From Outreach to Engaged Placemaking: Understanding Public Land-grant University Involvement with Tourism Planning and Development

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Abstract

This dissertation research project aimed to identify benefits and drawbacks of public land-grant university involvement with tourism planning and development, an emergent form of university-community engagement. Using qualitative methodology, the study's findings led to the codification of levels of university tourism planning and development capacity. It is hoped that the overall project—a portion of which is summarized in this dissertation overview—lays the groundwork for further research on public land-grant university tourism planning and development as potentially both a beneficial and a disempowering form of university-community engagement.

Research Purpose

*T*he purpose of this dissertation research project was to explore how public land-grant university involvement with tourism planning and development reflects a national shift from outreach to engagement modes of public service in higher education *(Weerts & Sandmann, 2008)*. Indeed, public land-grant universities have become involved with tourism planning and development efforts in their communities as forms of education and public service through academic programs and cooperative tourism extension, as well as through conference and event services and campus-based visitor information centers. Public land-grant university involvement with tourism planning and development signals a trend toward university placemaking, place promotion, and place marketing that coincides with the national university-community engagement movement *(Connell, 1996, 2000; Gunn, 2002; Markusen & Gadwa, 2010; Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995; Sidhu, 2006)*.

Do tourism planning and development activities advance or detract from the tripartite mission (i.e., public service, research, and teaching) of public land-grant universities? In an era of scrutiny regarding the value of higher education to broader society, public land-grant universities, as well as other research universities, are being called upon to show greater accountability to the

public that supports them through taxes and tuition *(Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006; McDowell, 2001; Taylor, 2010; Weerts, 2007).*

If public land-grant university involvement with tourism planning and development is a new form of university-community engagement, is the practice a viable way for public land-grant universities to advance a community engagement agenda in an era of public accountability? With growing skepticism regarding universities' contributions to society, why would public land-grant universities opt to administer public service through tourism planning and development instead of through what may be viewed as more pressing regional and community development topic areas (e.g., workforce development, public health and nutrition, access to information technology, housing)? Is the phenomenon more about promoting institutional interests than it is about improving community prosperity?

To address these questions, this dissertation research project sought to identify benefits and drawbacks of public land-grant university involvement with tourism planning and development as an emergent form of university-community engagement.

Concepts Underlying the Research

Two primary concepts underpinned the research project: university capacity for tourism planning and development, and university promotion of tourism planning and development as community-engaged placemaking.

University Capacity for Tourism Planning and Development

The tourism planning and development capacity concept derives from two fields: community-based tourism planning and community development. From a tourism planning perspective, Moscardo *(2008)* defines such capacity as a community's readiness to participate in tourism development based on its level of collective, collaborative tourism knowledge. From a community development perspective, Glickman and Servon *(1998)* identify aspects of organizational capacity, including programming and networking capabilities. For example, programming capacity was understood as a public land-grant university's ability to provide tourism planning and development services that fulfill its education, research, and public service missions (e.g., offering technical assistance to small businesses; planning and/or hosting cultural events and educational conferences). Networking capacity was understood as a

public land-grant university's ability to create and manage partnerships with external entities (e.g., municipal- and county-level destination marketing organizations; state tourism departments; national tourism-oriented professional organizations).

University Tourism Planning and Development as Community-Engaged Placemaking

Today, public land-grant universities appear to be inculcating principles of placemaking in their public service activities and missions. Placemaking is a holistic approach to planning and development that integrates natural, built, and sociocultural environments through interorganizational collaboration and citizen participation. Urban scholars argue that place competitiveness, place quality, and place attachment are critical in a global-network society in which the fortunes and misfortunes of individuals, organizations, cities, and regions have become tied to the types of places that they are perceived as coming from, currently occupying, and/or moving toward *(Bonner, 2002; Castells, 2000; Corcoran, 2002; Drier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2005; Florida, 2002)*. Professions and institutions with expert-level influence over placemaking processes—including planning, public policy, historic preservation, architecture, engineering, and now, community-engaged universities—are viewed as having increasingly significant power in determining how places are perceived by residents and visitors, as well as where communities rank in regional, national, and global place hierarchies *(Florida, 2008; Nelson, Butler, & Wall, 1999; Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995)*.

Research Methods

Little published research exists on university involvement with tourism planning and development, particularly as a form of public service. Thus, for this emerging area of inquiry, this dissertation project employed a non-linear, inductive design that incorporated three qualitative methodological frameworks: grounded theory, case study, and institutional ethnography *(Glaser, 1998; Leonard & McAdam, 2001; Smith, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Yin, 2003)*.

Grounded Theory to Explore and Analyze the Literature and University Websites: Phases I and II

Due to lack of theory related to the benefits and drawbacks of public land-grant university involvement with tourism planning

and development as an emergent form of university-community engagement, the study progressed through three phases of discovery. The first phase proposed the integration of three bodies of literature for examining university-community tourism engagement phenomena. The three bodies of literature were planning, tourism planning, and higher education public service. As with other grounded theory efforts, the literature review not only identified theoretical gaps, but also provided data for establishing a theoretical space for examining university-community tourism engagement critically *(Connell & Lowe, 1997; Heath, 2006)*. The literature review, therefore, provided a basis for developing and refining the study's research questions, two of which are addressed in this brief dissertation overview:

- How are public land-grant universities with greater tourism planning and development capacities distinguished from public land-grant universities with lower capacities?

- What are reciprocal benefits and drawbacks of university-community tourism planning and development? Do benefits and drawbacks differ based on institutional capacity?

The second phase identified and characterized five levels of public land-grant university tourism planning and development capacity. Visual and textual data were gathered from over 150 websites for university-based cooperative tourism extension departments, conference and event services operations, and campus-based visitor information centers. Data gathered from websites were interpreted using semiotic analysis, a method of deconstructing language and images as texts *(Bourdieu, 1991; Thurlow & Jaworski, 2006)*, to determine levels of tourism planning and development capacity among the 69 public land-grant universities included in the study. The semiotic analysis also led to the identification of distinguishing characteristics for each capacity level. In addition, over 150 in-person and phone survey interviews were conducted with university and community leaders (e.g., academic administrators, extension and academic faculty, local tourism professionals) to verify the interpretation of the website data. The five-tiered capacity classification system emerged from this analysis.

Case Study and Institutional Ethnography Methods: Phase III

For the third research phase, the public land-grant university tourism planning and development classification system developed in the second phase served as a basis for conducting two case study institutional ethnographies. The two institutions were Rutgers University, a public land-grant university located in New Jersey's Gateway Tourism Region, and Alcorn State University, a historically Black 1890 public land-grant university and a legislatively designated partner in the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area. The institutions were selected for their contrasting capacity levels. Based on the classification system developed in Phase II, Rutgers University was classified as a high capacity Level 3 university, and Alcorn State University was classified as a low capacity Level 1 university. They also were selected based on the investigator's familiarity with tourism planning and development characteristics and initiatives within the institutions' respective regions.

Three data collection and verification techniques were used to achieve in-depth, critical comparative analyses of the institutions' involvement with tourism planning and development initiatives: (1) participant observation of university-community tourism engagement meetings; (2) material review (e.g., case study university websites; community planning meeting minutes; local tourism promotion websites and marketing materials); and (3) approximately 15 semi-structured on-site interviews with university-based and community-based leaders.

The Findings

The study had two primary findings related to the benefits and drawbacks of public land-grant university involvement with tourism planning and development as an emergent form of university-community engagement.

Finding 1: University Tourism Marketing Reinforces Historic Institutional Hierarchies

The study found that public land-grant university tourism engagement marketing reinforces hierarchies that have existed historically among public land-grant universities based on geographic location, institutional type based on race (i.e., 1862 land-grant institution vs. historically Black 1890 land-grant institution), and perceived institutional prestige. The five-tiered classification system that evolved from the findings of this study is a basis for this finding (see Table 1).

Table 1. Proposed Classification System of Public Land-grant University Tourism Planning and Development Capacity

	Tier	Description	Examples (alphabetized by state)	General characteristics
High capacity (42 total)	Level 4	Public land-grant universities that feature all four tourism planning and development mechanisms (13 total)	• University of Florida-Gainesville • Purdue University (Indiana) • Iowa State University • Cornell University (New York) • Texas A&M University	Institutional types • 38% are members of the AAU (Association of American Universities) • 31% are considered "Public Ivies" • One (2%) is a historically Black university • 33% serve states located in the Mississippi Delta and Great Plains regions; none of these are historically Black public land-grant universities
	Level 3	Public land-grant universities that feature three of the four tourism planning and development mechanisms (29 total)	• University of Arizona • University of Maryland-Eastern Shore • University of Minnesota-Twin Cities • Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey • University of Wisconsin-Madison	Perceived commitment to community engagement • 71% are members of Campus Compact • 19% received the 2010 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification designation
Medium capacity (11 total)	Level 2	Public land-grant universities that feature two of the four tourism planning and development mechanisms (11 total)	• University of Connecticut-Storrs • Fort Valley State University (Georgia) • Kansas State University • Montana State University • Virginia State University	Institutional types • None are members of AAU (Association of American Universities) • One (9%) is considered a "Public Ivy" • 36% are historically Black public land-grant universities • Three (27%) serve states located in the Great Plains of Mississippi Delta regions; one of these is a historically Black public land-grant university Perceived commitment to community engagement • 72% are members of Campus Compact • 36% received the 2010 Carnegie Community Engagement Classification designation
Low capacity (16 total)	Level 1	Public land-grant universities that feature one of the four tourism planning and development mechanisms (9 total)	• Alabama A&M University • Tuskegee University (Alabama) • Alcorn State University (Mississippi) • South Dakota State University • University of Wyoming	Institutional types • None are members of the AAU (Association of American Universities) • None are considered "Public Ivies" • 88% are historically Black public land-grant universities • 69% serve states located in the Great Plains or Mississippi Delta regions; 81% of these are historically Black public land-grant universities
	"Not applicable"	Public land-grant universities that feature none of the four tourism planning and development mechanisms (7 total)	• Southern University (Louisiana) • North Carolina A&T University • Langston University (Oklahoma) • South Carolina State University • Tennessee State University	Perceived commitment to community engagement • 56% are members of Campus Compact • One (6%) received the 2010 Carnegie Community Engagement Classificiation designation

High capacity universities.

Public land-grant universities ranking in the classification's Level 3 and 4 categories were determined to be high capacity institutions. The data analysis found that high capacity public land-grant universities tend to promote their involvement with tourism planning and development as community engagement, thereby advancing themselves as powerful placemakers that help to make their communities more competitive destinations in regional and national place hierarchies. Moreover, over one third of high capacity public land-grant universities (38%) are members of the prestigious Association of American Universities and/or have been identified as "Public Ivies" by Greene and Greene *(2001)*. Cooperative tourism extension departments, conference and event services operations, and campus-based visitor information centers at these institutions also tend to be affiliated with national professional organizations and scholarly networks (e.g., Association of Collegiate Conference and Event Directors–International, Collegiate Information and Visitor Services Association, National Extension Tourism Conference). They also tend to maintain relationships with local tourism marketing and policy entities (e.g., state tourism offices, destination marketing organizations, chambers of commerce). Such affiliations afford these university-based entities opportunities to enhance institutional programming and networking capacity for tourism planning and development activity.

Medium capacity universities.

Public land-grant universities ranking in the classification's Level 2 category were identified as medium capacity institutions. This category featured a mix of institutional types that, when viewed collectively, appeared to have levels of commitment to community engagement comparable to and perhaps even greater than high capacity public land-grant universities, as evidenced by membership levels with Campus Compact, and designation as community-engaged institutions by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The Level 2 category, however, contained more historically Black 1890 public land-grant universities than Level 3 and Level 4 combined. The study found that medium capacity public land-grant universities collectively were perceived as less prestigious than their high capacity counterparts. Overall, their cooperative tourism extension departments, conference and event services operations, and campus-based visitor information centers had fewer affiliations with national professional organizations and scholarly networks, and were less likely to maintain relationships with local tourism marketing and policy entities.

Low capacity universities.

Public land-grant universities ranking in the classification's Level 1 and "Not Applicable" categories were identified as low capacity institutions. These public land-grant universities appeared less equipped to participate in tourism planning and development as community engagement and, thus, also appeared to lack place-making power in their communities. Collectively, low capacity public land-grant universities appeared to have less commitment to community engagement than institutions in the high and medium capacity categories. Because most of these institutions lack coopera-tive tourism extension departments, conference and event services operations, or campus-based visitor information centers, overall they tend not to affiliate with national professional organizations and scholarly networks related to tourism. Moreover, relationships with local tourism marketing and policy entities are much less evi-dent among these institutions than they are among their high and medium capacity counterparts. The study found that historically Black 1890 public land-grant universities are the most common institutional type in the low capacity category (88%). Also, unlike high and medium capacity institutions, a majority of low capacity public land-grant universities (69%) serve states that are located in historically depopulating and chronically poor regions—particu-larly the Great Plains and the Mississippi Delta—where tourism is being considered as a key economic development strategy *(Popper & Popper, 2006)*. In contrast to the high and medium capacity categories, the vast majority (81%) of public land-grant universi-ties that serve these regions are historically Black 1890 institutions.

Finding 2: Placemaking Power Is an Indicator of Institutional Competitiveness

The study revealed that the adoption of tourism engagement marketing strategies among high capacity public land-grant univer-sities creates a "new playing field." Low capacity public land-grant universities and their communities are disadvantaged when trying to compete with high capacity universities and their communities. This new playing field is driven largely by sophisticated, collabora-tive tourism engagement programs that shape perceptions of public land-grant university placemaking power.

High capacity public land-grant universities collaborate with others within their ranks on tourism development projects (see Figure 1), thus codifying prestige and socioeconomic power structures that distinguish not only the institutions, but also the

geographic places surrounding them, as competitive destinations. These high capacity institutions also add value to community and regional tourism planning and development capacity, as they promulgate tourism knowledge through Cooperative Extension and academic programs. For example, the University of Minnesota Tourism Center promotes tourism "research, facilitation, and consultation services," including "festival and event management" and "tourism development" *(University of Minnesota Tourism Center, 2011)*. High capacity institutions also provide event spaces and visitor information services that aim to strengthen local and regional social capital networks and enhance community destination image. One example is the Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center at Michigan State University, which "fit[s] with the land grant mission of the University" of "service beyond the campus boundaries" *(Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center, n.d.a)* and is billed as "the jewel of hotels in Lansing and East Lansing, Michigan" *(Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center, n.d.b)*. Another example is the visitor and information program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, which promotes "popular destinations," "landmarks," and other attractions on campus and in the city of Madison *(2011)*.

Figure 1. The Cooperative Extension tourism departments at Clemson University, a Level 4 public land-grant university, and the University of Illinois, a Level 3 public land-grant university, collaboratively offer the Pee Dee Agritourism Passport, a web-based marketing portal advertising a variety of agritourism businesses and attractions in the northeastern Pee Dee region of South Carolina. The portal promotes farmers markets, agricultural festivals, pick-your-own farm experiences, farm-based bed and breakfast inns, and a farm-based museum. Retrieved October 11, 2012, from http://peedee.agritourism. illinois.edu/agri/about

Conversely, public land-grant universities with low tourism engagement capacity tend to be separate (read: divested) from, rather than embedded (read: invested) in their communities. Indeed, historically Black 1890 universities, which, in this study, were over-represented among low capacity public land-grant universities, generally are members of the national university-community engagement organization Campus Compact, and their students and faculty commit many hours of service to their communities. Moreover, some of the historically Black 1890 universities highlighted in this study, particularly those at high and medium capacity levels, do, in fact, promote their cultural heritage and event facilities as mechanisms of institutional public service. For example, Fort Valley State University, a medium capacity institution, describes its historic Anderson House Museum and Welcome Center "as a viable university and public information center that responds to the education and facility usage needs of small groups" *(Jordan, n.d.)* as well as promotes its C. W. Pettigrew Farm and Community Life Center as "a full-service conference, convention, and fine arts facility" that is an "outreach program" of the institution *(Boston, n.d.a)*. Low capacity public land-grant universities—whether they are historically Black 1890 universities or not—provide utilitarian and, in some cases, incomplete and/or outdated promotional information about their cooperative tourism extension projects and their conference and event services and campus-based visitor information operations. Programming and networking capacity are important factors in promoting public land-grant university involvement with tourism planning and development as university-community engagement.

The two case study institutions in this dissertation research project, Rutgers University and Alcorn State University, were found to have quite different levels of involvement and perceived place-making power in their respective regional tourism planning and development initiatives. With its flagship New Brunswick campus promoted for having "an arts and culture powerhouse" location *(New Jersey Department of State Division of Travel & Tourism, 2012, p. 117)*, Rutgers University, a high capacity Level 3 institution, emerged in the study as one of 20 "trendsetters" at the forefront of advancing public land-grant university tourism engagement. Conversely, as of the completion of the study, Alcorn State University, a low capacity Level 1 institution, was perceived by study respondents as having limited involvement with Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area planning activities when compared with other non-land-grant

partner institutions (i.e., Delta State University, Mississippi Valley State University).

Summary of the Findings

This study examined public land-grant university tourism planning and development activity throughout the United States in general, and at two universities in particular. The findings led the author to propose a five-tiered classification system of public land-grant university tourism planning and development capacity. The proposed classification system establishes a framework for analyzing how this activity is being promoted as a form of community-engaged placemaking.

Conclusion

The overarching conclusion of this dissertation research project is that public land-grant university involvement with tourism planning and development may be more aptly referred to as "university-community tourism engagement," especially since many leading public land-grant universities are framing it as such. Numerous institutions practice university-community tourism engagement despite the lack of scholarly attention to this phenomenon.

This dissertation research project also concluded that university-community tourism engagement illuminates placemaking power differentials between and among public land-grant universities. These power differentials include geographic location, institutional type based on race, and perceived institutional prestige. Elite public land-grant universities that are adept at promoting themselves as placemakers through tourism planning and development are positioning themselves for sustained public support as well as long-term survival. If state budget reduction trends continue, and public entities demand further proof that higher education institutions are contributing to the common good, high capacity public land-grant universities that are perceived as placemakers—the ones actively enhancing quality of life in surrounding communities and helping make them more competitive in regional, national, and global destination marketplaces—will likely have an advantage over low capacity public land-grant universities that are not perceived in this way. Ironically, university-community tourism engagement among public land-grant universities reinforces class, race, and power hegemonies that the university-community engagement movement seeks to address.

As high capacity public land-grant universities innovate continuously through programmatic enhancements and professional information networks, the efforts of low capacity institutions pale by comparison. Invariably, the likelihood decreases that low capacity public land-grant universities can offer the level of place-making resources that will enable their communities to compete in regional, national, and global place hierarchies, which high capacity institutions and their communities appear to define and command through monetary resources; through political and social capital relationships with external tourism organizations and other universities involved in tourism-related activities; and through specialized expertise and facilities for bringing together faculty, staff, students, community stakeholders, and national and global visitors. Indeed, the greater a university's contributions to the attractiveness of surrounding communities as destinations, the more engaged a university may appear to be. Thus, placemaking power may gain in importance as public land-grant universities and other higher education institutions are expected to demonstrate their contributions and worth to society.

Contribution to the Literature

This dissertation research aimed to fill a gap in the university-community engagement literature that has been addressed chiefly by Connell *(2000)*, whose work asserts that university involvement with tourism planning and development provides a "socially responsible way" *(p. 8)* for universities to fulfill the educational and public service aspects of their missions. The study demonstrates that the marketing and promotion of university-community tourism engagement activities has become more salient in recent years. The study findings support further observation and analysis of the implications of university involvement with tourism planning and development as a form of university-community engagement.

Specifically, the study has established groundwork for further research on public land-grant university tourism engagement as a concomitantly beneficial and disempowering form of university-community engagement. Connell *(2000)* observes, "At first glance, the terms 'tourism' and 'university' may sit rather uncomfortably together" *(p. 1)*. Though it is being framed as community engagement, public land-grant university tourism planning and development indeed may be an unsettling concept, because it can be viewed as fueling another, perhaps more controversial, trend: the intensifying commercialization of higher education. Bok *(2003)* asserts that commercial activity (i.e., revenue generation) in higher

education has "clearly helped make universities more attentive to public needs . . . causing universities to become less stodgy and elitist and more vigorous in their efforts to aid economic growth" *(pp. 15–16)*. University-community engagement scholars should consider investigating whether public land-grant university tourism engagement genuinely advances non-elitist public service and community-based action, or if this emerging practice actually reifies institutional prestige, and geographic and race-based hierarchies, to the detriment of low capacity public land-grant universities and the communities that such universities are mandated to serve.

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