stewardship council
- Planning
- Cultural heritage
- Environment
- Local government
- Transportation
- Stand alone sites

Foster partnerships with private and public entities:

- Land and sea coordination "Big Picture"
- National Geographic
- "Pilgrims Progress" on enterprising sites coast
- Towns
- Historic sites
- Industrial architecture
- New age pilgrimages
- Individually developed "sites" integrated into packages trails that provide an opportunity for "revelations"

In sum: Harmony, passion, regionalism, planning ahead, resident involvement; keep the focus on stories – tell the story...experience the story!

III. In what ways must local residents and their needs and interests be brought in as equal partners in creating geo-tourism in SEM?

Nuggets

- The South coast Sustainable Region is a result of community-wide stewardship that will enhance quality of life for all.
- Regionalism – creating harmony and a vision, cooperatively not competitively through coordination, through our regional stewardship council.
- Through education, our residents will fall in love with our region. They will want to preserve the “soul” of place.
- In what ways must local residents and their needs and interests be brought in as = partners in creating geo-tourism in SEM?
- (Move from calling people who visit) “tourists” and “visitors” to “guests”?

Full Café Conversation

World Fest...all festivals – small, ethnic festivals that might not be able to advertise on MOTT website.

People need to experience “entire” place – sites, smells; locals need to see visitors as “guests” more than tourist; individual neighborhood maps – created by neighborhoods themselves...we need to pressure our restaurants and ethnic places for locals as well as visitors because this ties into self interest of citizens.

Boston attractions get together and share information – have a common name and a collaborative campaign. Let’s copy it. Hold neighborhood public meetings to discuss their neighborhoods as unique. Make tourism about the place and the people or the place. Keep asking the question: Does a place have a lifestyle? Don’t overlook the obvious in your own back yard; keep residents domains protected.

Local buy-in: it’s their job because it’s their story. Unite areas of interests together in collaborative efforts. Develop areas within the community for regular day-to-day activities and promote this. This requires openness on part of residents to allow people in to experience the place. Tourism equates to, too many outsiders in residents’ eyes?

We need citizen input on these issues:

- Essex Heritage area
- Greenbelt
- Dock – huge LNG tankers – invite – hospitality

- Diverse population...economically displaced...gentrification
- Fishing is zoned...tourists come to watch fishermen – realism
- No mini-screens
- “Visitors” or “guests” to the neighborhoods...Promote the “invitation attitude”...can tourists be considered “guests” or “visitors” more? Local diplomacy can help International/domestic tourists feel at home
- Guests spending 3-5 days...or 7-10 days in neighborhood?
- “Real tourism” has smells and sights where some are nice and some aren’t like fishing villages...Develop identity of small places with price at small scale – too small to be a “distinction” but will add interest (=time, money) to someone who visits
- Battleship Cove
- New Bedford: Spanish is overtaking Portuguese
- How is the next narrative we use turn to the new goals?
- The more we seek outside visitors...tourism helps local governments to exploit visitations...outside eyes are needed
- EMV’s and Visitors’ Bureau
- “Food is the draw for travel...Seafood/Portuguese restaurant...Farming/horticulture, perm culture
- Web “2” technology...On-line presence to not only provide education and information, but also gather information

IV. What will be the major elements of the SEM practice of geo-tourism, e.g., future generations are fully considered in the planning and as being stewards of our places?

Nuggets

- Vision/value landscape
- Identify stakeholder
- Resource & education
- Destination identify

Full Café Conversation

Focus on “visionary land use.” Understand the role of sustaining our economy and economic growth...“telling the story-creating a Story Core” why are we here? Think locally: Pilgrims Progress “new age pilgrimage.”

Identify certain landmarks/stakeholders:

- Agriculture
- Municipalities, historic commission, agricultural commission
- Local brands, NRCS
- Residential involvement

- Identify value of place/tell story...preserve history of buildings/barns...explain how buildings fit in shaping landscape
- Think of how to manage obstacles: traffic, accessibility
- Infrastructure to manage existing population with tourism
- Investing in preserving open space, large tracts of land
- Keep local costs manageable for stewards that currently exist
- Tell or share current business, i.e.: cranberry growing, agriculture with tourism
- Identify liabilities as they apply
- Regional or local? What shapes area?
- Cultural
- Agro
- Economic story
- Inclusive stakeholders involved
- Residents build "place"
- Know heritage...know your community
- Long-term planning so there is "balance in tourism"
- Education-building the story "telling the story"
- Creating partnerships
- Stakeholders of place..."stewards of the place" quality of life issues (foundation)
- Visitors
- Products, services, experiences
- Investment
- DMO's

How do you get them to embrace a vision?

Conservation...Preservation...Stories...Educate for appreciation of the "360" degree experience.

Do a "Tour SE MA Program." Participate in cultural heritage events... and do a search for the story and find the locals who can tell it to visitors and residents.

Conduct a study:

- The cul-de-sac residents = the indifferent tourist
- Education
- View suburban sprawl...and how it destroys a farming community
- Agriculture, Fishing, Local Cuisine = Heritage Farm Coast

V. What local community and environmental issues are vital to integrate into the BCC tourism curriculum? The BCC tourism curriculum has a practicum component: What are the essential local or regional opportunities students should get involved with?

Nuggets

- Curriculum has to include knowledge of local area exposure to region...a sense of pride
- Knowledge of customer service...event planning
- Identify stakeholders building a system for transfer of information....establish placement sites
- Tour SE Mass. for residents

Full Café Conversation

Career info to high school student generate internet buzz in region.

The fabric of the SE-MA tourism course has to include: Past, present and future.

What to integrate into BCC tourism curriculum:

- Customer service
- Problem-solving
- Story telling
- Leading
- Knowledge of the local...nature, historic, scenery, agriculture, ecological i.e. "barn tour"
- Use of correct tourism verbiage
- Create a sense of pride in area
- Site visits, field trips "hands on experience"
- Course in interpretive guiding
- Event planning
- "Farm tours" group tour course
- Meet the needs of small businesses
- Sites for placement history such as: Winery, agriculture and culinary

Internships: paid vs. non-paid placements...models and different requirements for different schools. Focus on: building a system...finding the right contacts market local food courses...practicum bio-reserve..."fabric of SEMA" a course that will touch geography, history of region, culture.

Curriculum =...Site visits...field trips...hands-on...Interactive experience...a local history course...Native American connection...find local people to speak... tell stories...experience as a tourist would.

VI. Wild card...The Challenges of Geo-Tourism

Nuggets

- Food connects people to land and sea, culture and history
- Economic feasibility strategies for protecting land, culture and heritage
- Instill respect for open spaces and historical stewardship
- Education, outreach and sharing stories
- Tapping into the “melting pot” with fuel prices soaring - tourism can take advantage of many cultures

The Full Café Conversation

Challenges: It is a demographic issue...It is an outreach issue.

Tourism is often funded through state and local EDC's: How does geo-tourism interface with those traditional models of ROI that EDC's use to measure success? Hotel tax funds tourism in state...Quantity vs. quality...how to get the “fundors” to value sustainability?

Tying together Fall River/New Bedford in terms of regional similarities is important to emphasize...weather patterns, economic, etc. Keep in mind that food connects all!

We are a melting pot...We have: Ukrainian, Cape Verdean, Polish, Portuguese, Finish, English, etc....this is interesting stuff!

“Utilize locally retired people to tell the story.”

Offer some tourism tools that tell a story! Stories of “the past.”

When in England you can go on a “Jack the Ripper” tour...We need walking tours that tell the story of the whaling industry with folks in period clothing... OK, the story of “hefty green,” the titan of Wall Street.

Sense of place to bring forward: land conservation; protecting open space as well as the integrity of the building and historical landscape! This is “not just anywhere concept;” place restrictions on New England growth and development with care and stewardship of the culture and heritage of New England style architecture!

In Burlington, Vt...Intervale has the city back to farming...buy local - farmers markets (8 ½% of Burlington's local food is produced by farmers of Intervale where many are entrepreneurial young people learning from the elders.)

Providence residents travel East → Cape...we need to market to Providence.

Establish laws on preventing "tacky" businesses?

Foster stewards and land and historic houses...How can we sustain the agricultural character of Westport...and still be economical? We need to instill the respect for open spaces and historical stewardship - for the land is essential. Consider telling story from a different perspective, i.e., story of New Bedford seaport - not just whaling, but story of location by a storyteller in character/costume?

Advocacy for the role of each person being responsible for actions...customer interprets all based on a real people...Can't get out of role = more depth but less flexibility than we had in the past.