

A Preliminary Investigation into Tourism Readiness: Proposing a Tourism Potential Index

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Abstract

This paper examines the variables that contribute to the tourism potential of a location or destination. The authors review literature addressing destination tourism, and tourism/destination branding. Additional literature review on bricolage is presented as a supporting discussion for the methodology used regarding data collection. A pilot study was conducted to investigate the characteristics and resources related to tourism for a small sample of counties in eastern Kentucky. The results of data collected are presented as a Tourism Potential Index, along with a Tourism Potential Index Model. Future research and analysis is recommended to measure effectiveness of the proposed model, and further refine and identify the factors influencing the tourism potential of a county. This research supports a regional economic development initiative in Kentucky, one pillar or goal of which is based on tourism.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the largest economic sectors in the world economy. Beyond creating jobs for travel and tourism workers, it contributes to the overall world economy by contributing to gross domestic product (GDP) growth. The economic impact of travel and tourism in 2016 generated \$7.6 trillion US, accounting for 10.2% of the global GDP ([Turner & Freirmuth, 2017](#)). Furthermore, growth in travel and tourism was greater than the overall economy for the past six straight years. Additionally, it becomes more important, as travel and trade barriers become part of the overall international landscape, for countries and regions to look inward to tourism as an economic driving force. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) March 2017 (Turner, 2017) report shows the contribution of tourism to gross domestic product, employment, visitor exports, and investments. Obvious contributions include accommodations, transportation, entertainment, attractions, food and lodging, cultural and historic visits, etc.

The positive economic impacts of tourism include direct employment in the tourism industry, as well as indirect employment in retail and transportation ([Simm](#)). In addition, tourism creates opportunities for small businesses, particularly in rural areas, as well as generating tax dollars for things such as airports and hotels. There are also social impacts from tourism, related to

preservation of traditional arts and crafts, customs and festivals. Finally tourism, especially ecotourism, encourages conservation of wildlife and natural resources, and may generate funds to support these resources. An add-on in this area is the source of employment for guides and service support personnel. Thus, tourism most definitely offers the opportunity for economic development, both globally, and locally.

Purpose

This research is grounded in the statewide economic development initiative in Kentucky, known as SOAR (Shaping Our Appalachian Region). The purpose is to investigate and collect information about the resources available in the region that support tourism and economic development. The researchers plan to develop a preliminary model or index that can be used to measure the current status of a sample of select counties for potential tourism-related resources. The discussion will provide a background of the Kentucky initiative, review of literature related to specific objectives of the initiative, methodology of data collection and review, discuss the findings, and present a proposed tourism potential index and model for local tourism opportunities.

Background

National Level

President Obama, in the 2015 budget, appropriated \$1 billion to the coal stricken counties of Eastern Kentucky. The objective of this proposal was to revitalize the community at large through land reclamation and small business development (“SOAR history,” n.d.). Recognizing the importance of assistance to this area has been the mission historically of The Appalachian Regional Commission (Carroll, 2015). The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) represents a partnership between the federal, state, and local government and serves as a regional economic development agency (“About ARC,” n.d.). This program serves all of West Virginia and parts of twelve other states: Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Alabama, Georgia, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia (“ARC fact sheets and infographics,” n.d.). In summary, this program helps 420 counties and more than 25 million people (“ARC fact sheet 2-18,” 2018). Each year ARC provides funding for several hundred projects in the Appalachian Region in a wide range of program areas.

Specifically, in the state of Kentucky in 2016, ARC funded more than \$9 million in projects and grants ranging from community infrastructure, to education and healthcare. In other states, in addition to those mentioned, ARC also included projects and grants in such areas as: asset-based development, entrepreneurship and business development, health, leadership development and capacity building, telecommunications, tourism development, among other areas in transportation, highways, and energy. Last year alone, there were 37 grants and projects approved for Kentucky (Carroll, 2015).

State Level

Appropriations given by President Obama in 2015 and 2016 further supported Kentucky initiatives begun in the fall of 2013. At that time, then Kentucky Governor Steve Beshear and Kentucky 5th District Congressman Hal Rogers began to realize the severity of the continuing difficulties faced by the region, specifically those hardships resulting from a declining coal industry. They essentially believed the region was at a ‘tipping point’ and that people were ready, willing, and able to begin an honest dialogue regarding the future they face, and what would be necessary to not simply accept the one to come, but to envision and work together to create a more hopeful alternative (“SOAR history,” n.d. para 2).

Other state and community leaders used terms like: “unchartered waters,” “daunting economic uncertainty,” “outside the box thinking,” “re-energizing the economy,” “resiliency, face new challenges,” “will overcome,” (“SOAR history,” n.d. para 3, 4, 5) as the SOAR discussions progressed. What began as a desire to bring people together to solve a problem, extended well beyond anyone’s dreams and the 250 estimated attendees grew to over 1,500. “As word of the Summit spread, initial resistance and cynicism in the region turned into fascination, and then engagement,” (“SOAR history,” n.d. para 7). The excitement generated during six weeks of planning, resulted in a regional forum on December 9, 2013, and is still a strategic initiative continued today.

Focus group sessions and intense discussions on the various topics of interest ensued. From these discussions, entrepreneurs and small business owners alike shared their views on South East Kentucky and challenges to be faced in the new economy moving forward. For years, the opportunities for people within this area of Appalachia were severely limited due to lack of roads and infrastructure to entice big business. Therefore, the life blood of such a community was its people and the fact that individuals who made this their home were proud and wanted to stay. So, many have turned to small entrepreneurial ventures to open doors. This economic endeavor has sustained many for years and will continue to do so into the future; however, the future holds a caution determined from a review of the SOAR initiative and attendance at meetings held at the initial meeting and various meetings thereafter throughout the Eastern Kentucky region. Discussion at these meetings found a strong desire for participation in the initiative, but it became clear many understand the product and “offering” the communities and region possess, but fail to comprehend how to translate this “product” into a “value/benefit” others could appreciate. Thus, it becomes apparent there is a significant need to assess the “market” of the region from a perspective of a marketer. There is truly a need to understand the market environment, target market (consumers) and marketing strategies that need to be implemented for regional development, and specifically, tourism development.

This serves as the foundation of this research project. It is the researchers’ goal to conduct a pilot study to assess the current resources relative to tourism, develop an index of tourism potential and model for individual counties. The foundation of this project is based on one of the SOAR initiative goals, specifically, the seventh goal in SOAR that is to establish Kentucky’s

Appalachian region as a tourism destination (“Regional tourism development,” n.d.). Within this goal, there are six objectives, three of which will be the focus of our efforts:

7.1 Support tourism projects that leverage existing assets to create attraction/destination based economic activity through private businesses such as theme parks, resorts, ATV trails, etc.

7.2 Improve regional branding and marketing efforts to increase awareness and demand for recreational activities.

7.5 Build upon regional assets that create unique identities for communities.

Review of Literature

Attractions and Destination Tourism

The following discussion will review literature related to the first SOAR objective on attraction/destination tourism. Location or place discussed from tourism development and research is often referred to as a destination, and referenced as destination tourism. Methods to develop and promote tourism often address the development of a place image or brand identity. The image of a tourism destination can be a factor that pulls visitors to a location.

A study by Omerzel (2011) examining tourism in Slovenia noted the characteristics of Slovenia as a tourism destination: safety and accessibility, hospitality, ecological integrity, dynamism, and a rich natural and cultural heritage. While a tourism destination is a reason for travelling, attractions of the destination generate tourism demand. A tourist perceives the destination as a set of natural, cultural, artistic or environmental resources, but it is also seen as a product available in the area. Overall, the tourism destination is a mixture of the attractions, service activities, and the transportation system. If any one of these is missing, development of the tourism industry cannot develop the destination. The authors cite Smith’s 1994 definition of tourist destination as a “complex entity based on a variety of different products, services and experiences; managed by different stakeholders with a variety of ownership forms,” (p. 4). The authors conclude there are six main groups of variables that include demand for Slovenia as a tourist destination: inherited resources, created resources, supporting factors, situational conditions, management, and demand.

Research by Aksoz and Arikan (2008) discussed tourism destination development by identifying five components of tourism that have a significant impact on any destination. These components are attractions, accessibility, accommodations, activities and amenities. It would seem obvious that tourists need to identify something that draws them to a location/destination, i.e. attractions. This could include the natural environment and resources, such as waterfalls, lakes and mountain or valley views. Attractions could be historic attractions, such as a cathedral or monument, or a man-made attraction such as a Walt Disney attraction. Accessibility is essential, as tourists and visitors require the infrastructure of roads and highways that are passable and mass transit availability such as airports, railway stations, or water access to a harbor. In addition to specific

attractions, activities enhance the visit to a destination. Many activities include nature and environmental experiences, such as hiking, boating, skiing, or leisure/relaxation at the local beach. These activities can also serve as the attraction for tourists to visit the destination. Unless the tourists live in the destination location, they will require accommodations, both at or near the location, as well as on their way to and from the location. Beyond the accommodations available, additional amenities including shops/shopping, restaurants at a minimum, while public transportation and tourist information also provide tourist-friendly amenities. A more recent study by Fundeanu (2015) supports the role of tourism in economic development. This research identified four factors that determine competitiveness of a destination: 1) location, safety and costs; 2) administration, marketing and information services; 3) basic resources including the physical geography, culture, history, activities and special events; 4) infrastructure, accessibility, and support services.

Camprubi, Guia, and Comas (2008) stress the importance of connecting various tourism agents location to develop a tourism destination. This research developed a model that demonstrates the relationship network needed to develop a tourism image, as the competitiveness of a tourism destination influences the tourism image. This is supported in additional research (de San Eugenio Vela, Nogué, & Govers, 2017) which found the lack of institutional coordination and organization is an obstacle to place branding and planning. Additional research by Kesic and Pavlic (2011) investigated what elements influence destination image. The researchers state that there are three aspects of tourism demand: transportation, supply and marketing. They state that the tourism destination image should be grounded in a true destination identity. The development of image and identity relate to marketing efforts and strategies. Konecnik (2004) notes it is important to include attention to product development, appropriate pricing, and effective distribution channels for destination marketing efforts to be successful. The research continues by emphasizing that the seven P's of services marketing, product, price, placement, promotion, people, processes, and physical evidence should include two additional P's, politics and paucity, since destination tourism requires a unique combination of marketing strategies to be effective.

Branding

The previous discussion provides the linkage to branding, and more specifically the second SOAR objective related to branding. Methods to develop and promote tourism often address the development of a place image or brand identity. The image of a tourism destination can be a factor that pulls visitors to a location. Acharya & Rahman (2016) examined the place image and branding as components of tourism and determined the image of a location can significantly impact tourists' intentions to visit a place. Additional research by Konecnik and Go (2008) introduced a framework to analyze tourism destination identity, specifically for Slovenia, positing that the destination should define its brand and content, not the consumer. The research determined it is imperative the destination identify its true position in the market via a critical self-analysis. Both the public sector and the private sector serve as sources for developing the destination brand.

Hankinson (2010) identified the convergence between urban policy, tourism and mainstream branding into an emergent domain of place branding. Urban policy emphasizes economic development of towns and cities, based in many factors including tourism, retailing, financial and cultural services. Place branding can be applied to any one or all types of location and activities from a marketing perspective. Confusion in terminology and domain variables continues to exist. This is further discussed by Hanna and Rowley (2008) who found the term destination denotes the tourism dimension of a place, and that the focus of discussion for place branding has shifted from tourism to business and marketing. Vuorinen and Vos (2013) report place branding is seen as a participative process that brings stakeholders together when making efforts to strengthen place identity. In particular, place branding in rural regions needs the combined efforts of various stakeholders, noting that the efforts of private operators are essential in the success of place branding efforts.

Another research study (Lin, Pearson, & Cai, 2011) examined the role food identity can contribute to the competitiveness of a destination, and food is in fact, a main reason why individuals visit Taiwan. This would “make sense” as gastronomic tourism supports the notion of food and culinary experiences’ impact on tourism choices. Food is also part of the cultural and social fabric of many destinations worldwide. When developing a destination brand identity, specific food and culinary items and experiences might be selected to develop that identity.

Gartner (2014) addressed the difference of destination brands and product brands. While brand stability and brand equity are imperative to the continued success of a product brand, destinations are places of life and change. Destinations and places are not inert objects like products. Rather destinations consist of dynamic living entities, environmental settings and the local residents. This instability is counter to the concept of brand development and equity. There is an inherent danger or risk with destination brands—as the destination itself will evolve and change, and is subject to the possible change impacted by nature and the environment. Review of destination branding through the years found focus and discussion on logos and slogans or tag lines. Examples that we might recognize: “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas,” “Wild and Wonderful West Virginia,” “Virginia is for Lovers,” “Unbridled Spirit” (KY). Other research addressing promotional campaigns (Kemp, Childers, & Williams, 2012) of cities found the use of clever messages can be used to create distinctive brand images of geographic locations. Examples provided included Arlington, Texas the “Bowling Capital of the World” and Hershey, PA, “Sweetest Place on Earth.”

More recently, Dioko (2016) cited a trend away from general tourism promotion and marketing, in favor of destination branding of places. The author notes that destination marketing is not new, and interest began almost four decades ago. Around 2005 it seemed to have waned when reviewing literature on the subject. However, the marketing and promotion of cities, and places remained stronger. Dioko concludes these efforts have evolved into destination branding. Another study (Foroudi, Gupta, Kitchen, Foroudi, & Nguyen, 2016) attempted to link the concepts of place branding, place image, and place reputation. The results of this study found two key variables contributing to identification of a place brand are national culture—including

the country's name, attributes, people, culture, geography, etc. and second, the infrastructure including economy, technology, tourism development goals and promotional strategy. Foroudi et. al continue by noting that place branding usually focuses on attractions and location image, primarily placing emphasis (focus) on cities. Destination branding, a spin-off of place branding, is primarily oriented to tourism. The findings in their study identified twelve key place branding elements, in two main categories: culture and infrastructure, both of which align with Dioko's research. Foroudi et. al also noted five main moderations of place branding: political perception, social media and news, place awareness, place association and tourism experiences. The researchers also posit that place awareness will allow domestic and international tourist marketplaces to be competitive. This is accomplished by identifying the opportunities a place has to offer, based in three areas: 1) diverse range of natural and cultural resources, creating a setting for activities that are relaxing, and safe, 2) differentiation of the attractions and facility from competing destinations, and 3) a commitment of the government to improving and expanding tourism. Another study which parallels these concepts, by Hamilton, Tee and Prideaux (2015), discussed in-bound tourists who partake of events such as food and wine tasting/activities, arts, culture and music, nature and wildlife activities, festivals, athletic-based activities, as well as business-based events such as trade meetings, conventions, fairs and markets, along with educational and scientific conferences and seminars. These researchers also identified six event tourist categories: adventurers who are thrill seekers; socializers looking for a good time with family and friends; actors who love role playing; valuers who critically assess events and the destination; gratifiers who hold personal beliefs about the event to relieve stress or other personal objectives; and inquirers who want to satisfy their inquisitive nature.

This discussion brings us back, almost full circle to the initial discussion of attraction and destination tourism, and more specifically the "five A's of tourism" identified by Aksoz and Arikan (2008): attractions, accessibility, accommodations, activities and amenities. These components of tourism will be used as the foundational categories/variables to be investigated in this study.

Regional Assets and Economic Development

The final literature discussion relates to the fifth tourism objective of regional assets and the overall SOAR initiative goal of economic development. Research conducted by Assaker, Vincenzo, Esposito and O'Connor (2011) examined the importance of tourism in a country's development, and the stimulus tourism can play in economic growth. Specifically, tourism in less developed countries plays an important role in economic development. This study investigated the role of the economy, society and environment, termed the tourism paradigm, and used structural equation modeling (SEM) to find the causal relationships between the three constructs. One significant economic variable the authors identified was price, since this impacts demand. Environmental components included both the natural environment, and infrastructure, as well as the role of environmental management and sustainability of the country. Another factor considered in the environment included population density. Variables contributing to the infrastructure included: road index, sanitation access, electricity, vehicles, internet access,

telephone mainlines, and mobile phone access/availability. The research identified six variables used to measure society: education, life expectancy, income, television index, PC index and newspaper index. Results indicate the economy has an indirect positive impact on tourism via the infrastructure and environment. Infrastructure also impacts the society variables, in particular the technological development, as well as access to transportation and sanitation. Finally, the researchers found the more deprived the members of society felt, the more willing they were to accept some inconvenience. Overall, the relationship between the economy and tourism was not significant, but that the infrastructure and supporting environment were significant to the tourists' experience.

Goffi (2013) investigated issues concerning tourism competitiveness. Research results found thirteen components to competitiveness factors. These include (in decreasing order of influence): 1) sustainable tourism policy and destination management; 2) general infrastructures; 3) events and activities; 4) responsible tourist behavior; 5) managerial competencies of local tourism firms; 6) destination marketing; 7) quality of natural resources; 8) gastronomy (food services quality); 9) historical and artistic features; 10) price competitiveness; 11) visitor satisfaction management; 12) tourist accommodations; and 13) emphasis on maximizing local economic development. More recent research by Mikulic, MiliAevic and Kresic (2016) brings together the economic importance of tourism, along with the need to develop a strong branding concept with the process. The authors cite the importance of tourism to bring economic benefits and the role it can play in achieving economic, social and environmental stability. The results of this study found brand strength is positively and significantly correlated to tourism intensity (relative importance of tourism for a region), and specifically to the number of overnight stays by tourists. The authors conclude that stronger brands parallel better tourism performance for a specific destination.

Asset Assessment and Analysis Using Bricolage

The following brief discussion of the concept of bricolage is presented as a “groundwork” perspective from which a local/regional tourism analysis can be conducted to identify potential resources that might go unnoticed if attention would be too narrowly focused. The researchers believe that addressing the availability of resources from a bricolage mindset provides a positive, rather than restrictive or limiting outlook. Bricolage could be one approach to regional and local development of tourism for locations in the SOAR region. One of the most-often referenced definition of bricolage is that of Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) as he described the actions of a bricoleur: has no precise equivalent in English. He is a man who undertakes odd jobs and is a Jack of all trades or a kind of professional do-it-yourself man...adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks.... His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with ‘whatever is at hand’ (p. 17).

This explanation of how individuals (often entrepreneurs) use what is at hand to create something from nothing (Baker & Nelson, 2005) and how entrepreneurs develop something in a resource-constrained environment could be applied to local tourism destination and brand

development. Baker and Nelson developed what they termed an integrative definition of bricolage based upon the concept of solving new problems and recognizing opportunities by combining resources at hand. They identified three elements of importance 1) making do, 2) resource combination for new purposes, and 3) resources at hand in the development of their bricolage process model. The researchers concluded that bricolage provided organizations with the capacity and behaviors to be creative and improvise. Desa (2012) explained bricolage as making do with pre-existing resources and creating new products from what is at hand. Bricolage demonstrates resourcefulness and adaptiveness, to repurpose resources. The results found bricolage was more likely to occur in areas with low technological development and when the cost of doing business through formal channels is high, i.e. there is a low ease of doing business index. Other authors (Di Domenico, Haugh, & Tracey, 2010) identified three key constructs of bricolage: making do, refusal to be constrained by limitations, and improvisation, and noted that bricoleurs remain creative even under pressure. Duxbury (2014) continued the line of thought on improvisation, comparing entrepreneurs to jazz musicians, whose improvisations are spontaneous, unplanned and unexpected. Johannisson, (2011) also referenced improvisation as applicable to creative endeavor to move an organization forward. Bricolage was also referenced by Korsgaard, Anderson and Gaddefors (2016) when discussing re-sourcing, sourcing resources from new places and use of resources to create multiple forms of value. Attention to resources and opportunities, provides the ability to identify novel ways for resources to be used, even when considered to be of little or no value from a traditional perspective. These authors posit re-sourcing as a strategy that places a greater emphasis on a more holistic view of resources.

Lennerfors and Rehn (2014) examined bricolage from the perspective of the role the state could take in promoting new resource combinations in declining industries. These authors cited many authors addressing the three components of bricolage: making do, combining resources for new purposes and resource at hand. Their findings determined bricolage could be viewed as the combination or aggregation of resources. The researchers noted bricolage should not assume attention be focused on the individual bricoleur. Another related study by Linna (2013) investigated how to design solutions for the Base of the Pyramid (BOP), those in resource-scarce, low-income, economically stressed environments. This study adapted the concept of bricolage to how individuals in resource-trapped areas could creatively utilize scarce resources that are easily found. Specifically, social capital can serve as a collective resource. Furthermore, even in a resource poor environment, there are existing resources that could be perceived as hidden assets. Thus, the social capital, via community members may provide insights from a different perspective, and provide the new view of these resources. Results found innovators/entrepreneurs performed as creative bricoleurs who were not constrained by limitations, but were able to create something from very limited resources or “nothing.” Additionally the research determined that innovators in the study found solutions without external assistance, as well as finding methods to overcome technical challenges. The solutions were practical and affordable for the local economically limited conditions.

The previous discussion of tourism, directed toward destination tourism and branding, and the review of bricolage provides the foundation for data collection and model development discussed next.

Methodology

The five components of tourism (Aksoz & Arikan, 2008) as mentioned in the previous literature review include attractions, accessibility, accommodations, activities and amenities.

Positioning this as a foundational framework, and then applying the concept of bricolage, identifying resources at hand, researchers collected data in Appalachian counties, related to Aksoz & Arikan's tourism components (henceforth referenced as 5As). The sample included the twenty-two county service region of a southeastern Kentucky regional comprehensive university. The twenty-two county service region of this regional comprehensive university is also part of fifty-four counties identified in the SOAR initiative. Working from a bricolage perspective the researchers identified items and activities that would be included in the data collection process. Basic resources that were identified included: festivals and special events, food, lodging, outdoor recreational activities, culture and art, specialized sport activities, college and university entities, roads and access; population characteristics, size, density, land, and water area. Referring to Aksoz and Arikan, 2008, the data categories were aligned to "5 As", attractions were considered any special event, historical site, or major draw to the community such as a festival or yearly parade, carnival or musical performance that would welcome visitors to the local community that would otherwise not be attended by outsiders. Accessibility was highways or interstates that would provide access to the specific communities in review. Accommodations focused on hotels, bed and breakfasts, Airbnb, or other arrangements that provide overnight or weekly stays. Activities focused on regular types of events that were available within a community to enjoy on a regular basis. Amenities included the hospitality support providers, such as restaurants that assist in providing the basics to those visiting a specific area.

Data Collection

Twenty-one of the twenty-two counties in the university service region are part of the fifty-four county SOAR initiative, and were identified for potential data collection. The researchers collaboratively brainstormed using a bricolage perspective, to identify resources at-hand in the "home county" of the university. Familiarity with the resources and community provided the opportunity for the researcher to identify resources with an "anything is possible" attitude. This then provided the foundation to develop a scorecard or model for data collection.

Data collection occurred in the spring of 2018, using the twenty-two county service region of the university. The researchers used websites and online resources from chambers of commerce, Kentucky State Tourism, and county governments. In addition, information was collected using Wikipedia for U.S. Census data on population, land and water area, historic sites, and other relevant items, such as the availability of alcohol. During this data collection process the researchers became aware of the broad variation in the quality and quantity of information

contained in these online resources. The researchers determined these online resources could serve as a promotional and information platform for individual communities and counties. Therefore, a qualitative component was added to the data review, assessing the attractiveness and interactivity of individual websites, along with the quantity of information presented regarding support for tourism. The researchers have termed this component Awareness, thus adding a sixth A to the components of tourism.

The five original tourism components were measured by a simple quantitative sum of the individual items for each variable. Historical attractions were identified separately when identified by either specific websites or Wikipedia. Awareness variables (the 6th A) included: 1) a link from the state tourism website to a local city/county tourism website; 2) qualitative measure of the website, using ranked rating scores 3-1, three being very high quality and engaging, two better than average, and a one ranking as an average website; 3) number of information/resource categories identified on the website; and 4) presence of a unique slogan or tag line. These four items were summed for an Awareness score.

Results

As presented in Table 1, the Tourism Component Scores (5As) for the counties are quite varied, ranging from a low of 5 to a high score of 106. Given this range of scores, 53 would be a median score. Clearly a majority of the counties (18 of the 22) fall below this median point. Approximately half of these fall in what we would consider a “mid-range” score. There are three counties that have relatively high scores, 77-106. These results address the 5As, tourism components of Aksoz and Arikan (2008).

Table 1
5A Tourism Component Scores

County	Attractions	Historical Attractions	Activities	Amenities	Accommodations	Accessibility	5A Score
Elliott	0	0	0	3	1	1	5
Lewis	0	6	4	6	0	4	20
Morgan	3	2	1	9	1	5	21
Wolfe	4	0	6	2	9	2	23
Knott	3	0	16	6	1	0	26
Martin	7	0	5	13	2	1	28
Letcher	7	0	5	11	5	1	29
Mason	0	6	6	7	8	3	30
Lawrence	4	0	5	18	7	1	35

Johnson	2	2	6	20	3	2	35
Breathitt	9	3	6	16	2	1	37
Magoffin	4	3	14	12	1	4	38
Menifee	2	0	25	8	9	2	46
Bath	11	4	18	8	2	4	47
Fleming	15	10	9	10	0	4	48
Carter	10	3	11	17	4	4	49
Montgomery	4	15	14	10	6	3	52
Floyd	3	12	10	19	5	3	52
Greenup	1	15	22	11	1	4	54
Pike	12	16	17	18	7	7	77
Rowan	20	2	12	43	7	5	89
Boyd	7	25	15	43	12	4	106

Table 1, 5A Component Scores

The Awareness components (online resources and materials) show more disparity in the data presented in Table 2. Six of the twenty-two counties examined have no online presence or resources available. Another five have low awareness scores as well. This indicates half of the counties examined are not using the potential of online materials and resources to reach tourists. Comparison between Table 1 and 2 show four counties (approximately 20%) are low on both scores. Four additional counties have mid-range tourism component scores, but fail to promote the region online, or have minimal online presence. Counties that scored high or relatively high on both scales remain fairly constant.

County	Tourism Website	Website Quality	Number Categories	Slogan	Awareness Score
Elliott	0	0	0	0	0
Lewis	0	0	0	0	0
Knott	0	0	0	0	0
Martin	0	0	0	0	0
Breathitt	0	0	0	0	0
Magoffin	0	0	0	0	0

Carter	1	0	0	0	1
Fleming	1	1	0	0	2
Morgan	1	1	3	0	5
Wolfe	1	1.5	3	0	5.5
Menifee	1	2	2	1	6
Mason	1	2	5	0	8
Greenup	1	2	4	1	8
Montgomery	1	2.5	4	1	8.5
Lawrence	1	2.5	6	0	9.5
Letcher	1	3	5	1	10
Pike	1	3	5	1	10
Rowan	1	3	5	1	10
Boyd	1	3	6	0	10
Bath	1	2.5	6	1	10.5
Johnson	1	2.5	7	1	11.5
Floyd	1	3	7	1	12

Table 2 Tourism Awareness Results

Data related to other factors collected are presented in Table 3 Geo-demographics, including alcohol sales (1=wet, .5=moist, 0=dry), population density, as well as land and water mass that would all seem to contribute to tourism potential in some way. (Note: a county is classified as moist if alcohol sales are allowed in one or more cities, but not throughout the county.) At this point a score or “measure” of these independent factors is not evident, so Table 3 is not “ordered” by any “score” but rather presented in the same order as Table 1, Tourism Components. Casual review of the two tables would indicate very similar placement on the various factors reviewed. It could be surmised that more land and water mass would provide greater opportunity for tourist activities, while population density would indicate human resource/labor support for amenities and activities. The availability of alcohol is usually considered to be an asset when attracting visitors, but may or may not be directly related.

County	Dry/Wet	Pop. Density per sq mile	Land Area Sq/mi	Water Area sq/mi
Elliott	0	34	235	1
Lewis	1	29	483	13
Morgan	0.5	37	381	2.7
Knott	1	47	352	1.3
Martin	0	56	231	1
Wolfe	1	33	222	0.6
Breathitt	1	28	492	2.9
Magoffin	0.5	43	308	0.71
Mason	1	73	240	6.3
Letcher	0.5	73	338	1.1
Lawrence	1	38	416	4.5
Johnson	0.5	89	262	2.2
Fleming	0	42	351	2.8
Carter	1	68	412	2.6
Menifee	0	31	204	2.3
Bath	1	44	279	1.8
Montgomery	0	114	197	1.5
Greenup	1	107	344	10
Floyd	1	100	393	2.4
Pike	0.5	83	787	1.8
Rowan	0.5	83	286	6.5
Boyd	1	310	160	2.2

Table 3 Geo-demographics

At this point the researchers have developed a preliminary model of the components, but further analysis must consider how to actually measure tourism potential. Some considerations might include the weighting of such things as a national park or wildlife area, direct access via interstate highway, or a nationally recognized activity. The next step in this research is to test this

model, using data on tourist dollars and revenues. At this point, tourism revenues are only reported (as found available) on a state level. Expenditures are reported by county along with employment numbers resulting from either direct or indirect expenditure, but the data does not include actual employment dollar revenues. Thus the researchers need to determine a source of data reporting dollar/economic revenues resulting from tourism activities and relevant employment for each county, to be able to test the proposed Tourism Potential Index Model. Furthermore, how the geo-demographic items fit into the model is uncertain at this time. The researchers recognize it should impact the tourism potential of a county or community, but cannot determine just how that occurs, nor how to measure the various component factors.

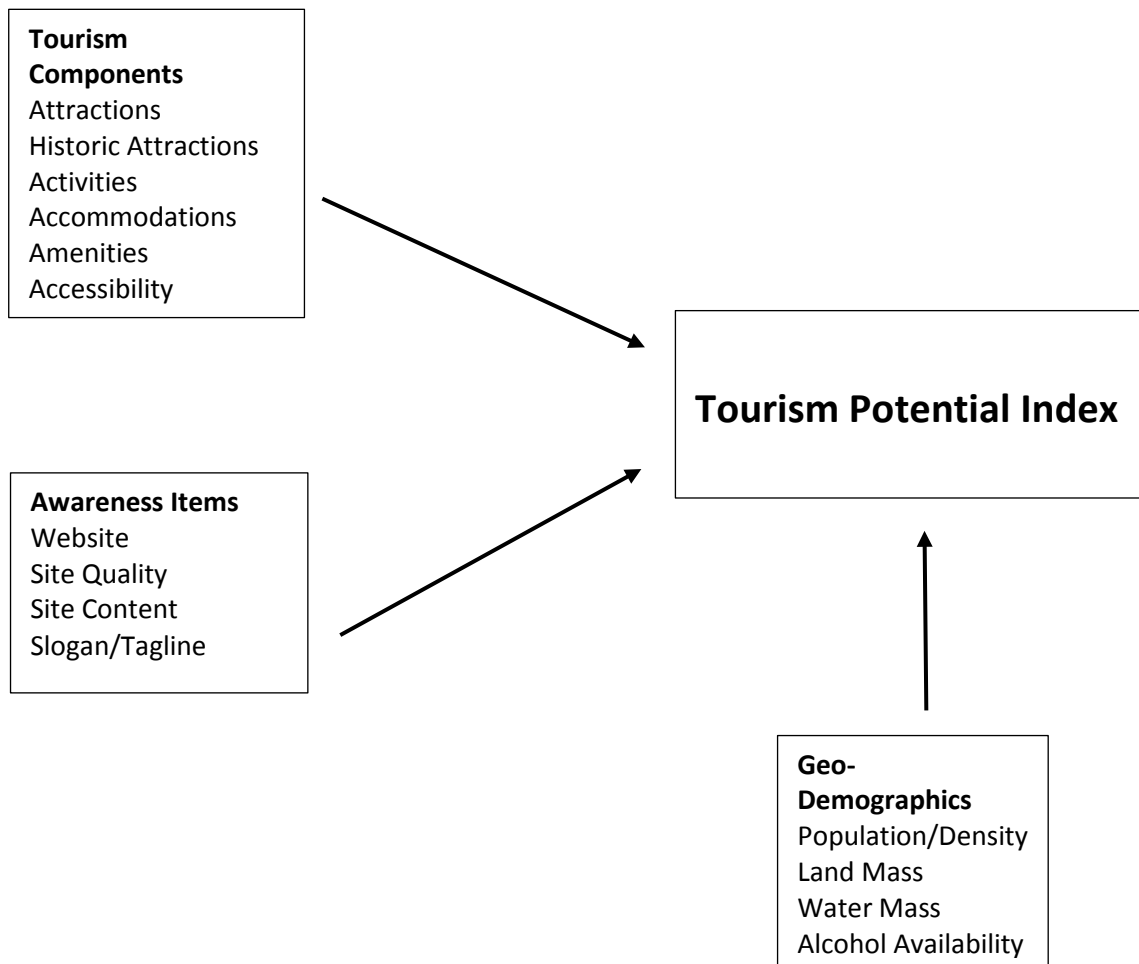


Figure 1: Tourism Potential Index Model

Summary

This study has presented a discussion of literature related to tourism on a local or destination level, and data that was collected from a test sample of twenty-two counties in eastern Kentucky.

Based upon the literature, factors impacting tourism and the attractiveness of a location have been identified, and categorized relative to the tourism components identified by Aksoz and Ariken (2008). Through the process of collecting data, the researchers realized the quantity and quality of online information and promotional materials for individual locations may hold a key to the visibility, informative quality and image attractiveness of a location. This component was termed “awareness” and additional variables were identified and evaluated.

Other items to consider regarding the model development and testing could include the weighting of such things as a national park or wildlife area, direct access via interstate highway, or a nationally recognized activity, such as the Kentucky Derby. A model for a Tourism Potential Index has been presented, but still needs to be tested.

Weaknesses

It is possible the researchers have overlooked or failed to identify specific factors and opportunities in local areas or communities simply as a result of the data collection methodology. Does this impact the accuracy or relevance of the model presented, or should the awareness component be a significant factor in attracting tourists to a location? At this point, these questions cannot be answered, because the model has not yet been tested. Also, the method used to collect data may or may not be a significant factor in the preliminary results presented here. This study employed a simple “inventory” or collection of applicable factors identified by the researchers as a result of the literature review, and used common online resources such as local chamber websites, maps and Wikipedia to collect the data. However, the data collected via Wikipedia comes from US Census data, as noted on Wikipedia. All of these can be considered weaknesses at this point.

Future Research

A next step is to analyze actual tourism numbers (dollars spent, jobs provided, and revenues collected) by county to test the proposed model. It is anticipated that higher scores on the Tourism Potential Index, will be correlated with higher tourism revenues. Testing could also determine the need to weight certain factors in the model and provide insights into the impact the geo-demographic variables have in the model. Additional research would include collecting data for the remaining twenty three SOAR initiative counties and again testing the proposed model. Further insights might be gained by comparing the SOAR initiative counties with other destination tourism locations in the state, such as Lexington, Louisville and Northern Kentucky, often referred to as the golden triangle.

Conclusion

The state of Kentucky is touting the success of tourism as well as reporting larger revenue numbers contributing to the economy (Centric Inc., 2017; Green, 2018) contributing \$14.5 billion in 2016. This was the strongest overall growth since 2005, and all nine of the designated tourism regions experienced growth in 2010 (“Kentucky tourism generated,” 2017; Roenker,

2016). Both the Kentucky Tourism, Arts and Heritage Cabinet, and the Department of Tourism publicize the state's natural beauty which supports adventure tourism activities. The success and impact of the bourbon industry as a centerpiece in the tourism story is often reported. Vineyard and distillery tours, along with the equine industry are often in the headlines regarding Kentucky tourism. Along with the dollar revenues reported, employment numbers are often highlighted, but in reality are only about four percent of the state's population. While some individuals proclaim the revenues generated by tourism are a significant contributor to the state's economy, others believe Kentucky is failing to live up to its potential (Phillips, 2016). State finances always impact the dollars available for marketing and promotion. Additionally areas that are economically distressed may find a continued lack of support, both financially and psychologically to further develop economic projects. This leads the discussion back full-circle to the SOAR initiative. As mentioned in the background section of this paper, the Tourism Potential Index Model presented supports goal 7.1 which addresses leveraging current assets to support tourism and economic activity, and goal 7.2 that strives to improve efforts that increase awareness and demand of tourism activities. While the model does not specifically address goal 7.5 creating unique identifies for communities, the Awareness score/component of the model did identify those counties/communities that have developed a tagline, logo, or other distinguishing item, that could be considered a form of branding. As discussed in the data collection method, the researchers feel consumers often use the web and other online sources to research destinations, including activities, amenities and other important information. Searching via electronic resources is an integral part of millennials' daily life, and thus it is important that all individual locations attempting to build tourism use online and digital promotional messages.

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Keywords: tourism, destination tourism, destination branding, tourism potential index

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners:

This study examines tourism potential, destination tourism and destination branding. The research applies the components of the “five A’s of tourism” identified by Aksoz and Arikan (2008): attractions, accessibility, accommodations, activities and amenities. The researchers have developed an “awareness” factor comprised of the quantity and quality of online information resources for individual locations. The research provides the opportunity for marketing educators to apply the concepts of marketing and branding to tourism, relevant to a location or destination. Additionally, the study presents a proposed model to measure a destination’s tourism potential that may be applied and used by both researchers and practitioners alike. The relevance to tourism researchers and practitioners is the variables identified in the components of the model, and ability to use this information to analyze the potential for tourism development.

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ID#: 1283