Assessing the Impacts of Sustainable Tourism Programming in Small Communities
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Background

- The Minnesota Sustainable Tourism Assessment for Small Communities Project (MSTASC) was launched in 2013 to help small, non-metro communities identify, develop and enhance local and regional tourism assets that will attract more visitors or keep them longer in the region.
- Five communities or community clusters, with populations under 1,500, were selected to participate in the project. These include:
  - Warroad
  - Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley
  - Akeley
  - Beardsley
  - Houston

This poster highlights accomplishments of each community’s tourism development efforts to date, largely as a result of the MSTASC project.

Findings Across Communities

- Social capital: 42.7%
- Human capital: 20.1%
- Civic/Political: 20.1%
- Built: 18.6%

Cultural, health, and natural environment effects were reported less frequently. Warroad’s work to build its reputation as HockeyTown USA was included as a cultural heritage effect. Warroad also had begun interesting cultural heritage work around a former CCC camp in the Beltrami State Forest. Health effects, most notably in Akeley and Houston, focused on recreational trails, and other recreational types of activities that were being promoted as part of the overall sustainable tourism development strategies for these communities.

Selected Findings From Each Community

- **Warroad**
  - Largely as a result of the program, stronger relationships have been built with University of Minnesota, Crookston, as well as with Extension. With Extension, the community is hoping to conduct an economic impact analysis of hockey-related activities. A survey project to examine the needs of existing businesses in Warroad is underway. The community has engaged with the state Department of Natural Resources to open up new trails in the Beltrami State Forest. As a result of the program, the community applied for and received Community Cluster and Natural Environment Assistance Program support for a university student to examine trail design to connect the Heartland Trail to downtown and Main Street. Several investments have been made to improve the municipal campground, including a new vending machine and ice machine, new grass, and a new online registration system. Participants also described improvements at Memorial Corner, near the Paul Bunyan statue and museum, and a continued commitment to a community garden near the school.

- **Akeley**
  - As a result of the program, the community applied for and received Community Assistantship Program support for a university student to examine trail design to connect the Heartland Trail to downtown and Main Street. Several investments have been made to improve the municipal campground, including a new vending machine and ice machine, new grass, and a new online registration system. Participants also described improvements at Memorial Corner, near the Paul Bunyan statue and museum, and a continued commitment to a community garden near the school.

About Ripple Effects Mapping

About REM: Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is an evaluation method that engages program stakeholders to retrospectively and visually map the chain of effects resulting from a program or complex collaboration. To start the process, participants interview each other in pairs using the following questions:

**Appreciative Inquiry questions:**
1. What is a highlight, achievement, or success you had based on your involvement in tourism development in the past 18 months?
2. What unexpected things have happened as a result of your involvement in this tourism development work in the past 18 months?
3. What connections with others – new and/or deepened – have you made as a result of the work happening in tourism development in this community in the past 18 months?

Methods

**Data Collection:** 3 Ripple Effects Mapping sessions in Houston, Akeley and Clinton-Graceville-Beardsley
- 4 phone interviews with key community members in Warroad and the Extension educator working with the community.

**Recruitment:** Participants were recruited by the local leadership teams. To qualify, they must be:
1) active core team members
2) other community stakeholders who had knowledge of the program but were less directly involved.

About the Authors

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