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SOCIAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS IN TENNESSEE'S RURAL COUNTIES

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SOCIAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN DESTINATION MARKETING ORGANIZATIONS AND STAKEHOLDERS IN TENNESSEE'S RURAL COUNTIES

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Angela Gray Sebby
December 2016

DEDICATION

With love and gratitude, I dedicate this dissertation to my best friend and my husband, Mark D. Sebby. He has always believed in me, no matter what endeavor I chose to pursue. With his encouragement and unwavering support, I was able to dream big and accomplish my goal of teaching and inspiring others. I give my deepest expression of love and appreciation for his unwavering encouragement and for the sacrifices he made during this graduate program.

ABSTRACT

Promoting local culture and heritage, natural resources, farm-to-table opportunities, and outdoor recreation, more visitors are now travelling to rural communities for these experiences.

The goal for rural areas interested in tourism is to create viable and sustainable tourism through destination-marketing strategies. These strategies require extensive research, appropriate planning, and allocated funding, often managed by a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). With the creation of the Tennessee Rural Development Task Force, Tennessee's strategy is to increase economic growth in rural communities.

While there is a need for the DMO to form an alliance with industry stakeholders, lack of incentives and strained relationships can inhibit beneficial collaboration. This study examines the stakeholders' perceptions of trust in the DMO by exploring the social exchanges DMOs in Tennessee rural areas currently utilize to form alliances while examining the effects on the tourism area. To achieve a deeper understanding of the social exchanges and trust involved in the relationships between DMOs and their industry stakeholders, grounded theory was chosen to explore the social interactions and study the relationships. Through interviews, participants were able to share their unique experiences and points of view to identify patterns and key themes of the social exchanges.

This study identifies the grounded theory of *commitment to change* stands between the realization of the need to expand social benefits for the community and identifying the appropriate strategies needed to support the development of rural tourism. When DMOs and stakeholders decide to expand benefits, they engage in social

exchanges in which the DMO is perceived as trustworthy; dependable and reliable.

When stakeholders commit to change, trust in the DMO and the vision rural tourism

development intensifies. This results in an inclusive community identity that

encompasses a brand image, a community self, and a sense of belongingness, for locals

and non-locals alike. Committing to change depicts the social processes between DMOs

and their stakeholders in rural Tennessee tourism areas. The social process provisions

allow for the theory to be utilized to guide DMOs in formulating strategies that

strengthen the alliances and build trust for successful rural development.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL INFORMATION

"In the past, economic development professionals tended to look down on tourism

development. Now, however, the lines separating economic development, community

development, tourism development, and workforce development are all blurring."

Ed Morrison, Regional Economic Development Advisor, Purdue

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

With half of the state's land area in farms, Tennessee is dominated by farming

and forestry, exhibiting large rural areas and communities (American Farmland Trust,

2015). Over the past five decades, economic opportunities in these rural communities

have steadily diminished as a result of fewer, but larger farms, farm crises, and loss of

rural manufacturing facilities (Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, & Van Es, 2001).

According to the United State Environmental Protection Agency (2016), rural areas are

examining diverse avenues for current resources to provide local jobs, economic

opportunities for the area, and positive well-being for rural residents.

With communities promoting local culture and heritage, natural resources, farm-

to-table opportunities, and outdoor recreation, more visitors are now travelling to rural

communities for these experiences. To further encourage tourism to rural areas, the State

of Tennessee Department of Tourism Development has introduced various marketing

campaigns geared toward driving trails in these areas. The Civil War Trail, Quilt Trail,

Old Tennessee Trail, Pie in the Sky Trail, and the Sunny Side Trail are just a few of the

sixteen trails that the Department markets and promotes (Tennessee Vacation, 2016).

The rise in visitation to these rural areas provides significant advantages to the

community. Increased tourism introduces a diverse cash flow into the rural economy:

tourism monies, sales tax dollars, grants, and additional government funding (Reeder &

Brown, 2005). This provides economic opportunities for residents, either those directly

(tourism suppliers) or indirectly (grocery stores, gas, etc.) related to tourism (Wilson et

al., 2001). This is a result of a tourism economic multiplier effect where the direct

benefits of tourism indirectly benefit the rural area as a whole. Through increased

taxation resulting from tourism, the entire area receives additional benefits in terms of

increased government services, improved infrastructure, and more economic

opportunities to support the current residents (Reeder & Brown, 2005).

Ultimately, the goal for rural areas interested in tourism is to create viable and

sustainable tourism through destination-marketing strategies that gain tourists and their

monies. These strategies require extensive research, appropriate planning, and allocated

funding. Furthermore, understanding the destination's resources—cultural flair,

attractions, accommodations, infrastructure, transportation, etc.—and marketing these

resources requires a specialized organization. Within many U.S. cities and areas, the

Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) assumes the full responsibility of the

marketing and management of tourism in the destination area. It is typically a not-for-

profit organization selected to develop a brand image for an area, generate tourism

interest, provide information to visitors and meeting/event planners, and coordinate

services and information between tourism industry business partners (Prideaux &

Cooper, 2002).

This designated organization–either a Chamber of Commerce or a Convention

and Visitor Bureau–is responsible for utilizing financial resources to build a destination

brand image and market the entire destination area. The DMO's marketing activities are

used to promote the destination to meeting planners, groups, pleasure tourists, and business travelers as an attractive brand that fulfills the consumer's specifications desired (Wang, 2008). Its role as the collective marketing source and representative of the destination's diverse hospitality organizations establishes the organization as the focal and unbiased contact for tourists (Morrison, Bruen, & Anderson, 1998).

Likewise, Yuan, Gretzel, and Fesenmaier (2006) clarify that DMOs "act as the liaison between prospective visitors to the area and the businesses that will interact with visitors when they come. They collect and provide information from and to both ends of the value chain" (p. 151). The businesses, also known as destination area stakeholders, have a vested interest in the development, implementation, success, and sustainability of a rural destination area. The stakeholders consist of hospitality, restaurant, tourism owners/operators, local and state government, economic development organizations (EDO), community leaders and supporters, and visitors. With multiple images from numerous stakeholders, destination perceptions and evaluations may be altered from the destination brand image. Therefore, DMOs must be a collective tourism information source to maintain the integrity of the rural destination brand image.

A successful DMO relies upon a leader with political astuteness, visionary skills, and a dynamic personality (Bornhorst, Ritchie, and Sheehan, 2010), as well as leadership in creating and sustaining a vision for the destination area (Morrison, Bruen, and Anderson, 1998). Coordinating the elements of the tourism industry with the public sector to deliver a clear and attainable focus for tourism in the destination area is imperative in growing a rural destination area. To intensify the effectiveness of its destination marketing and perception of the organization's position, the DMO can adopt a

unified marketing strategy and single destination brand. Partnering with the public sector

to market, research, and promote the rural destination area only strengthens the DMO's

trustworthiness and success as the collective tourism source. Prideaux and Cooper (2003)

express that a working relationship with stakeholders can be established through

cooperation on mission statements, objectives, and strategies for the destination as a

whole. With the contributions of the industry stakeholders, sustainable tourism

development ensues (Choi and Sirakaya, 2005).

RESEARCH JUSTIFICATION

The degree the DMO raises awareness of the local tourism business, enhances the

quality of life for the community, and acts as the representative for residents and visitors

can strengthen or weaken the community's involvement and perception of the DMO and

its activities. Planning and development by the DMO should be designed with the

community's support to create a relationship that is beneficial to both community support

for projects and greater revenues for the destination area. Even though an extensive

literature review was conducted, little information was found on DMOs in rural tourism

areas. Cai (2002) specifies that rural areas are generally too small to advocate tourism,

and resulting in a deficiency of research on rural DMOs.

To adopt support of tourism initiatives, DMOs and stakeholders exercise social

exchange; interactions based upon the benefits and cost to each party, either tangible or

intangible (Homans, 1961). Grounded in the social exchange theory, these interactions

are studied to further understand social exchange factors (Ap, 1992). While information

on social exchange and minor inferences to cooperation in cultural rural tourism was

readily available, absent was the identification of social exchanges between DMOs and

stakeholders in rural tourism. Furthermore, a fundamental component of the social

exchange between participants is trust, as the exchanges are voluntary and not required (Blau, 1964; Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). While trust has been discussed in many disciplines, it is significantly lacking in rural tourism studies and absent in the studies of the social exchanges between rural DMOs and the rural tourism stakeholders.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

While there is a need for the DMO to form a partnership with local hospitality/tourism businesses, lack of incentives and strained relationships can inhibit beneficial collaboration to increase tourism in the rural destination area. According to the Destination Marketing International Association (2015), there is a disconnect between DMOs, EDOs, and their communities over the benefits of tourism, thereby limiting tourism and economic growth. This results in the stakeholders' resistance to rely on one marketing entity to fully embody the destination's brand image and instead, recognize their own contributions to the promotion of the destination area, creating a distorted brand image of the rural area.

Additionally, numerous stakeholders provide multiple challenges for developing effective DMO strategies. Different objectives, interests, and naivety about the role of the DMO can result in the lack of trust in and effectiveness of the organization. Sheehan, Ritchie, and Hudson (2007) argue that DMOs rely profoundly on stakeholder resources and can be at a disadvantage due to local government pressures, political agendas, and interests of regional residents.

Community support can also impact visitor satisfaction of the rural destination area. Whether or not the visitor feels welcome by the local residents has a direct affect on revisit intentions and word of mouth advertising. According to the study by Bornhorst et al. (2010), if the relationship between the community and the DMO is strained, local

residents may not embrace visitors. The authors further state the lack of community support–promotions, programs, and visitor interactions–and accessibility of the destination can invalidate tourism marketing endeavors, products and services.

In 2014, Tennessee tourism spending was $17.7 billion, with five counties making up approximately 72% of the tourism dollars and more than 100 million people visiting the state (The Washington Times, 2015). According to Tennessee's Tourism Commissioner Kevin Triplett, the state should not be dependent on the top five tourism counties alone. Therefore, Tennessee's Department of Tourist Development plans to work with the other ninety counties to increase visitation to those rural areas (Triplett, 2016).

With the creation of the Tennessee Rural Development Task Force in the summer of 2015, the Governor of Tennessee and the Economic and Community Development Commissioner's strategy to increase economic growth in rural communities. This will be directed by three task force chairs: economic development, agriculture, and tourism. With members from the state legislature, state agencies, and both public and private participants, the goals of the newly formed task force are: economic development in acquiring new businesses, education advancement, entrepreneurship assistance, endorsement of rural tourism, and promotion of agricultural based businesses (TNECD, 2015). Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica, and O'Leary's (2006) study indicates that formulating creative partnerships can be a challenge for DMOs, however effective strategic alliances play a critical role in the DMO's ability to produce stakeholders' intended results.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The DMO's tourism industry relations are the strengths and weaknesses of the relationships and the social exchanges produced from the DMO protecting the interests of the local stakeholders while pursuing quality and innovative performance (Wang, 2008). When a stakeholder and the DMO agree to share knowledge and resources in order to develop and implement strategies, share in the monetary success, and create sustainability of a destination area, an alliance is formed.

Coyle-Shapiro and Shore (2007) stipulate that trust forms the basis for a social exchange relationship. This study will focus on Tennessee's rural DMO's alliances' perceptions of trust while examining the effects on DMOs and stakeholders. To fully understand each stakeholder's perception of trust, this entails further study of the social exchange that contributes to the organizational-stakeholder relationships and relationship marketing. By developing this relationship, rural DMOs and stakeholders are able to meet the demands/expectations of the visitor (defined by the brand image) in order to create visitor satisfaction and ultimately, revisit intentions. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to discover the social exchanges that DMOs in Tennessee rural areas currently utilize to form alliances with the EDO and local stakeholders that can be used to identify patterns and key themes of the social exchanges.

This study proposes an illustrative model based on identifying the patterns and key themes of social exchange variables and trust perceptions in rural tourism, and further examining the effects between the DMO and rural area stakeholders. According to Pearson, Baughan, and Fitzgerald (2005), the model is an abstract of the reality of the participants and the phenomenon used to explain the comprehensive findings as a graphic depiction. This can be used to recognize what components are needed by the DMO and

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stakeholders to build trust for successful rural development. The findings may guide

DMOs in formulating strategies that strengthen the alliances in order to attain visitor

satisfaction that results in a sustainable rural destination area. This is addressed with the

research questions in the following section.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What are the perceived benefits to the tourism area if DMOs form strategic

alliances with stakeholders (government, community, and industry suppliers)?

RQ2: What are the different stakeholder perspectives of effectiveness in the tourism area

where the DMO utilizes relationship marketing to form strategic alliances?

RQ3: What level (if any) does the EDO assist in cultivating relationships with DMO and

local stakeholders in order to form a strategic alliance to promote tourism?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

- Chamber of Commerce (COC) – A local association that brings businesses together

  through paid memberships to form alliances to promote their business community. In

  some areas, the COC contains both the EDO and the DMO (Palmer & Bejou, 1995).

- Convention and Visitors Bureau (CVB) – A type of DMO that promotes an area to

  visitors and meeting planners in order to increase tourism. It is supported by hotel

  room tax, apportionments from the local government budget, and/or private

  membership. It can be a county department or operate as a private business (Palmer

  & Bejou, 1995).

- Destination – place where one travels to or visits; a geographic area (Sheehan &

  Ritchie (2005).

- Destination Brand Image – Created for stakeholders to establish a belief, idea, or

impression of the area, the brand image is comprised of pictures, text, and other items–natural or manmade–reflective of a destination area (Crompton, 1979; Gunn, 1972).

- Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) – Either a COC or CVB responsible for marketing a specific destination and assisting in developing communities. They are an unbiased point of contact for meeting planners and tourists. Most services are free (request for proposals for events and meetings, visitor information, etc.) and funded through hotel occupancy taxes, membership dues, improvement district, and government funding (Adeyinka-Ojo, Khoo-Lattimore, Nair, 2014; Prideaux & Cooper, 2003; Wang, 2008).

- Economic Development Organization – organization responsible for economic development of an area through marketing for new businesses and by supporting existing ones. They may be government agencies or public-private sector partnerships and are accountable for policy making, administration, and development (U.S. Economic Development Administration, 2016).

- Rural – relating to countryside, agricultural areas, and rural towns with less than 2500 inhabitants, but not part of larger labor market areas (USDA, 2014).

- Stakeholder – Business or individual that can be affected by the DMO's policies, promotions, and development of tourism in the area. Some examples are hotel and lodging, tourism industry, political, or community stakeholder (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005).

DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 (Introduction and General Information) imparts the importance of the DMO with an overview of the background of the research. It also justifies the research in terms of literature gaps and statement of the problem. Furthermore, the purpose of studying the social exchanges between DMOs and stakeholders in rural tourism areas is addressed with related research questions and definitions.

Chapter II (Literature Review) introduces rural tourism–history, definitions, and objectives–as well how to develop a sustainable tourism destination and the DMO's importance in its success. Additionally, it focuses on the theoretical frameworks that are used to understand social exchanges and trust. This chapter will explore them in context with the relationships between DMOs and tourism stakeholders. It will also address how trust in relationships can be developed into strategic alliances with projected benefits.

Chapter III (Methods) consists of the rationale for the qualitative research design and the selection of Grounded Theory to guide the study. Additionally, the researcher's role is clarified, as well as the criteria used to select the appropriate participants. In this chapter, the process of collecting and coding the data, the importance of the researcher's memos, procedures utilized, and the ethical procedures followed are further explained.

Chapter IV (Results) delivers the data collection, analysis, and results. In addition, the evidence of trustworthiness is elucidated and the properties of engagement are addressed. Finally, subcategories are represented and described in terms of their relation to the theory.

Chapter V (Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations) includes interpretations of the findings along with the implications, both professionally and scholarly. Limitations of the study are addressed, and future research opportunities are focused.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study serves to discover the social exchanges that DMOs in Tennessee rural areas currently utilize to form alliances with the area's industry stakeholders. This chapter examines previous research to assist in directing the selection of participants and the design of the interview protocol. A more thorough understanding of rural tourism, development of destination tourism, the role of DMOs, social exchanges, trust, and alliances allows one to recognize the diverse role and/or application of each in the study.

ROLE OF LITERATURE IN GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY

The function of a literature review in a qualitative study is to present a context for the problem prior to collecting data, and is utilized afterwards as a source for analyzing the findings (Creswell, 2003).   In using grounded theory, Glaser and Strauss (1967) state this method should not include any literature review beforehand to limit presumptions and conclusions. Nonetheless, Charmaz (2004) adapts their theory by asserting that one must recognize previous knowledge, indicating that reviewing literature yields preliminary data that should be respected when forming the interview protocol. Employing a restricted literature review in this study as a theoretical framework "serves as a lens through which researchers view the world and subsequently their research, and is created from research" (Jones, Torres, and Arminio, 2006, p. 9), allowing analysis to be determined from the data collected. Therefore, according to Creswell (2003), the discussion section encompasses information that is significant and relevant to the data analysis, thereby including related theories from previous research.

RURAL TOURISM

Historical Context

In the United States, railroad companies are associated with the early development of rural tourism. From Yellowstone and Yosemite National Park lodges–initially created for the railroad workers–to hunting and fishing camps up north, Gartner's (2004) study indicates visitors relied on the railways as their means of transportation to rural regions, parks, and nature areas. His research acknowledges rural tourism continued to grow with the creation of the National Park System and the U.S. Forest Service in the early 1900's, increasing dramatically after World War II. Together with the return of the troops and their military technology and equipment, travelers during this time instigated activities such as snow skiing, whitewater rafting, off-road touring, and more in rural areas (Siehl, 2000). However, the largest increase in rural tourism came amidst the creation of the interstate highways. Through convenient transportation and the increased wealth Americans were enjoying, returning troops and their families travelled further into rural areas (Gartner, 2004).

Gartner (2004) also asserts federal land policy contributed significantly to the development of rural tourism. While the U.S. National Parks comprise only a small percentage of federal land estates, these areas have drawn significantly more visitors than major theme park destinations, resulting in rural communities formed along the entryways (Crompton, 1990; Rosenow and Pulshiper, 1979). In the 1960s, western U.S. rural towns developed in close proximity to immense ranches owned by resource industries: lumber, mineral, agriculture (Stegner, 1992). The latter part of the 1960s brought about an increase in rural seasonal homes, while tourism was commonly considered a means of economic development in the 1970s and early 80s (Gartner, 2004).

Rural Tourism Defined

In 1994, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) recognized that rural tourism required a more detailed definition. Previously, it was defined as tourism happening in the countryside (OECD, 1994). With the assistance of Bernard Lane–Director of the rural tourism unit at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom–OECD established rural tourism as having explicit aspects. As set forth by Lane (1994), rural tourism exists in rural settings that function rurally in terms of small businesses, nature inspired, and traditional character. He further indicates rural areas must develop naturally with local families, thereby demonstrating the complexity of the setting and its environment, as well as the economy and historical aspects. Likewise, the author states development of rural tourism must maintain the integrity of the area utilized for conservation and sustainability, not urbanization and expansion.

Consequently, rural tourism is described as tourists traveling to rural destinations to pursue satisfying and pleasurable experiences associated with rural settings, nature, historical heritage, and culture (Jimgming & Lihua, 2002; Butler & Hall, 1998). In these settings, travelers' experiences can consist of farms, natural surroundings, heritage and folklore, traditions and local values, adventures, art and historical sites, leisure, sightseeing, and education (Pedford, 1996; Fredericks, 1993; Bramwell and Lane, 1993; Jingming et al. 2002). Rural tourism involves activities such as camping, walking and hiking, driving, farmers' and craft markets, cultural displays and museums, adventure sports and activities, heritage sites and education, and musical events (Hong, 1998). These activities are supported by local tourism businesses normally operated by residents, and consequently, are not representative of a typical tourism type business: chain and

large scale (Mckercher & Robbins, 1998). Handmade arts and crafts, food indicative of the area and resources, attractions characteristic of the heritage, culture, and natural resources are common establishments found in rural destinations.

Bramwell et al. (1994) describe rural tourism as overall consisting of various properties in a predominantly farm area, although it does not rely on farm-based tourism alone. When traveling to rural areas, visitors can experience one or multiple forms of rural tourism: eco-tourism and/or nature based tourism, cultural tourism, rural adventure tourism, and agri-tourism (McGehee & Kim, 2004). Tourists participating in eco-tourism and/or nature-based tourism typically visit rural destinations for bird viewing, animal watching, education in flora and fauna, and enjoying nature. According to Kiper and Ozdemir's (2012) study, the ecosystem is fragile, therefore, rural tourism development requires strategic planning to preserve it.

Defined by Macdonald and Jolliff (2003), cultural rural tourism encompasses tourists visiting rural areas to experience the local culture, folklore, natural settings, heritage and historical attractions. Kiper and Ozdemir (2012) further indicates that heritage tourism is part of cultural tourism and as such, may include: rural buildings and architecture, war relics and landmarks, archeological sites, monuments of famous figures, and historical remains. It can also consist of parkways and trails–historical and cultural– created to educate tourists and further encourage visitation to rural areas.

Regarding adventure tourism, the United Nations World Tourism Organization's (UNWTO) 2014 Global Report on Adventure Tourism states it is one of the fastest growing areas in the vacation industry. The motivation for the adventure traveler is experience centered; engaging in outdoor activities, connecting with core values, and

interacting with local residents. Activities such as caving, hiking, cycling, hunting, fly-fishing, kayaking, and off-roading are a few of the most popular pursuits. Unlike experiences offered for mass tourists, adventure tourism offers one the opportunity to engage in a genuine experience, and may afford tourists low or high risk opportunities depending on the level of participation (Kane & Tucker, 2004).

Agritourism showcases agricultural products and services to increase the traveler's experiences with the intention of delivering economic opportunities for farmers and business owners (Wicks & Merrett, 2003). Providing activities such as animal interactions, wineries, U-Picks, farmers' and craft markets, agricultural education and festivals, agritourism assists farmers and businesses in creating multiple streams of income, while developing and expanding current farms and products (Kiper and Ozdemir, 2012). In addition to cultivating its current offerings, agritourism safeguards the rural way of life and environment, presenting the rural area with a sustainable form of tourism (Privitera, 2010).

Objectives

According to the OECD (1994), the objectives for rural tourism are to (1) establish jobs and sustain them while allowing for further development, (2) preserve and protect the local architecture and environments, (3) support the community, agriculture, and forestry, (4) improve residents' quality of life, (5) create jobs for the disadvantaged and under-employed, and (6) enrich the quality of life for urban visitors. Perpetuation of the rural culture should be a recognized goal for rural tourism planning (Butler & Hall, 1998), going beyond the OECD's objectives and compounding success for the destination area (Clark & Chabrel, 2007).

McCool and Martin's (1994) research specifies tourism as an alternative means to alleviate depressing social or economic levels in rural areas. Economically, tourism directly affects businesses that service the tourist and creates an indirect economic impact for the entire destination area. According to Fleischer & Felsenstein (2000), tourism is responsible for generating demand in the rural market and thereby, creates new revenue sources for the rural area and the local government. Calculated from performance variables—return on investment, percent growth in tourism, and economic multipliers— tourism's direct impact generates new income and employment, increases taxes, and economically elevates the level of prosperity for the rural residents (Eadington & Smith, 1992).

The manner in which tourists' monies flow in the economy area is measured as a multiplier effect of the tourism dollars. The indirect impact of tourism creates jobs in the tourism industry and encourages growth in other industries, such as hotel and restaurant suppliers, manufacturers, information technology, retail, and services. As new jobs are created in the rural tourism area, tax revenue increases with added local spending. In addition, other types of businesses are enticed to the destination. With the creation of added local jobs, the additional increase in tax revenues is used for infrastructure and tourism development. (see Figure 1).

Consequently, the success of tourism in an area is linked to the success of the businesses and individuals of the tourism area. For rural areas that are economically declining, rural tourism is a viable solution to improve the residents' quality of life (Mcintosh & Goeldner, 1984), and provides the opportunity to increase waning incomes (Douglas and Derret, 2001).
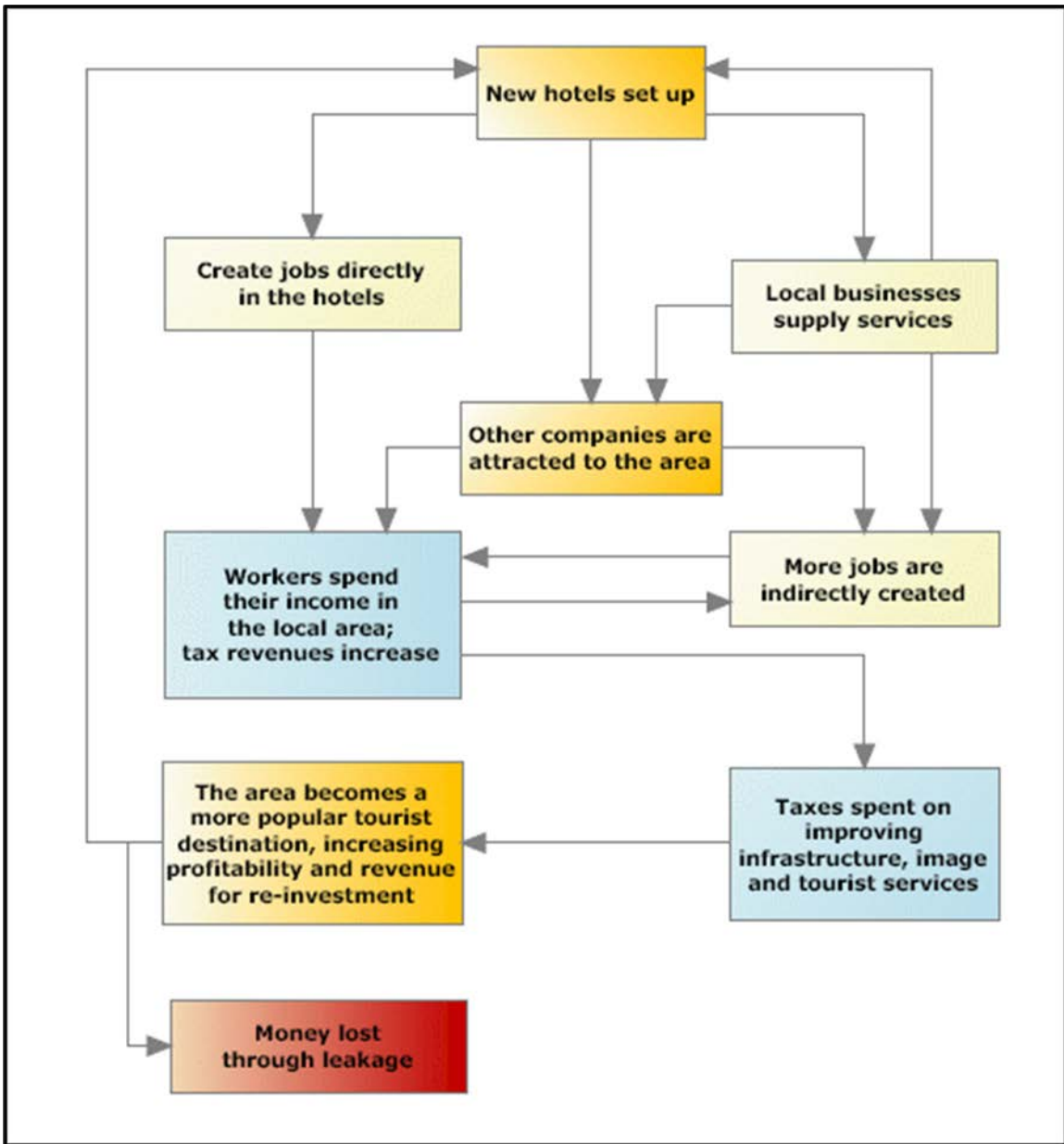
Figure 1. Barcelona Field Studies Centre Tourism Multiplier Effect (2016)

In achieving the objectives of rural tourism, destination areas must also consider how to sustain these goals: conservation of the local culture, protection of the rural environment, and continuing economic development (Bramwell, 1990; Bramwell & Lane, 1994; Lane, 1994a; Lane, 2009). Lane (1994a) clarifies sustainable and successful tourism development relies on continuing visitor satisfaction created through the effective development of the rural destination.

DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM

Lane's (1994) research for the OECD establishes four elements necessary for sustainable rural tourism: development and analysis skills, ongoing discussions with industry stakeholders, local support, and continuous improvement. The author maintains those in charge of rural tourism must have tourism development experience, in addition to analysis skills–economic, natural resource, and societal–to formulate appropriate strategies to develop and sustain rural tourism. Likewise, he indicates that conferring with a wide selection of industry stakeholders–businesses, transport, farmers, government, attractions, restaurants–is essential in establishing goals and objectives representative of the rural area and residents. Consequently, through conversations with the stakeholders, Lane (1994) discusses the importance of residents receiving assurance that tourism will not spoil the current quality of life, but offer the opportunity to increase livelihoods. He confirms that formulating suitable rural tourism strategies should evolve over time without resistance to change, and those in authority acknowledge missteps to reduce the likelihood of repeating previous mistakes.

Moreover, the OECD's (1994) report indicates that a sustainable rural tourism area must (1) develop businesses that are environmentally viable; (2) develop, improve,

and continually monitor lodging and attractions; and (3) provide and maintain

infrastructures. Wilson et al. (2001) further advocates building sustainable rural tourism

with community support, special events to encourage local tourism, and cooperating with

surrounding areas to develop tourism packages. Notwithstanding, the authors contend

that community support in the areas of planning, development, and tourism ensues tourist

satisfaction, providing the destination with positive hospitality and word-of-mouth.

Coordination and cooperation between tourism businesses–sharing resources

while still remaining competitive–and between the businesses and area governance

maintains a goal and objective driven atmosphere, in which strategic planning ensues

(Wilson et al., 2001). This is necessary to address continued growth and any

complexities or complications that may arise as the rural area expands. Furthermore, the

authors state additional sustainable rural tourism factors consist of information and

technical assistance, maintaining the main street program, and local government's

collaboration and support in terms of zoning, funding, infrastructure, and tourism

education.

In addition, rural tourism success depends on sufficient attractions, adequate

promotion and marketing of the destination area, appropriate services, and rich

hospitality (Wilson et al., 2001; Gunn, 1988). The authors note that attractions can be

natural or manmade, and should be effectively promoted and marketed to tourists to

affect visit and re-visit intentions. With increased tourism however, the authors stipulate

that the destination must also integrate the appropriate infrastructures needed to sustain

increased traffic to the area: roads, water, power, and signage. Equally important,

services such as lodging, food, information and shopping play a significant role in the

sustainability of the destination area by satisfying the needs and wants of tourists (Wilson et al., 2001). Finally, they advocate the importance of hospitality in these organizations and by the community. Welcoming guests to the area and being cordial indicates visitors' presence in the community is valued.

As rural destinations compete with other areas for tourist traffic, what some fail to realize is there are effective and strategic ways to develop a tourism destination. Understanding the dynamics between tourism and those promoting the rural destination are the keys to the sustainability of the tourism area (Wilson et al.). The components vital to the success of a tourism area can be fulfilled and managed through a DMO for the tourism area, formed with the cooperation of the local government and businesses (Pike, 2008). Pearce and Schanzel (2013) state that destinations need to be managed, while Wang and Fessenmaier (2007) maintain that a DMO is vital for creating new tourism businesses and promoting existing ones. Additionally, as rural tourism expands, a DMO can provide information (between visitors and businesses), technical assistance crucial to visitors (websites, social media), and consistent destination brand promotion (Wilson et al., 2001).

TOURISM FOUNDATIONS OF SUCCESS AND THE DMO

Successful tourism destinations must maintain their charm while providing unique experiences to travelers (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). The authors indicate tourism destinations should be comparative to other destinations in regards to resources, but hold a competitive advantage. This advantage is attainable when the area recognizes its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), and develops and implements an appropriate strategic plan. Addressing competitiveness through the destination's core

structures, supporting factors, qualifying determinants, and destination management

provides discernment constructing a strategic plan applicable for the rural area (Enright

and Newton, 2004).

Enright and Newton (2004) state core structures of a destination are the aspects

that are unique to the area, either native or manmade. The authors ascertain they contain

geography, culture, history, special events, and tourism structures (lodging, food,

shopping, and attraction), while supporting factors include accessibility and

infrastructure. Qualifying determinants–safety, location, and other local–provide another

level to the competitiveness of the tourism area (Enright & Newton, 2004)

Destination marketing and management can be directed by a DMO. It can be

organized as a Convention and Visitor Bureau (either independent or dependent on the

local government), a Chamber of Commerce, a local government agency, or a special

legal entity; all directly responsible for marketing the destination brand and generating

additional monies to an area through revenues and taxes (Wang, 2008). Soteriades'

(2012) research asserts that effective collaboration marketing efforts require strong

leadership, administrative support, shared vision, goal accomplishment and open

communication. Wang (2011) states a DMO manages networks (industry stakeholders,

community, government, and visitors) by providing information, coordinating meetings

and marketing campaigns, acting as a liaison, and building teams and partnerships. He

also indicates that the DMO is the leader for establishing and marketing the destination

brand image and coordinating the funding to do so. This requires expertise in leadership,

functional skills, developing the destination brand image, relationship marketing,

alliances, and social exchange.

Leadership

The OECD (1994) specifies leadership is a requirement for the success and
sustainability of rural tourism. It should be comprised of those who recognize the value
of tourism to the destination area, avidly attain funding, and actively endorse tourism
with the participation and cooperation of various leaders in the area (Wilson et al., 2001).
A successful tourism area is supported by a successful DMO, which is directed by a
leader with political astuteness, visionary skills, and a dynamic personality (Bornhorst, et
al., 2010). Morrison et al. (1998) assert it is vital the DMO establish leadership through
visionary goals and objectives for the area. Without the foresight to find a way to
continually develop the tourism area and the creativity, the destination area will be unable
to create a competitive advantage over other destination areas.

Likewise, the top executives and board of directors are vital to the success of the
DMO. These leaders must be visionaries who understand what is required for the
destination area to be innovative and create unequal experiences for tourists (Bornhorst et
al., 2010). Board members typically represent a diverse group of hospitality businesses:
hotel, restaurants, meeting planners, government, retail, and residents. Bornhorst et al,
(2010) suggest varied assembly of business leaders impacted by the local tourism dollars
offer diverse objective insight into planning and promoting the destination area.

According to Morgan and Hunt (1994) for the DMO to be successful, leadership
must be able to visualize an attractive destination area and offer unbiased discernment, as
well as be competent in delivering tourism advantages, not disadvantages for the industry
stakeholders. The authors argue that when stakeholders believe DMO leaders have
integrity and are reliable in developing the rural destination area, the organization has the

capability to enhance tourists' experiences, financially affecting the destination area. Moreover, they indicate sharing of information, values, and opportunities fosters trust between the DMO and the stakeholders.

Functional Skills

Wang (2008) stresses that leadership must perform functional duties with appropriate skills that support the local tourism industry. DMO tourism success relies heavily on managerial functions evaluated by stakeholders—marketing, services, product development, and management—all of which require expertise (Bornhorst et al., 2010). In addition to managerial functions, a DMO must determine visitor needs and wants, identify market segments, and produce the applicable promotion to publicize to visitors (Soteriades, 2012). DMOs must recognize and appreciate the destination's resources and successfully market these resources to target population segments in order to increase tourism. The OECD (1994) maintains tourism leadership must actively support rural services, businesses, and attractions, as well as conservation of the rural environment.

The leadership and staff of the DMO can be vital to the success of the tourism area. Kusluvan, Kusluvan, Ilhan, and Buyruk (2010) find "employees and how they are managed are key determinants of service quality, customer satisfaction and loyalty, competitive advantage, organizational performance, and business success" (p. 174). They contend that for a DMO to be recognized as professionally managed and perceived as such by stakeholders, leaders must be committed to the success of rural tourism, establish trust with stakeholders, and build motivation among participants to create a sustainable rural tourism area. Lee and Turban (2001) establish ability—skills and competencies—as a main component of trust, whereas Webber (2001) states those highly

proficient, experienced, and capable can result in trust and success in their interactions.

Tourism Brand Image Development

Another vital responsibility for rural DMOs is the development and promotion of the rural tourism area, involving research where one must identify the market and convey a unified approach to present it (OECD, 1994). This can be accomplished through destination branding, found to increase the competitiveness of the area (Hanna & Rowley, 2008). DMOs are responsible for developing and implementing a brand image that encompasses the experiences and attributes that the destination has to offer. Ritchie and Ritchie (1998) affirm this brand image communicates to visitors an experience unique to the destination through a picture, name, or logo.

Bornhorst et al.'s (2010) study indicates that marketing the brand is the most important operational activity for a DMO. Effective marketing, both to tourists and tourism suppliers, can increase tourism opportunities by increasing the number of tourism industry suppliers, enhancing tourists' experiences, and positively affecting the destination financially (Prideaux & Cooper, 2003). Although stakeholders have diverse goals and are inclined to advertise their own businesses; to have a competitive advantage, marketing must be done collectively (Gunn, 1988; Bramwell & Alletop, 2001; Palmer & Bejou, 1995).

A DMO is responsible for creating and marketing the destination on behalf of the entire rural area, not individuals (Wang, 2008). Fayll and Garrod (2004) affirm destination marketing and promotion must maintain an all-inclusive image, not diverse images created independently by various tourism stakeholders. This establishes consistency in the destination depiction presented to tourists and creates a holistic image.

The authors contend that multiple images marketed from diverse industry stakeholders will alter tourists' perceptions and evaluations of the area, thereby altering the destination brand image and affecting the competitive position. All marketing—online presence, print, publicity, representation, social media, and supplier relations—must be addressed with a consistent destination brand image. Creating a complete and consistent brand image cultivates trust (Ha, 2004) that can be developed between the industry stakeholders, the DMO, and visitors. Establishing a trustworthy, uniform brand image position creates a viable destination, thereby increasing the financial opportunities for the area.

Relationship Marketing

Acknowledging the influence of the stakeholders in regards to funding, infrastructure, product and services, support, government clout, the quintessential relationships that must be developed are between tourism, rural development, and the public and private sectors (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005; OECD, 1994). Soteriades (2012) states these relationships create a value chain where exchanges of resources and knowledge, communication, and participation encompass the foundation of value to the visitor. Therefore, a DMO's role as a collective tourism source in terms of marketing, information, and as representatives of the numerous tourism stakeholders, situates the organization as the focal and unbiased contact for meeting planners and tourists (Morrison et al., 1998).

DMOs need to be a collective tourism information source to maintain the integrity of the destination. Tourist decision choices can be obstructed by the variety of information sources, significantly affecting perception and evaluation of the rural

destination area (Baloglu and McCleary, 1999). As the collective tourism source, the DMO's marketing activities promote the rural destination area as an inviting brand that fulfills the consumer's requirements, thereby forming preferred relationships with them (Wang, 2008).

This relationship marketing encompasses all marketing functions focused on creating and sustaining positive social exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The author further indicates communication, sharing values, and equally partaking in opportunities are significant in these relationships; trustworthiness playing a significant role in developing trust and commitment to the marketing efforts. Likewise, Yuan, Gretzel, and Fesenmaier (2006) believe that personalization, timely interactions, extraordinary resources, distinctive benefits and opportunities, and elevated standards are beneficial in creating a successful destination area.

The DMO's role as the collective marketer, tourism promoter, and information center is indicative of DMOs serving as the mediator for tourists and businesses (Morrison et al., 1998). Simonin (1999) states that achievement of strategic and effective marketing is realized when visitors' wants, needs, and expectations are satisfied. Therefore, effective marketing can increase tourism and the number of tourism suppliers, enhance visitors' experiences, and financially affect the rural area.

While most tourism industry suppliers are financially unable to market their products or services to areas outside of the region due to limited funds; through relationships with the DMO, they are able to increase their marketing capability. Palmer and Bejou's (1995) study states individual promotions influence visitors less than collective marketing. Working with the DMO and sharing resources allows for

stakeholders to achieve equality in advertising efforts (Reid, 1987). Offering marketing opportunities such as online event calendars, brochures, and website links, DMOs assist rural businesses with promotion, marketing, and strategy creation in order to increase traffic to them (Ertuna &Kirbas, 2012). To develop a sustainable and economically positive rural tourism destination, sharing of goals, objectives, communication, and accountability must be promoted; typically, under the direction of the DMO.

Alliances

Palmer and Bejou (1995) maintain that alliances are essential in destination marketing due to the similarity of goals; attracting more tourist to economically and socially benefit the public and private sectors. DMOs not only entice more tourists with a unified brand image; they also manage the relationships between tourism stakeholders (Adeyinka-Ojo et al., 2014). To successfully incorporate tourism in a rural area, stakeholders must be motivated to stay actively involved in its development (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). Likewise, Kibicho's (2008) study discloses key factors in stakeholder cooperation: participation, well-defined goals, obvious opportunities, official meetings, and commitment to accomplish objectives. OECD (1994) states rural tourism sustainability can be achieved between a DMO and its stakeholders through exceptional alliance engagements.

Two or more members working together to gain a competitive tourism advantage for the destination while mutually dependent on the other partner—in terms of risk and benefits—develop a strategic alliance over time (Palmer & Bejou, 1995). Alliances between the DMO and tourism industry stakeholders are derived from cooperation and coordination. Bramwell & Lane (2000) emphasize that cooperation is a fundamental

condition for sustainable tourism development, and the alliances are developed through cooperation on mission statements, objectives, and strategies for the destination as a whole (Prideaux & Cooper, 2003). Additionally, Soteriades (2012) states that tourism marketing alliances are the byproducts of stakeholder involvedness and mutual support. These working relationships are developed from pursuing quality and innovative performance in marketing the destination area whilst protecting stakeholders' interests (Wang, 2008).

Another important component of an alliance is the willingness to share information and resources. While recognizing the advantages of revealing information, further cooperation forms a strategic alliance (Palmer & Bejou, 1995; Palmer 2011). Sharing tangible and intangible resources, creating unified goals and objectives, and pursuing thriving relationships creates alliances where collaboration and social exchange is implicit (Palmer & Bejou, 1995).

Social Exchange

With ties to anthropology, social psychology, and sociology, the basis of social exchange is that human relations are based upon exchange, either social or material. In terms of what is exchanged; love, status, information, money, goods, and services are six relevant resources (Foa & Foa, 1974). Blau (1964) states that social exchange must include at least two people involved in bartering services, products, or information that may or may not be equal in value. Bryne, Pitts, Chiaburu, and Stiner (2010) indicate that when social exchange occurs, there is a perceived obligation to reciprocate in actions that are advantageous to the destination area. The expectation of reciprocity, as well as other anticipated gains (status, power, philanthropy, and productivity) are clarified as personal

incentives of the social exchange relationships (Blau & Alba, 1982; Ekeh, 1974).

According to Colquitt, Baer, Long, and Halvorsen-Ganepola (2014), the key

mechanism of social exchange is the relationships. By developing this relationship, the

DMO and stakeholders are able to meet the demands and expectations of the visitor—

defined by the brand image—in order to create visitor satisfaction and ultimately, revisit

intentions. Likewise, reinforcement is a notable component of a social exchange relation

(Emerson, 1976; Homans, 1958). Homans (1958) further indicates reinforcement is

established in terms of social rewards and can incorporate approval or prestige.

SOCIAL EXCHANGE AND TRUST

Trust has been explored in various disciplines such as anthropology, economics,

psychology, sociology, and business. Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998)

indicate within these fields, the diverse applications of trust has typically been studied as

either being calculative, institutional, or relationship derived. However, the authors

indicate that with numerous aspects of trust, the definitions are mostly related to the

contextual condition. Therefore, trust will be examined in the perspective of social

exchanges and aspects relevant to the social exchange theory.

Relationships

Without social exchange, there is no relationship (Colquitt et al., (2014).

Likewise, Coyle-Shapiro and Shore (2007) stipulate that trust forms the basis for a social

exchange relationship. Therefore, to establish and sustain a social exchange, trust is a

vital factor (Blau, 1964; Holmes, 1981).

In order to have a positive social exchange, the weakest partner must cooperate

with the actions of the other without censoring, expecting the other party will assist with

the best interest of those involved (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Likewise, this

cooperation can be formed through commitment to the relationship, where trust is reciprocated as well (Beritelli, 2011). Similarly, trust is based upon the expectancy that one will respond in kind during social exchanges, and whether one is actively participating in the exchange (Boon & Holmes, 1991; Lewicki & Bunker, 1995; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). Furthermore, Farrell's (2004) study indicates anticipating individual advantages when cooperating in the exchange can foster trust and have an effect on the intensity. Experiencing a positive social exchange, it is expected that participants will continue to develop these relationships by sharing information and resources (Saxena, 2006).

Business-to-business (BTB) relationship exchanges normally rely heavily on contracts and negotiations to work together for mutual benefits. In terms of a social exchange relationship, a relationship is established through trust, commitment, and reciprocity without the legal binds of contracts (Lambe, Wittmann, Spekman, 2001). Trustworthiness can be measured based upon the participant's goodwill, commitment, and dependability, as well as the level of benefits and risks with the association (Bhattacharya, Devinney, & Pillutia, 1998; Sheppard & Sherman, 1998). Axelroad (1984) suggest that cooperation between participants in the social exchange will continue, provided both parties anticipate that a return service is forthcoming (reciprocity).

Reciprocity is expected by participants in order to maintain the trust and sustain the mutual loyalty, goodwill, and support in the social exchange relationship. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) state that there are three types: interdependent exchanges, folk belief, and moral norm. With interdependent exchanges, an exchange is made with reciprocity that is normally understood as customary without any sort of

negotiations, and the cycle commences yet again. Folk belief relies on the philosophy of fairness in the exchanges; if not in the present time, then in the end. In regards to unfair exchanges, this reciprocity is established on the belief in karma. This reduces the prospect of any sort of retribution. Finally, moral norm addresses how someone is expected to behave in the social exchange. Although everyone should be treated fairly, the authors indicate that not everyone shares equally in the moral norm values. In addition to the three reciprocity types expected, negotiated rules may be utilized to establish equal reciprocity (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

In regards to social exchanges between groups, Emerson (1976) indicates it is formed through social processes and division of labor, resulting in exchange networks. To become sustainable without legal indentures, the authors indicate it is vital the relationship be established early through the initial exchanges. According to Moorman, Deshpande, and Zaltman (1992), confidence in the other partner's proficiency in the task, dependability, or purpose will result in trust established through the exchange. With mutually agreeable exchanges and reciprocity in the early stages of the transactions, the degree that the social exchange relationship will continue is highly probable. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) believe that due to previous positive exchanges and trust established throughout recurring reciprocity, participants will be more dedicated to the relationship and commit to fostering it.

To develop and sustain the BTB relationships, Lambe et al. (2001) identifies six social exchange theory variables: dependence, trust, commitment, cooperation, relational norms, and satisfaction. A social exchange relationship offers businesses the opportunity to acquire rewards from the relationships that may be unattainable from other

organizations, thereby creating dependence. With this dependence, trust is a vital

component to be developed. Furthermore, commitment to the relationship with the

understanding that sustainability is more advantageous than short-term prospects also

strengthens trust and the relationship. The authors also indicate that mutually agreed

rules develop the relationship, resulting in cooperation with the purpose of mutual

satisfaction and cultivating additional benefits to both parties. Finally, when both parties

are content with each other's performances, cooperation, and commitment, satisfaction

and loyalty will ensue.

Pertaining to rural residents' support of tourism, Easton (1965) indicates the level

of trust residents have in organizations will influence their perspectives on tourism

strategies directed by the DMO. Trust has an effect on the views and actions displayed in

the social exchange, thereby guiding one's opinions on tourism projects and leadership

(Sheppard & Sherman, 1998; Bronfman, Vazquez, & Dorantes, 2009). With increased

trust, support is explicit and social exchanges beneficial (Harisalo and Stenvall, 2002).

With trust, DMOs are able to promote relationships to create sustainable and profitable

interactions with stakeholders, and enhance its ability to create stronger ties, trust, and

support. With little trust however, support falters and DMOs encounter difficulties in

tourism planning (Bronfman et al., 2009).

Vulnerability

With the weakest participant involved in a social exchange—where one

anticipates group benefits, but forgoes censorship of others—vulnerability is established

by the uncertainty of the other party's actions (Mayer et al., 1995). A core principle of

the social exchange theory is trust and commitment to the relationship in order to

alleviate the vulnerability. The authors ascertain that one factor is consistent in the characterization of trust; vulnerability is a significant component in order for trust to be developed between two or more parties. There is a prevalent agreement of describing trust as "a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another" (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). Therefore, with either party experiencing vulnerability, there is now cause to establish trust between the parties. Nevertheless, Tribaut and Kelley (1959) state that social exchange will occur only when the apparent advantages of the exchange are greater than the disadvantages of the other party's vulnerability.

Adopting the understanding that vulnerability is an underlying condition of trust, this can be further explained in relation to social or business contexts. Trust is considered either cognitive or affective when establishing a relationship. Cognition-based trust is the knowledge that the other participant is reliable and dependable (both contexts), while affect-based trust is applicable in relationships formed from concern and caring for others' welfare; greater in social context, but can be built over time in business contexts. Over time, trust is the basis for establishing dependability, encouraging helpfulness, and supporting promotion (Aryee, Budhwar, and Chen, 2002).

Altered Trust

Trust is not merely something that happens immediately. In order to develop trust, there are two conditions that are critical components in order for trust to ensue: risk and interdependence (Rousseau et al., 1998). According to the authors, risk is realizing that there is a possibility of experiencing a loss, thereby creating vulnerability in those making the judgment and placing their trust in someone or something. Secondly, relying

on another person(s) for a condition to be achieved creates an interdependent relationship; one being vulnerable to the actions of another. Over time, the degree of risk, interdependence, and trust may alter given different contexts, situations, and participants.

According to Doney and Cannon (1997), trust is constantly being reconsidered in terms of whether or not the other party is meeting the expected commitments to the relationship. The authors indicate there are five phases to form trust: developing, prediction, capability, intention, and transference. With risk and interdependence establishing vulnerability, the authors believe one must calculate any associated costs or benefits related to forming a relationship with another party. This is referred to as the calculative process in the developing phase of trust. As trust begins to develop during the prediction phase, observing reliability and dependability in a partner will allow one to have confidence in their expectations of them. The authors further emphasize that realizing the other party has the expertise and power to reciprocate in the relationship and believing that the other party will—the capability phase in the development of trust. Intention is the next phase in growing trust, where one has confidence the motives of the other party are clear and understandable. Finally, seeking a reference from an outside party to grow confidence in the credibility of the original party is referred to as the transference process in the development of trust in a relationship (Doney & Cannon, 1997).

Blau (1964) specifies that trust develops based on social exchange participants fulfilling obligations, increasing significant exchanges, and reliability. As the degree of trust changes, Rousseau et al. (1998) indicates that it could exist in one of three stages:

building, stable, or declining. Even when trust is declining, it could be stabilized though building it again. Likewise, trust is never perfectly stable, but constantly fluctuates. The authors indicate that trust will continue in one of the three stages if there is not a significantly large cost to the parties or a one-sided relationship.

Likewise, Rousseau et al. (1998) maintains that even though there is trust (positive expectations), there is also distrust (negative expectations) in all relationships. The diverse degrees of the combined levels of trust and distrust are signified as different forms of trust per the authors: deference-based, calculus-based, relational trust, and institution-based trust. The authors affirm that greater cost constitutes greater trust; deference-based trust is indicative of relationships that have higher costs if a relationship is unequal. Both parties would have much to lose if there were a lack of trust in the expectations of the other. Normally this type of trust is solidified with contracts or measures in order to equalize the responsibilities of both parties, therefore deferring to the laws in place. Rousseau et al.'s (1998) study also brings into question as to whether there is actual trust here or simply mandatory obligations from low levels of distrust.

Luhmann (1979) claims that as trust develops, more time and resources are entrusted to the social exchange to further sustain the relationship, thereby creating confidence in the exchange and inclination to further cultivate it. Rousseau et al.'s (1998) research suggest that when one chooses to place their trust in another party based upon high expectations, the other party will produce lucrative results. However, the authors argue that both parties will constantly monitor the process in order to gauge that the results are being produced. Therefore, calculus-based trust is a situation where the

levels of trust and distrust are elevated more significantly than deference-based trust. Calculus-based trust is factual; in essence great trust, but with required credibility.

Beritelli (2011) emphasizes significant communication and accessibility reinforce trust and support in relationships, circumventing misunderstandings and disloyalty. As relationships continue to grow and expectations are met, trustworthiness is formed through repeated instances of integrity in the dealings. Relational trust is when emotions begin to form between the parties due to the consistency of trust in the relationship (Rousseau et al., 1998). The authors state the ability to rely on another party during difficult and successful times indicates the highest level of trust and one of the lowest of distrust where both parties have proven themselves worthy, creating a sustainable association.

Trust is fundamental in reducing the disadvantages—risk, fear, and greed—while encouraging the advantages—cooperation, satisfaction, commitment, and support—of social exchanges (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Kumar, 1996; Hwang & Willem, 1997). Positive social exchanges increase trust and commitment, establishing a sustainable relationship (Blau, 1964; Lambe et al., 2001). Consequently, if the relationship is comprised of aligned objectives, participants can choose to form an ongoing alliance to effectively pursue their goals (Levine & White, 1961).

Alliances

Strategies formulated for tourism planning and development by the DMO must be designed with the community's support to create a relationship that is beneficial to both; community support for the projects and greater revenues for the area. Geyskens, Steenkamp, Scheer, and Kumar (1996) indicate that developing long-term relationships

that prove to be mutually beneficial to both parties could not be achieved without some classification of trust present. The greater the trust in relationships reinforces the cooperation, commitment, and benevolence between the parties. This in turn reduces the risk of negative actions affecting either participant. The authors maintain that believing in the other party—exhibiting honesty and attentiveness within the relationship—decreases conflict between the parties and supports mutual satisfaction in the arrangement. Consequently, trust creates an opportunity for those in the relationship to become more confident in the exchange if there is a willingness to be proactive in the sharing of knowledge and resources. Morgan and Hunt (1994) indicate that unobstructed communication between the parties and support will procure a strategic partnership. This exchange and interaction is vital to those in strategic partnerships (alliances). In addition, the authors believe that reciprocity is mutually understood to be a requirement in the relationship and one that will be the norm.

Ultimately, strategic alliances built on trust with high degrees of social exchange can lead to further benefits to the parties. Neilsen (2011) states that trust is "path-dependent and evolves over time, depending among other things, on the social, institutional, and national context" (p. 161) as do alliances. Subsequently, trust in a strategic alliance may influence the establishment of other alliances, thereby proving to be advantageous for all parties involved.

Trust in alliances is also conceptually identified differently depending upon the study and researcher. Robinson and Rousseau (1994) indicate it may be utilized as a cause, effect, or interaction. They believe the greater the trust, the more an individual will agree to produce the predicted behavioral intention. Subsequently, to build strategic

alliances, higher trust would be required in the relationships between tourists and the supplier, or Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) and industry stakeholders. They also emphasize that increased sharing of knowledge and resources will in turn contribute to greater trust (effect). Likewise, a deeper social exchange between the DMO and the local government (alliance) results in greater trust and support in terms of financials and resources. Additionally, they state that trust can be viewed as an interaction between the DMO and stakeholders' social exchanges and marketing effectiveness.

Byrne et al. (2010) indicate that social exchange and trustworthiness are success variables of strategic alliances. The greater the degree of trust and commitment to the alliance, the more enhanced the financial and nonfinancial benefits to each party (Cullen, Johnson, and Sakono, 2000). Partnering with the public sector to market the destination area strengthens the DMO's trustworthiness and success as the collective tourism source. Through communication, trust, and commitment, relationships are formed and collaboration ensues in order to develop a sustainable destination area (Wang, 2008). Leitch and Richardson (2003) indicate that these working relationships require compatible goals and strategies; and this compatibility promotes trust, cooperation, and commitment (Zineldin, 2004). These strategic alliances are crucial in developing a sustainable destination area through tourism planning, destination development and urban regeneration (Wang, 2008).

CHAPTER III: METHODS

This chapter describes the details of the research methodology and the processes involved. The reasoning for the selection of a qualitative method and choice for grounded theory is presented first, followed by the guiding paradigms–philosophical foundations, ontological and epistemological views–and the role of the researcher. Next, the study and research procedures are explained, followed by interview protocol. Lastly data analysis, triangulation, and validation are addressed.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND RATIONALE

To achieve a deeper understanding of the social exchanges and trust involved in the relationships between DMOs and their industry stakeholders, a qualitative methodology was chosen for this study. Mariampolski (2001) indicates that qualitative research can produce discernment, awareness, and perceptions from the participants that would otherwise be lost in a survey-only methodology. Qualitative studies consist of naturalistic inquiries with purposeful sampling with the ability to be open to design flexibility as the study progresses and data is analyzed (Patton, 2002).

Through interviews, participants were able to share their unique experiences and their own point of view. Additionally, Hatch (2002) indicates that multiple realities exist due to different individual perceptions of the world and that not everyone shares the same reality. A DMO may have a different perception of their social exchanges and trust than the local business owner, mayor, or resident. Therefore, qualitative research allowed for the discovery of a deeper understanding of what makes social exchanges in Tennessee's rural tourism work. Through personal experience and insights, as well as engagement with the participants, researchers have the ability to comprehend a phenomenon, while revealing their own perceptions and reflexivity when analyzing the data (Patton, 2002,).

The author indicates however, that during data collection, this must be done with neutrality to avoid influencing the participants' perceptions and descriptions, while attentive to relationship subtleties and situations.

Qualitative research allows for "thick descriptions; inquiry in depth; interviews that capture direct quotations about people's personal perspectives and experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 40). It involves acquiring information from participants intentionally (interviews) and unintentionally (observations). In this study, unstructured interviews–informal with open ended questions–were conducted to develop conversations to promote the flow of information and perceptions between the participants and the researcher. Patton (2002) also indicates the researcher must be immersed in data and situations with the intention of uncovering relationships and themes that would be overlooked through a survey. Direct observations of the participants, the businesses located in the city seat and with the Main Street Program, the rural county area, and the interactions among those present at tourism meetings allowed for an unbiased perspective of the relationships between the DMO and stakeholders, as well as the appearance and management of rural tourism. Upon analysis, Patton (2002) further indicated that one must adopt a holistic perspective; understand that each interview is exclusive and empathize that the entire study is multifaceted. Therefore, it was important to take time off after each interview, after constructing a memo or field note, or analyzing secondary data in order to examine the next item without discernment.

Crooks (2001) indicates that grounded theory is an applicable research when it involves social relationships and group behavior. Since this study examined social interactions and explored relationships between the DMO and its stakeholders, grounded

theory was most suitable. Developed by Glasser and Strauss (1967), grounded theory involves comparative analysis with periodic data collection as needed. It enables the researcher to discover the causal relations, not just the subjective experiences (Suddaby, 2006). Although the concepts perceived from the observed relationships are indistinct, Strauss and Corbin (1990) indicate they can be unveiled as one studies the subjective experiences. Through this type of research, one can categorize the rich, thick descriptive data of the complicated phenomenon into actual concepts to be employed in developing a theory to better understand the participants and situations.

This theory will fill a gap in the literature regarding social exchanges between DMOs and rural tourism stakeholders, particularly in rural Tennessee tourism areas. Additionally, it will add to the body of hospitality and tourism knowledge, as well as provide practical implications. Employing Strauss and Corbin's (2015) version of grounded theory that reality may not always be known, but can be interpreted, the development of the theory pertaining to the social exchanges between rural DMOs and stakeholders can be employed in the hospitality and tourism field. Understanding the components needed for a social exchange, as well as the role of trust in the exchange, can be used to create sustainable collaborations between rural DMOs and stakeholders.

GUIDING PARADIGMS

The purpose of the research and interview protocol must align with the philosophical position of the qualitative research method chosen. In the course of studying Hatch's (2002) and Anfara & Mertz's (2006) literature, it was realized this qualitative research should be constructed using a constructivist paradigm; viewing research as a methodological process developed by relativist ontology, a subjectivist epistemology and a naturalistic setting (Denzin, 1983). This qualitative paradigm utilizes

an explanatory theoretical framework that describes the meaning of individuals, social groups, or cultures (Creswell, 2013). It offers a humanist philosophy orienting strategy based on the researcher's fundamental beliefs about the nature of reality or an approach to a phenomenon (Hirschman, 1986).

Ontological Views

Ontology addresses the nature of one's reality, as well as one's relationships (Godfrey-Smith, 2003). Guba & Lincoln (1994) believe realities are based on the development of experiences. The authors indicate with additional experiences and increased knowledge, a reality may diversify depending upon the individual. What one perceives as their reality leads them to make decisions and act according to their own cognitive understanding. Hatch (2002) believes knowledge is shaped by an individual's experiences, and one's understandings are created from their own reality; therefore, multiple realities exist due to different individual perceptions of the world. What one stakeholder may perceive as a positive social exchange, may not be recognized by others as beneficial to the rural tourism area. Additionally, what a relocated tourism stakeholder views as the norm in establishing relationships, may seem overbearing or inappropriate for life-long stakeholders or residents in rural Tennessee towns. Therefore, multiple realities provide an enhanced discernment of the phenomena, allowing for more significant insight into the social exchanges and trust between rural DMOs and stakeholders.

This is depicted in grounded theory constructivism, where understanding of some phenomena must be constructed from multiple realities, in which to see the truth or acquire the appropriate knowledge (Webb & Mallon, 2007). Based on the research by

Creswell (2013), Denzin (1983), and Lincoln & Guba (1985), there are commonly used

characteristics applicable to constructivism. First, there is a direct interaction of the

researcher with the phenomenon: collecting data from documents, observing behavior,

and conducting in-depth interviews. Additionally, participants provide multiple

perspectives from multiple realities (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1990). Using

deductive thinking, patterns and themes are built from the bottom up. The authors

indicate that defined variables or causal relationships are not required, and that one must

utilize the various forms of data to categorize, code, and develop themes relevant to the

research questions. As rural DMO leaders and industry stakeholders describe trust and

their social exchanges, analysis of the depictions was utilized to identify concepts lending

towards a grounded theory that explained the complexity of the relationships (Corbin &

Strauss, 2008).

Epistemological Views

Understanding that social reality and specific phenomenon are co-constructed

between the researcher and the participant, epistemology focuses on how this knowledge

is discovered. Hatch (2002), affirms it is very difficult for one to remain distant and

objective as a researcher. However, Strauss and Corbin (1998) maintain the foundation

for grounded theory and constructivism–unbiased observation, restraint, extrapolation,

and assessment–is essential, but one must acknowledge the inclusion of individual

experiences to allow for the researcher to become immersed in the study. The

epistemological viewpoint of constructivism imparts that participants view reality as

centered on their own interpretations and understanding of their natural setting; the world

around them is perceived in a unique manner (Appleton & King, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

According to Bryant and Charmaz (2007), grounded theory is accepted as a qualitative research method that establishes a groundwork of social erudition to contribute to the body of knowledge in science. The constructivist philosophy of qualitative research asserts that it develops one's intellect in terms of complexity and extensiveness. Therefore, grounded theory was used to bring the researcher and participants together to promote understanding and acquire insight into their social exchanges (Creswell, 2007). Subsequently, the researcher was not a distant observer, but instead a contributor to the body of knowledge.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

To satisfy the requirements of this doctoral dissertation, research was performed independently. This was grounded through required graduate studies in retail, hospitality, and tourism management completed at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. In addition, working directly with tourism industry stakeholders for over eight years in hospitality and tourism management (lodging and with a DMO), offered credibility when interviewing participants for the research. Through the researcher's studies and employment, considerable knowledge and education in social exchanges, DMOs, and tourism industry stakeholders were acquired.

Reflexivity

Strauss (1987) asserts that one's biography can manipulate biases when utilizing grounded theory and consequently, and must be recognized and recorded throughout the development of the study. Post-positivists utilize bracketing in order to remain objective (Dowling, 2006), while Strauss and Corbin (1998) emphasize the use of a reflective

journal and memos to reflect on how one feels during data collection. This holds the researcher more accountable for any biases (Clarke 2005). By continually scrutinizing one's predispositions, the researcher's decisions are more discerning and will influence forthcoming activities (Birks & Mills, 2011).

Giltrow (2005) indicates that when using qualitative research, one must concede that biography and experiences play a significant role in the research development and method choices, thereby establishing the possibility of influencing the conclusions. The author also states that this subjective research encompasses more than just one's biography and experience; it will disclose one's culture, social standings, and political designations. Therefore, to address subjectivity, one must constantly memo. Glaser (1998) asserts that non-grounded concepts may arise during comparative analysis due to the researcher's prejudices. Consistently writing memos that address biases and feelings allow the researcher to be constantly aware of them, thereby controlling preconceptions and contributing to the quality of the research. Streubert-Speziale and Carpenter (2003) emphasize the rejection of memos that are not appropriate to the development of the theory during analysis, subsequently addressing subjectivity. Glaser (2001) stresses the importance of reflexivity as to hold one responsible for any evaluations and engagements during the research process, thus utilizing the research method consistently and openly.

With this said, reflection was observed during all phases of the research process: creation of study, literature review, data collection and analysis, limitations, and conclusion. Working in the hospitality and tourism industry for years led to a personal attachment and loyalty to the profession, along with understanding the importance of DMOs in tourism. While employed as the Visitor Center Assistant Manager at a DMO, a

gamut of the perceptions of the DMO were experienced. Moreover, forming

relationships with the DMO staff allowed for insight into their passion for their work, in

addition to their frustrations with stakeholders. Centrally located in the Visitor Center

created opportunities to converse with community and government stakeholders, but

found the ambience they conveyed to be vindictive and unpleasant. As interviews with

the research participants were conducted, it was important to keep this partiality out–

voice tone, interview wording, and observation–but realized the need address them

through reflective journaling to reconcile feelings of prejudice toward those naïve in

DMOs and tourism.

The reflective journal assisted in scrutinizing existing perceptions and position as

the researcher, while providing understanding and awareness of the unique social

exchanges between DMOs and stakeholders. It allowed for the opportunity to encourage

the participants to speak freely, which led to diverse data. Additionally, during analysis

and theory development, it assisted with researcher objectivity. Finally, the journal

provided a record of research decisions. Realizing that each rural county could not be

compared to the previously observed urban city, and understanding relationships and

agreements are formed with diverse objectives relative to their unique situation, created a

balance for the researcher's preconceptions and bias.

Interviewing those in rural counties in-person, by phone, or through e-mail,

brought about the realization of the stress associated with conducting back-to-back

objective interviewing. As someone who is passionate about the industry, it was

extremely difficult to keep this in check. Journaling constantly brought this bias into the

forefront and therefore, the decision to shift the focus from doing multiple interviews per

day to two to three per week was elected. This not only provided more insight and allowed time for writing and analysis, but it offered a work-life balance.

Sensitivity

Realizing that, as a researcher working with study participants, one carries their own perspectives, experience, and knowledge of the tourism industry and can influence the research process, Guba and Lincoln (1998) state the traditional definition of objectivity is not practical. Corbin and Strauss (2015) indicate that one must make every effort to be sensitive when interviewing, appreciating the participants' viewpoints and perceptions. As a researcher, one must be mindful of current issues during data collection and analysis. The authors further indicate that the researcher's biography and knowledge can allow for the theoretical sensitivity needed to discover concepts and their correlations.

According to Birks and Mills (2011), theoretical sensitivity is identifying information relevant to the study from the data compiled. The authors believe sensitivity recognizes the researcher's past experiences (professional and personal) and develops through analytic tools, improving as one progresses in the research. As groundwork for this research, I successfully completed a doctoral level qualitative research course. This provided the opportunity to pursue fieldwork that assisted in developing qualitative research skills in data collection and analysis, as well as addressing reflexivity and epistemologies. Additionally, integrated particular beliefs about qualitative research through personal reflection regarding previous experiences divulged preconceptions and biases to provide clarity during the research processes: recruiting appropriate participants, accumulating fitting data to analyze, and developing an applicable theory.

Analytic tools used in this study to strengthen sensitivity were: questioning, constant comparisons, analyzing the meaning of certain words, drawing upon personal experiences, looking at one's emotions, observing reactions from the participants, and constantly asking if the information really mattered and if so, in what ways. Bracketing—memos and reflexive journals—were used to raise awareness of theoretical sensitivity, as well as use for comparisons.

STUDY PROCEDURES

Corbin and Strauss' (2015) guidebook contained the essential procedures necessary to properly analyze and interpret the data collected. This was necessary to develop an applicable grounded theory regarding the social exchanges between rural Tennessee DMOs and stakeholders. The following procedures were addressed: ethical considerations, selection criteria of participants and sampling method, and population.

Ethical Considerations

No data for this dissertation was collected before the proposal defense with the dissertation committee. However, the study and consent form were previously approved by the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board (IRB) for research conducted in 2014 for the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development. The 2014 IRB was modified and approved in March 2016 to include more rural counties and address the risk for participants to include "beyond those in everyday life" for this study (sample consent form see Appendix A).

Prior to the start of the interview, participants were either e-mailed a copy of the IRB consent beforehand or presented one at the interview. At the start of the interview, the participants were informed of the purpose of the study and received information regarding their involvement. The researcher requested their permission to audio-record

the conversation and to contact them at a later date if necessary. Finally, all participants were advised of the possible risks and benefits associated with the study, and their confidentiality in the study. All participants consented and signed their initials on the first page and signature on the second page.

Privacy and confidentiality were maintained throughout the interviews and the study. All audio recordings were e-mailed via a secure line to a professional third party transcription service under a confidentiality contract and with no identifiers. Upon receipt of the transcripts, each was assigned a specific code only known by the principal researcher. Field notes were transcribed by the researcher and no identifiers were used in any reports, presentations, or publications. All consents, recordings, transcripts, and analysis are kept in a locked file box and on a home-based personal computer with password protection. This information is only available to the researcher and will not be revealed unless requested by the IRB.

Participants were allowed the opportunity to not answer questions and to withdraw from the study at any time. None chose to do so. All participants received the 2014 Tennessee Rural Tourism Toolbox template created for the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development, as well as an executive summary of the best practices and the identified patterns and key themes of social exchange variables and trust perceptions in sustainable rural tourism. To maintain confidentiality of participants during presentations of this study and in any articles submitted for publication, any language that would allow the reader to ascertain the participants' demographics and location, will be avoided by using pseudonyms to protect their identities.

CRITERIA FOR SELECTING PARTICIPANTS

Participants included COC and CVB tourism directors and a diverse group of leaders and supporters in the rural Tennessee areas chosen. Thirty rural tourism stakeholders were recruited for this study, representing diverse organizations and prominences. They encompassed the following industries: economic development planners, mayors, banking, restaurant owners and operators, newspaper journalists, librarian, hospitality and tourism employees, manufacturing management, volunteers, and historians.

Selection of Rural Counties

The United States government lists multiple definitions for the term "rural", which are supplied by the U.S. Census Bureau, the Office of Management and Budget, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The U.S. Census describes rural as areas outside of urban areas with a population of less than 2,500. However, the Office of Management and Budget classifies rural as micropolitan or non-core counties with populations ranging from 2,500 to 19,000 (Rural Assistance Center, 2014). On the other hand, the USDA takes commuting into consideration in order to establish a county as urban or rural. They classify rural as open countryside with rural towns less than 2500 people or urban areas from 2500 to 49,999 that are not a part of the metro area (USDA, 2015). For the purpose of this study, the USDA's definition from the Economic Research Service Rural-Urban Commuting Areas (RUCA) was utilized. This provides a looser interpretation of rural that is relative to counties in Tennessee that have a large land mass, smaller population density, and work commuting flow considerations (see Figure 2).

The Tennessee Department of Tourism Development website was used to select the rural counties for this study. Six counties were chosen from the 2014 Economic
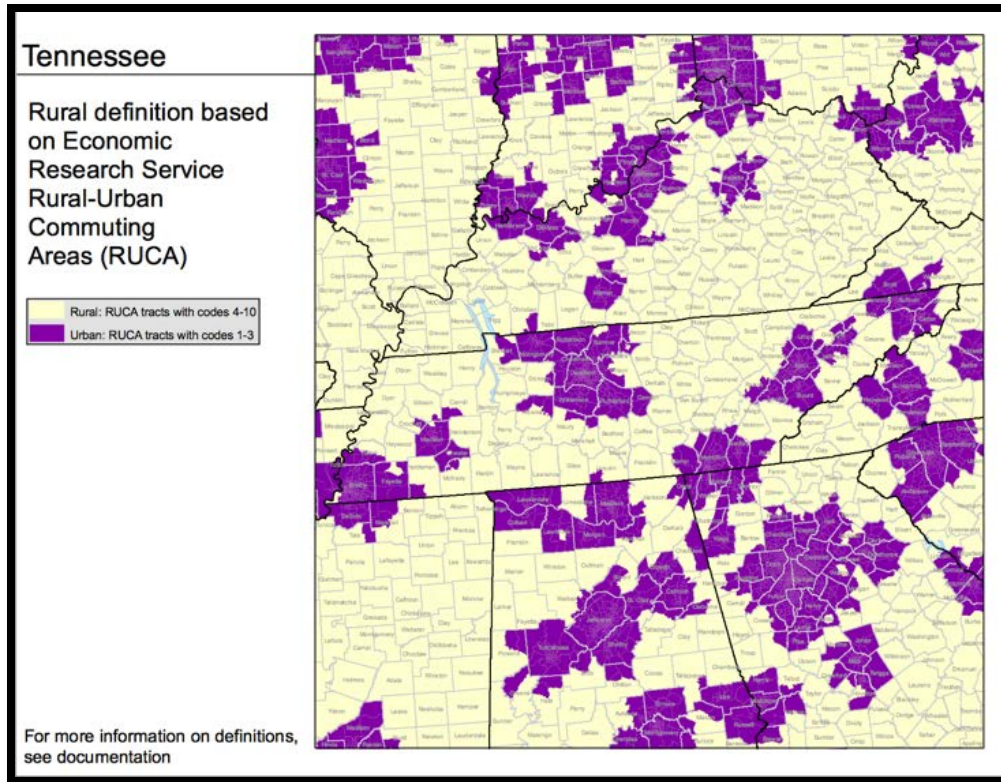
Figure 2. USDA Economic Research Service, 2014

Impact of Travel on Tennessee Counties report, two from each region: west, middle, and east. This report was prepared by the Research Department of the U.S. Travel Association Washington, D.C. in August 2015. It contains the impact of travel on Tennessee: expenditures and their trends, payroll and employment, and tax revenue. This report catalogs the results alphabetically, by ranking, as well as the percent change over the previous year, 2013. As indicated from the previous Tourism Commissioner in Tennessee, the top producer in tourism revenues from each region, as well as the lowest producers are indicative of two different levels of social exchange between the DMO and its stakeholders and were selected for this study from each region. This is indicative of purposeful sampling where the participants exhibit abundance and deficiency in experience, knowledge, and relationships marketing to support alliances.

Target Population

The purpose of the study is to develop a theory regarding Tennessee rural tourism's social exchanges. Utilizing Bodgan and Bilken's (1998) purposeful sampling technique where participants are chosen "because they are believed to facilitate the expansion of the developing theory" (p. 65), the research consisted of interviews conducted with individuals involved in rural county tourism in the State of Tennessee. Stakeholder participants were recruited through direct observations at tourism-planning meetings in the rural counties selected and referrals by other stakeholders.

The criteria used in the selection of the participants included evaluation of one's involvement in growing tourism in the rural area, assessment of adequate representation, and ease of recruitment (likelihood to participate in the study, logistics, and availability). The individuals chosen were identified as knowledgeable and provide (or are in a position that should provide) assistance to tourism efforts in the rural counties selected. They included a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) representative (Chamber of Commerce and/or Convention and Visitor Bureau) and four stakeholders: Economic Development Organization (EDO) representative, city and/or county leaders (mayor, planner, or board trustee), and local stakeholders (hospitality, restaurant, or retail business owners/managers).

DATA COLLECTION

Participants were notified that the study would be conducted by a University of Tennessee graduate student studying rural tourism and consequently, entry into the field was moderately easy. Therefore, access to data, observations, and interviews was not problematic. However, with this ease of entry came the concept of the participants' credibility predisposed to the anxiety of supplying information that may be deemed

inappropriate by the Tourism Director. Assurance was given that all information was confidential and would not be relayed back to the tourism director or other stakeholders.

Protocol

Initially, direct observations while touring the county and at a tourism-planning meeting were required to 1) gain a thick description of the county and its physical amenities, 2) identify key tourism stakeholders in the county, and 3) ascertain a non-participatory stakeholder. According to Denzin (1989), the function of the thick description is to note more than what the participant is actually doing, but also "the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard" (p. 83). Additionally, during the observations, physical aspects of the location were recorded by scanning the area from right-to-left, in order to provide a complete recollection of the facilities for later analysis.

In order to gain access to the participants, the DMO of the counties selected were e-mailed to arrange an interview and attend an upcoming tourism meeting. The DMO information was easily obtained from the county website supplied by the State of Tennessee. Other participants selected were based upon participation (either recognized or vague) in either the county Tourism or Town Hall meetings, from an observation during a county tour, or through internet research on the county. The objective was to interview those who displayed knowledge of tourism, with various levels of engagement in the growth of tourism in that county.

Upon recognition of the DMO and four vested stakeholders–supplier, city, or community–an interview protocol was established with the three topic domains, one lead off question for each, and additional follow up questions for each lead off, if necessary.

A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix B. The first topic domain

related to what the DMO does for the stakeholder, while the second relates to whether or

not they trust the DMO. Finally, the third question relates to the EDO's involvement in

tourism. This research investigated the following research topic domains:

1. What are the perceived benefits to the tourism area if DMOs form strategic

   alliances with stakeholders (government, community, and industry suppliers)?

2. What are the different stakeholder perspectives of effectiveness in the tourism

   area where the DMO utilizes relationship marketing to form strategic

   alliances?

3. What level (if any) does the EDO assist in cultivating relationships with DMO

   and local stakeholders in order to form a strategic alliance to promote

   tourism?

Interview Process

The research employed a criterion sampling strategy-purposeful sampling-

suggested by Creswell (2013). All participants were active or inactive stakeholders in

the development of tourism and had numerous years of experience in either tourism,

economic development, government, or business. A copy of the table listing the thirty

participants with a non-identifying participant ID and current profession, is found in

Appendix G. Protocol was maintained by notifying them that all personal information

would be sealed, the interviews were recorded for further research process (e.g.,

transcription), and that they had the right to withdraw without consequence.

The interviews were informal, unstructured, and open-ended (Polkinghorne,

1989) to bring out feelings, thoughts, and perceptions regarding the social exchanges and

trust they experience with the DMO and other stakeholders (Fetterman, 1998). An unstructured interview allows one to use an interview protocol (predefined questions) to carry on a natural conversation directed towards the research purpose to gather depth of the area discussed (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1990). It also allowed for one to voluntarily disclose their demographics, personal annoyances, and desires for the rural area, that were also integrated into the analysis.

Initially, the goal was for all interviews to be singular and in person. However, this was not feasible for all participants due to time constraints. Likewise, Czaja and Blair (2005) encourages the researcher to modify and use other means if distance encumbers face-to-face data collection. Therefore, the interviews were conducted either face-to-face in a setting chosen by participant(s), via phone during a convenient time, or through e-mail correspondence. Face-to-face interviews were either individual or focus groups, depending upon the availability and request of the participants. Several researchers have demonstrated that e-mail interviews, are effective in qualitative research for studying participants, exploring experiences, and relaying perceptions (Foster, 1994; Kennedy, 2000; Meho, 2006; Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015). During this study, e-mail interviews required multiple e-mails with the participants that included follow-up questions to allow for further probing or clarification. This not only made some of the participants more comfortable in terms of time constraints and information details, but also allowed them to provide more contemplative answers (Bowden & Galindo-Gonzalez, 2015).

The face-to-face interviews were initiated with a statement from the researcher regarding the purpose of the study, followed by clarification of the consent form. Phone

and e-mail interview participants received the consent form prior to the interview with the purpose of addressing any concerns or questions beforehand. Upon receiving consent, participants were questioned about their role in tourism in their rural county. They then were asked open-ended questions following the interview protocol, allowing for conversation that required self-analysis and perceptions of others. The researcher actively listened and contemplated on the areas discussed to expand the dialogue. Since the interviews coexisted with analysis, clarifying or probing questions were asked regarding concepts introduced by others to obtain additional information regarding the development of the social exchanges and trust.

Interviews lasted anywhere from 25 to 95 minutes. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if additional information could be obtained if needed via e-mail. Creswell (2007) advises researchers to follow-up with participants if further clarification is needed when a new concept is proposed or to recruit new members to further weigh in on a concept. Corbin and Strauss (2008) also indicate that as the theory starts to emerge from the gathered concept and categories, theoretical sampling–also advised by Creswell (2007)–is necessary for detailed analysis until saturation occurs. During the weeks following the interviews, additional information regarding relationships, social exchange, and trust development was gathered via e-mail and during follow-up meetings in the rural areas.

To capture the data accurately, all interviews were audio-recorded and sent using a secure website to a professional transcription service. All data were transcribed verbatim and upon return, line numbers for further reference were added. After the initial transcription, the interview was reviewed by the researcher to scrutinize for inaccuracies

and further refine the protocol. All transcriptions were kept on the researcher's home computer and stored in the researcher's Apple iCloud files.

Data relevant to the study that is complex and encompasses a significant range of applicable information, determines the credibility of one's study (Charmaz, 2006). Multiple forms of data were gathered during the study: observations, interviews, elicited material (emails and questionnaires), websites, documents (newspapers, government reports, organizational information), literature reviews, secondary data (USDA reports, Tennessee Tourism reports, and previous Tennessee rural study by researcher), journals, memos, field work, and field notes. Each provided rich detail, a wide range of perspectives, deep layers, and added to the value of the data for analysis. While conducting face-to-face interviews and during the initial meetings, observations were made regarding the participants' tone of voice and body language and later recorded in the field notes along with perceptions of them. Field work encompassed formal interviews, participant observations, site observations of the rural county, and informal conversations (not recorded). Memos and field notes were kept after each interview, encounter, and observation as encouraged by Glaser (2001) to provide reliability and trustworthiness when coding and categorizing.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is either inductive–finding themes and categories from the data–or deductive; inferences made from assumptions between the concepts and categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Patton, 2002). In this study, an inductive method of analysis was used where Corbin and Strauss (2008) advocate breaking down the data, identifying concepts, and using them to develop a core category that addresses the totality of the categories. Initiated with the first interview and transcript, data was analyzed so that

beginning concepts could surface and direct the ensuing interviews and data collection, representative of theoretical sampling. Upon completion of each interview, thick descriptions were created for each location, interviews transcribed, and data analyzed.

Theoretical Sampling

The grounded theory process further entails that the researcher must theoretically sample with the assistance of writing memos, constant comparative analysis, and conduct intermediate coding in order to identify the themes and categories. Glaser and Strauss (1967) define theoretical sampling as concurrently collecting, coding, and analyzing data in order to determine additional data needed to develop the core category. It is used to expand the scope and the depth of a category in regards to relationships and social exchanges (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After initial interviews, it was understood that more data was needed from additional outside sources (additional participants, websites, questionnaires, elicited material, etc.) to study the concepts in further detail and receive clarification. With this added data and the addition of relevant literature, the data and codes were interpreted to identify the factors needed for sustainable social exchanges, as well as the levels of trust.

Memos

Memos were employed to gain not only breadth of the study, but also depth to understand the social exchanges and trust between DMOs and stakeholders in each rural areas. They were written throughout the entire process to further evolve a theory by addressing the researcher's thoughts, feelings, and philosophical position in the research. As instructed by Corbin and Strauss (2008), each memo contained the date and a conceptual heading indicative of the understanding of the data gathered or any

hypotheses, aiding in reducing bias (see Appendix F). Memos were also used to record the participants' emotions expressed, as well as any noticeable outside influences that may be deemed significant during the analysis (social, political, environmental, and cultural). Likewise, memos were generated to include activities and any changes, along with the reasoning behind it.

All memos were open coded to acquire concepts from the very beginning (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Additionally, memos assisted in procedural and analytical decision making, as well as axial coding, categorizing, and developing the theory. By recording memos throughout the process, it allowed for the opportunity to reassess previous interactions for constant comparisons, created an audit trail, and transformed the codes into concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Coding

Open and axial coding were used concurrently during constant comparisons of concepts, relationships, and assumptions developed from data acquired. Open coding began with the initial observations, field notes, memos and secondary data, followed by the corresponding interview transcription (see Appendix E). In order to analyze the data, Rossman & Rallis' (2012) strategy of reading the information numerous times allowed for further recollection of the observation and interviews, gathering an unreserved perception, of which all were noted. Likewise, Wolcott's (1994b) method of examining each line of text as a separate piece of information, instead of in the context was utilized to identify pertinent codes including in vivo codes (verbatim single or multiple words).

With this, data was gathered and notations made of information that seemed applicable to the research questions (Strauss, 1987). With numerous lines of data, the

prevalent term and sentences were highlighted and codes were handwritten in the margins

of the transcription. Through analyzing line by line of the interviews, memos, and

observations, 138 significant codes relevant to the research design of the study were

established. This information was numbered and compiled in a chart in Appendix C as

per Bogdan & Bilkin, (2007). The frequency of the codes was not counted, which

equates all codes per Creswell (2013), but instead segments pertaining to them were

analyzed to evaluate relevance and establish if the code contained conflicting opinions in

the passages. Pertaining to utilizing pre-existing codes or code labels, using both in vivo

and segments that describe the information and a theme were applied.

Using the Creswell's (2013) method of beginning with a brief list of categories

for the codes and expanding upon further analysis assisted in narrowing the list of themes

as well, was representative of axial coding used to establish patterns to the categories.

This process was ongoing during concurrent data collection and constant comparative

analysis. Strauss and Corbin's (1990) coding method is utilized in research by combining

categories and transforming these sub-categories into the core category. Open coding

breaks the data down, while axial coding turns these codes into a main theme. Any open

codes that were not relevant or fit into a category were noted and put to the side to check

for applicability later on (Glaser, 2001).

Constant Comparative Analysis

Birks and Mills (2011) specify that while performing concurrent data collection

and analysis, one must also perform constant comparative analysis: comparing new data

to pre-existing codes, new codes to prior codes and categories, and then new categories to

established categories until cohesive. Constant comparison also enabled merging similar

categories and removing duplications. Utilizing all the interviews and data, the grounded

theory was integrated and the other categories substantiated one main category. This is

when a core central category surfaced that explained the social exchange and trust

between Tennessee's rural DMOs and stakeholders.

Visual Models

This led to generating an illustrative model to help identify the main variable

relating to the social exchanges between DMOs and stakeholders in select rural tourism

counties. Following Merriam's (2009) method, the variables and themes that pertain to

the exchange between the DMO and the stakeholder was visually displayed on a white

board and consistently referred back to the purpose statement, otherwise known as

diagramming. This assisted in mapping and connecting codes, filling in gaps and holes in

the formation of a theory as the conceptual analysis progresses. After advanced analysis,

theoretical integration was performed to transfer the abstract representation to fit into a

grounded theory.

Theoretical Integration

According to Birks and Mills (2011), three factors are necessary for theory

integration: choosing a core category, saturation of major categories, and sorting and

reviewing memos. The core category for this research was selected based upon its

overarching explanation that united the other categories, while still remaining logical and

uniform with the data that was received (Strauss, 1987). Although all interviews and data

were coded, saturation of major categories was realized at virtually the end of the data

collection and analysis. However, analysis continued in order to add further credibility of

the categories through diverse participants. Furthermore, Strauss and Corbin, (1990)

emphasize developing various theoretical categories based on existing theories and literature, adding clarification and supporting theoretical integration. Existing literature on social exchanges, trust, and alliances were studied to incorporate relatable theoretical categories. During integration, memos were printed, sorted by concept, and reviewed to allow reflection on relationships and categories. At this point, reverting back to coding and theoretical sampling allowed the opportunity to reexamine the correlations between codes and to include another diverse perspective on the relationship through questionnaires and follow-up e-mails.

In order to further integrate the core category, a descriptive (storyline) and a conceptual summary memo were written (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The descriptive summary memo is the explanation of the theory, while the conceptual allowed for a summary of the connections between the concepts, categories, and the core category. Selective coding allowed for transforming the story (both descriptive and conceptual summary memos) into a grounded theory. Glaser (2005) states that validation is further achieved through applying existing theoretical frameworks to the social exchange story to support and strengthen the grounded theory.

Quality and Validation of Grounded Theory

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), quality in grounded theory is the presentation of the analysis in a way the reader understands and deems it trustworthy. It is original, but unambiguous; constructed with a rational theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). These standards are achieved through the expertise of the researcher, methodological congruence, and procedural rigor (Birks & Mills, 2011; Glaser, 2004; Burns, 1989).

Expertise in grounded theory for this study was established with the following: completing a previous qualitative study, attending a qualitative studies class, information received from a dissertation committee member specializing in qualitative methods, researching numerous grounded theory journal articles, thorough reading of two current qualitative textbooks, online seminars, grounded theory forums, and online videos by Gibbs (2010, 2011) and Charmaz (2015). Methodological congruence was demonstrated through the researcher's guiding paradigms, stating the purpose of the study, and utilizing consistent methods to achieve it. Actively maintaining an audit trail through detailed memos, managing data through word processing, iCloud, and a paper filing system, while doing so in a logical and consistent fashion produced the procedural rigor needed to further establish quality in the research.

Not only must the research be conducted utilizing quality standards, it must also be valid. Silverman (2005) states that validity is simply the truth; what is real in terms of one's own reality. This realness is determined when the theory is reasonable when examining average social exchange experiences (Konecki, 2008). Therefore, one must evaluate the validity (trustworthiness) of the research.

Guba and Lincoln (1981) state there are four criteria needed to establish validity: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. With the use of multiple methods of triangulation, credibility was established. Triangulation of sources involved having diverse participants describe their perceptions of social exchanges and trust in regards to the DMO, EDO, and other stakeholders in six different rural Tennessee counties at distinct times and in diverse places (offices, restaurants, hotels, etc.). Utilizing informal questioning with the option not to answer a question if they so desired

reassured truthfulness of the data collected. Method triangulation was observed by engaging personally with the participants, providing rich, thick descriptions, and utilizing multiple data collection approaches (reviewing documents pertaining to the counties, observations of both participants and non-participants, complementing interviews with e-mail follow-up questions). Additionally, analyst triangulation addressed the role of the researcher, and through reflexive journaling provided ways to express any former or current biases. Furthermore, checking with participants for further clarification and confirmation and reassessing previous data for nonconformance assisted in achieving credibility.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) states that a theory must not only be credible, but also transferable. The authors state that the theory should fit the study, be reasonable to others, applicable to diverse situations, and be useful for practitioners. In order to be transferable, Misco (2007) suggests that another researcher should be able to produce similar results from a comparable situation if one follows the same rules, data collection, and analysis. By building thick descriptions, creating an audit trail, seeking out diverse participants, and performing constant comparisons, the grounded theory in this study is considered generalizable as suggested by Misco's (2007).

The objective of dependability is to reduce oversights, regulate the researcher's biases, and establish credibility through triangulation. This was addressed by creating a well-defined audit trail through diverse grounded theory data management methods and analysis measures This included data selection information, interview protocol, collection techniques, and audio recording. All transcripts were reviewed to check for mistakes (Creswell, 2009), and memos were written after analysis for constant comparisons and to

form concepts. Throughout the process, reflexive journaling was used reflect on and note the procedures used for the study. This audit trail ensures that both dependability and confirmability are addressed at the same time (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Likewise, reflexive journaling assisted in reflecting on any biases, thoughts, beliefs, and guiding paradigms, strengthening confirmability.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to discover the social exchanges that DMOs in Tennessee rural areas currently utilize to form alliances with the EDO and local stakeholders to generate a theory identifying patterns and key themes of the social exchanges. Given that trust forms the basis for a social exchange relationship (Coyle-Shapiro & Shore, 2007), this research also examined the DMO's alliances' perceptions of trust in the relationships during data analysis. This chapter is organized following Strauss and Corbin's (1998) grounded theory axial coding paradigm and was used to create a theoretical model (See Figure 3). The model directed the data analysis and was used as an illustration of the results, depicting the interconnection of the social exchanges, trust, and benefits among DMOs and their stakeholders. Therefore, the results of the study will be organized following the format of this coding paradigm.
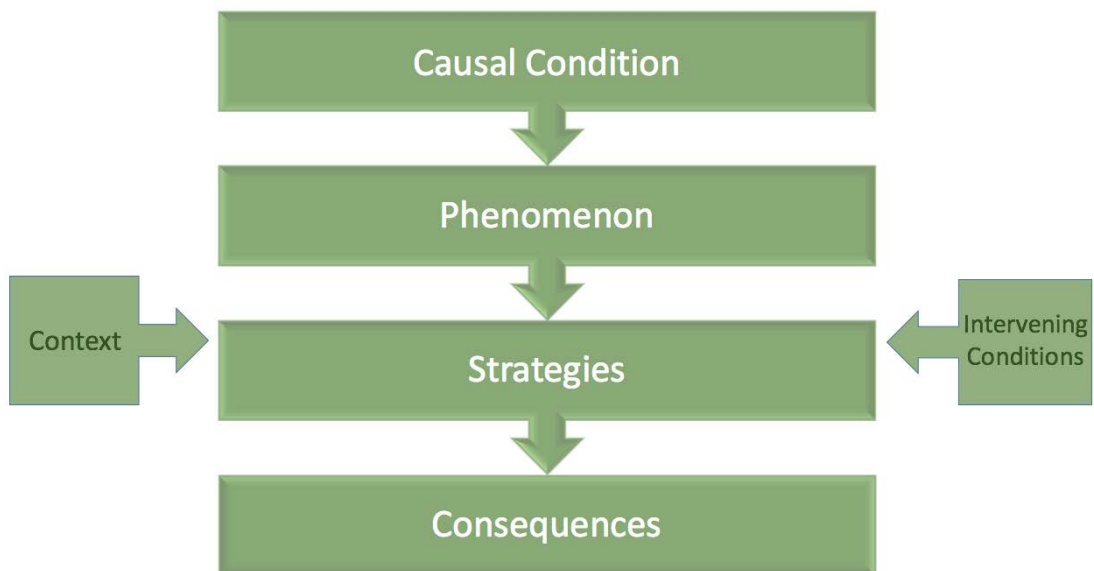
Figure 3. Grounded Theory Axial Coding Paradigm

AXIAL CODING PARADIGM

Categories were formed from the open codes through segmenting the data derived from the interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). With 138 open codes, constant comparison enabled the researcher to merge similar categories and remove duplications (Birks & Mills, 2011). Of the open codes remaining, relevant codes were developed into sub-categories, while others were integrated into these sub-themes or found to be less significant in terms of the purpose of the study. This produced twenty-one sub-categories that were refined to encompass six main categories, further transforming these themes into a core concept, as instructed by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Table 1 presents the categories and sub-categories resulting from analysis of the interview data. The sub-categories that construct the main categories are further explained with the participants' verbatim transcript to convey each category. The categories created were substantiated in the model, creating a storyline centered on the associations of the categories. Utilizing the coding paradigm, the open codes clarified the development of the storyline and the theory throughout the progression of data analysis. Accordingly, constant comparison throughout the data analysis facilitated incorporating the open codes into the appropriate component of the coding paradigm, and repositioning if deemed relevant.

Employing the axial coding paradigm model, the causal conditions that influence the trust of the social exchanges will be introduced first, followed by the central phenomenon of the social exchanges between the DMO and stakeholder. Next, strategies needed to develop sustainable rural tourism in relation to the context and intervening conditions will be presented. Lastly, the consequences of the strategies will be indicated.

Table 1: Coding Paradigm: Categories and sub-categories

Coding Paradigm	Category	Sub-categories
Causal Conditions	Expanding Social Benefits	• Economic growth in the community • Economic development • Social experiences • Revitalizing the community
Phenomenon	Commitment to Change	• Unification • Responsible involvement • Passionate
Strategies	Visionary Sustainability	• Identify and produce • Vision
Context	Recognition	• Value • Credibility • Leverage • The area's magnitude of tourism
Intervening Conditions	Predisposition Toward Tourism Development	• Resistance to change • Enlightenment • Communication • Legitimacy • Perception of trust
Consequences	Inclusive Community Identity	• Improved relationships • Cooperation and the domino effect • Identity: Present themselves as an inclusive community

Following the discussion of the axial coding, the use of selective coding to integrate the theory will subsequently be addressed and depicted in the coding paradigm model (See Figure 4). The coding paradigm supports the use of selective coding to develop the storyline into a grounded theory utilizing existing properties and dimensions of the categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

The following synopsis establishes the context for the results section. The causal condition needed for DMOs and stakeholders in Tennessee rural areas to engage in social exchanges is to *expand social benefits* for area residents. *Commitment* to change by the DMO, the EDO, and the stakeholders was established as the central phenomenon for developing trust and participating in social exchanges that advocate tourism development. The main strategy that flourishing rural tourism areas use to build and maintain trust is employing *visionary sustainability* practices. For these practices to be integrated, the context needed is *recognition*, while the intervening condition is the *predisposition toward tourism development*. The consequences of this process is an *inclusive community identity* appropriate for building a sustainable rural tourism area.

CAUSAL CONDITIONS OF SOCIAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN DMOS AND STAKEHOLDERS: EXPANDING SOCIAL BENEFITS

The causal conditions or categories that encourage social exchanges and trust between DMOs and stakeholders in rural Tennessee areas are relevant to expanding the social benefits for the stakeholders, as well as the community. When a benefit is recognized internally and externally, it is shown to have a multiplier effect on the society. All participants interviewed indicated that an individual benefit in conjunction with social benefits were a causal condition for engaging in social exchanges with the DMO and other stakeholders in order to develop tourism in their area. These social benefits

included: economic growth in the community, economic development (job creation and infrastructure), social experiences, and community revitalization.

Economic growth in the community

Sixty-seven percent of the rural communities interviewed described losing economic opportunities over the past few decades has been difficult for the residents, the downtown community, and the county. Some residents chose to leave the area and not return, especially the younger generations. Furthermore, as many downtown businesses closed, it left vacant building structures and an emptiness to what was once the strength of the community.

Participant F26 stated, "We lost a ton, but we can't sit around and cry about it. We've got to do something about it." Previously, rural areas viewed tourism as an inadequate means of supporting a community; however, tourism stakeholders belonging to a COC regarded it as a viable economic instrument. Participant E23 indicated as a result there was an "offshoot of our Chamber of folks who were tourism-based businesses, who owned tourism-based businesses, who wanted to have a stronger tourism presence." With a COC consisting of members ranging from tourism, retail, services, manufacturing, banking, and more, it garnered adequate support.

Although recognized as an opportunity for economic growth in the community, there is still the challenge of tourism, as participant C12 describes as having "a lot of different aspects, but just getting people in here to spend a dollar is huge." Even though fifty percent of the rural counties interviewed have a substantial tourism market, this still remains a challenge for them, as does convincing their communities that tourism can bring in additional monies for the area and have a multiplier effect on the community.

DMO B6 in a successful rural tourism county stated "Some people see the importance of it and some people see the dollar signs."

For some involved in downtown re-development, it doesn't matter what they see, they just want local support to continue to develop and expand the economic multiplier effect of tourism. EDO E22 discussed the importance of government officials' views on tourism, saying:

> Our county mayor, I think he is very aware that-- and he's older, and he's a little more mature, perhaps. I don't mean that our city mayor's immature. I just mean that when you get older, you gain maturity. I think our county mayor understands that it may look like it's fun and the intent is fun, but it's still making money.

She further suggested those supporting tourism understood it encourages the economic growth for other businesses as well and stated:

> Bring in tourism if we can because that helps people's businesses, but you know that flows down. That flows down into sales tax money. It's sales tax it generates for the city because every one of them is going to eat, and buy gas, and buy whatever at the stores.

When discussing this with local government officials, she told them:

> And I said, 'The benefit is going to come through take that $5 and go eat out, take that $5 and get $5 worth of gas to get you home. I don't care if you take that $5 and go buy a bottle of cheap whiskey souvenir.

Indicating even those not associated with tourism should understand how important it could be to the economic growth in the community.

> So we had to show them the economic impact, and then the trickle-down effect. For example, people who sell insurance, how is tourism going to help us? So we literally had to connect the dots for them. We had to show them that hey, if these folks come into the community, and they spend $1,000 while they're here, then that business that fed them, that business that they bought clothes, they did all these things? They're buying insurance from you. So maybe this tourist didn't walk into your office, but these providers did.

The majority of those interviewed either own a tourism businesses or understand the tourism economic multiplier, and recognize how with tourism their economies have grown. What they have utilized to attract visitors, has financially benefitted not only the tourism businesses, but the trickle-down effect has allowed many local businesses to remain afloat. Likewise, with a growing economy and downtown re-development as a result of tourism initiatives, economic development has been a by-product for some areas.

Economic Development

Five out of the six counties interviewed understood that tourism not only provided economic growth in the community, but also presented an opportunity to encourage corporations to once again invest in rural areas. An increase in jobs leads to increased economic growth by way of more businesses opening to support residents, thereby increasing tax monies, and consequently supporting the infrastructure and educational benefits for the community. DMO A1 from one of the highest counties in tourism growth reported:

> It's all kind of interconnected. I mean, if you bring potential businesses here, for instance, X Corporation. You got these big corporate people and they're making lots of money and their wives want to know where they're going to shop, what are they going to do, what's their schools like, what their kids have to do around here. That's tourism too.

Local banker C12 substantiated this by suggesting, "In order to bring in more jobs (factories, etc.), we needed to invest in our downtown in order to help attract potential employers." Many of the participants expressed the need for tourism to lead the way toward downtown development and revitalization to once again invite the attention of

businesses to relocate in their counties. One prominent COC EDO (E22) believes

"Everything just kind of links together that way."

However, DMOs, EDOs, and stakeholders realize this is not easy to accomplish.

Participant C12 believes "It would have to be a collective effort, and it's got to be

something that makes people want to buy buildings downtown and invest in those

buildings," while participant C12 expressed his lack of confidence by stating, "And how

do you get people to relocate downtown, and I can't really say." Nevertheless, all of the

counties involved in the research had committed to some form of downtown development

and revitalization.

The data analysis indicated that even though all of the counties participated in the

State of Tennessee's Main Street Program to renew the downtown district, not everyone

supported the program or has used it to entice tourism or economic developers.

Participant C12 said, "I think if someone's willing to do something, I think a lot of those

leaders will support it," while the top four counties interviewed recognize, as participant

A5 put it, "The chamber corporate people see that tourism is just another sweet jewel

that they can put in their pie to offer to those corporations who are looking at this

community." Four of the six counties' COCs were involved in tourism and economic

development and understood the importance of the connection. DMO B6 replied:

> We're a different animal. That person would come in and, we're a Chamber of
> Commerce, but we also have Economic Development, and tourism, and Keeping
> X County Beautiful, and then Education Force Development, and so many things
> under that umbrella. But I think that economic development and tourism have to
> work hand in hand, they are very important together.

She further indicated:

> Tourism is the driver here. It drives that launching tax. We have a lot of industry
> coming in, but tourism is what's driving that because economic development

receives the other 1.5% of the launching tax. So they need to be interested in it and they need to be up-to-date on it if they want that number to keep going up. I can't really say, because Mr. S. was here and then we had four presidents in between economic developers in between, and then Mr. S. again. But Mr. S. has always been very interested.

However, not all rural DMOs at the Chamber could interconnect tourism and economic development. One such COC participant (D16) was the DMO, the EDO, and the Main Street Development representative. Instead of focusing on all three aspects, she instead chose what she deemed the most important aspect of her jobs. "A lot of what I do is, we're working on a public port here, so I do a lot of industrial recruitment," thereby leaving tourism for others to develop and the new Main Street downtown to be utilized only by the local government and officials. Moreover, lacking the understanding of what social benefits could be derived if social exchanges between tourism and economic development were utilized, some rural areas are slow to progress their economic development. From the six counties participating, one county struggled the most in both tourism and economic development. According to participant F30:

> The county mayor, I think he's geared more towards the industry. I haven't really seen-- most of the tourist stuff is here in town. But, I think he keys more in on the industry part of it more so than the tourism. We don't really have an economic development board here. There's just a planning commission. I think this is the state working a little.

What some do not realize is that rural tourism offers "smaller job creation and expansion" and by working together, tourism and economic development both grow. At one of the largest rural tourism destinations in the study, DMO A1 is purposeful in establishing and growing a relationship with the EDO. In one instance, he said:

> There was a confidential project and I was working with EDO and local development. They come to us. Can we bring a hotel? We bring a convention space. What are you going to do? What can you do to help make sure that it is filled? I'm like, bring it on. Just give me enough. I'm working with EDO

internally and providing business conventions that fit. The city and ED director works so well on a daily basis. They talk. We're in discussions with them and give me a heads up. They make sure that we're in the know of hotels opening. We need to know so I can start planning.

It was also very important to him that local tourism stakeholders take the time to develop relationships and establish trust with those interested in developing businesses in the community. He indicated, "It would be nice to have people that would try to-- other than the chamber, because they do all they can." and without it, some opportunities could not be acquired. He also implied that tourism related economic growth and development could lead to a more substantial talent pool in the area. He stated:

> We hope that the economy can keep growing and we can-- there's some empty buildings that the mayor will talk about, but if that comes in and you think, 'Oh, they might steal our employees.' Well, no, it might improve the talent pool so that we all have-- where people are focusing on being here instead of going to the another city or different locations that they travel to.

Social Experiences

Many participants stated with economic growth, development, and a strong labor force, aspects of tourism can "give a visitor a more complete experience," and provide social experiences for the entire community. For visitors, many of the rural downtown areas either remind them of their childhood spent shopping in small communities, or they are aware of the re-development of small town America, thereby expressing an interest to visit. One city mayor (F26) deeply involved in tourism understood this concept by saying:

> When you leave that park after two or three days, and you're tired of rock climbing or swimming or whatever else, you want to come to almost Mayberry. Get out of your car and linger and you get off the Ferris wheel and you want to relax.

He realizes these experiences are unique to rural communities, and local stakeholders recognize this is the path to take for developing tourism. Likewise, a DMO of one of the most successful rural tourism areas interviewed understood that common occurrences can be transformed into social experiences for visitors and locals alike. Each year, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) organizes a raffle where many wait in line for hours with nothing else to do. Local DMO C11 said:

> All those guys are hanging around, and they get a little antsy because you've got to wait an hour-and-a-half, two, maybe three. So it's a social event at that point. These people were going to be here anyway. But they didn't have anything to do, they didn't have anything to eat, and they didn't know you sold duck calls and you sold duck blinds and you do all these things.   They see all the people that they need to see - the outfitters, the boat sellers, anything that-- and that's free, doesn't cost anything. They (local businesses) would bring a truck out and they probably sold one truck out of the thing. We're (Chamber representatives) all gathered around it.

Creating unique experiences in a State Visitor Center allowed one DMO the opportunity to share his county's heritage and initiate conversation with visitors to produce a learning social experience for visitors and employees. This has led to further social and historical experiences, where DMO C11 orchestrated a free tour of an area forgotten by many in the community and surrounding counties:

> But we'll take the historical society stuff out there. We took a Smithsonian exhibit out there, and they came in and enjoyed all this stuff about how we worked. We have a connection, and this could be an interpretive center. It might be a tourism thing, and it already is in the underworld. We take kind of a pilgrimage down there in the name of tourism to go see Xwood. We would like to own - we being the historical society - we'd like to own Xwood, have an interpretive center.

He further indicated money was not always the focal point of his tourism initiatives by stating, "Why do you come? And it's not always about money." Many times it is about the experience and the social interactions with others, necessary to bring

the community back together. All of the counties participating in the study created a

Farmer's Market in the downtown area and currently utilize it to not only sell produce,

but create social experiences for the residents and visitors. The DMOs understand the

connection between social experiences, relationships, and tourism. DMO C11 replied

"Are they buying anything? Maybe yes, maybe no. Maybe they're just lonely. They're

elderly people, and they want to come and hang out with their friends."

To create an atmosphere to entice participants to linger after purchasing products

to talk and build relationships, and to create a unique social experience for the

community and visitors, this DMO revealed:

> We play music. The Chamber director is a professional blues musician, before
> Chamber, before a lot of these things. Of course he doesn't charge anything to
> come down there and play, and he comes and entertains us well. The good part
> about that is I'll have a couple of bands that I'll actually pay for, and they'll come
> in and they're too loud. It's like they're in a concert, and I keep telling them. It's
> like, "Guys, we're selling vegetables, you know?" And the farmers, if they can't
> hear each other, if you and I couldn't talk in the Farmers Market, something is
> wrong. It's hard to tell a really good band that they're in the background until they
> get it.

Although he indicated the majority of those visiting the Farmer's Market appreciated the

music, there were still locals who did not understand the significance of social

experiences, and that a Farmer's Market was indeed a gift to the community, but also a

tourism source.

> I had to figure out who to listen to, and don't listen to Junior, that's what I learned
> - but this gentleman kept telling me, "We don't need a bunch of music down here.
> We don't need people doing crafts. We're trying to sell vegetables." Looking out
> for number one, didn't care anything about the other farmers and the market and
> sustaining it or different people downtown. It's like, "Just come buy my stuff and
> I'm out of here by nine." And it's like, "No, we're here til 12:00 or 1:00, and we
> want them to have something to do.

Piggybacking off the success of a downtown Farmer's Market, all counties

indicated it has led to further development of other opportunities to encourage visitation

and create social experiences for the community. Tying in with the downtown area and

the Farmer's Market, DMO C11 plans on utilizing the connecting vacant buildings:

> There were some buildings that were kind of to the right down there. There's a little place called River Center. It is not completed. It was a project done by another group, and they never really totally completed it. But it is to be, hopefully, a place where you would rent your canoes. It would be a classroom.

Five of the six counties found by improving the community while recognizing the

residents and the veterans was fundamental in increasing social experiences and

expanding tourism with participant F30 saying of his DMO:

> Growing the tourism, he's been instrumental at getting the farmer's market, he finished readily in getting the veteran's park going and developing a plan for that. So different things that he's spearheaded in trying to improve the community.

According to over seventy-five percent of the participants, these social experiences are

orchestrated by those who love the community, trust in its growth through tourism and

experiences, and are appreciated and accepted by the community. DMO C11 believes

social experiences are what the residents want by stating, "That's what I see, and that's

what I'm taking away from it, is that's what they are-- and I think that's what people

want."

Revitalizing Community

Five out of six counties stated another focus of tourism was to give new life to

the communities which have struggled with decreased economic opportunities through

the following: closing or relocation of many manufacturing facilities, the farm crisis, and

the reduction in the talent pool as a consequence of younger generations moving from

the area. Local banker C12 indicated, "We have good public schools, but we get a lot of

brain drain, we don't have a lot of people come back," and furthermore, "There aren't any jobs for people to come back, or there's not a lot of cool things for people that are younger that would draw them here." Consequently, participant C15—local restaurant manager from the third highest rural tourism county in the study—stated that the majority of the growth in his rural area was due to the remaining locals determined to revitalize the downtown area and the community. He said "The owner really cares about this county. He's been here his whole life. His family's grown up here. That's one of the reasons he opened this business is because he wants to see the city grow.

Additionally, corporations and factories which have moved to the area also see the need for invigorating the community and the local workers. Manufacturing CEO F27 addressed the need for corporate sponsored events, but wanted to do something to create unique experiences for his workers. He said, "Our company wants to have 90 there (at event), but see there's halls here but there's no atmosphere." The mayor and stakeholders interviewed in this county agree that to rejuvenate the community and the residents, you can no longer give them depressed offerings, but instead, "everything we do we cannot have it ordinary."

What was discovered in the study is most residents and visitors believe downtown rural areas are "all it is, is banks and attorneys and there's nothing to do." Many of the participants were quite frank in indicating bypasses and outlying areas have contributed to the ignorance of what the downtown destination area can offer them, with locals telling them, "It's a hassle to drive all the way down there." They feel forgotten with participant F26 stating, "We're in the head of the valley, and it almost feels like

we've just been forgotten," while F28 expressed, "We're kind of lost, and I think we're

the best kept secret in Tennessee." Local banker C12 understood it as such:

> I would like for them to see what it's bringing to them. I know that if people aren't downtown seeing it, I don't think they really understand. It's hard to get people downtown, but I'm sure in the past, so-and-so moved out. This shoe store moved. Closed shop and went out here, and this went out there. It's like, I guess for most people, have just kind of written it off. We all know that the reason why we don't have business here is they don't have clients, clientele. All right, we've got the scale sitting here doing this. There's got to be tipped one way or the other. First of all, you're not going to get the people if they don't have somewhere to shop. We're trying to change, to get people to come up for stuff like that.

Other counties also realize the key to revitalizing the community is to bring

visitors and local back to the downtown area, and that this must be done through

economic growth and development, as well as social experiences. Participant C12

indicated that although many talked about revitalizing the downtown area for the

community and visitors, it seemed as if most of that was just talk. "It's just bogus stuff,

'We've got to get more restaurants downtown, we've got to get more businesses down

town, we've got to do this, and we've got to do--,'" while others take action. In one of

the weakest tourism counties, the tourism leader and a stakeholder's desire to revitalize

the community for the social benefit of all encouraged others to become inspired.

Mayor/DMO F26 stated:

> Like I said, we don't have money. We went right over here to the bank and said, 'Here's what we want to do.' And by the way, our president of the bank, he's behind this thing. He's always been great to work with. He's really working with us. He's like, 'This thing could work.'

Participant B9—a DMO from one of the highest tourism based counties—

believes, "We're here to give back to the community and add cultural value to the

community, and that translates down the line to draw more people here who will spend

money," while participant C11 that the "key to all of this is economic and community

development through historical preservation: preserving what we have, getting people to come back downtown, and being real about it." For those still trying to revitalize the downtown area for the community and for tourism, EDO E22 said "I think once our downtown is on point, we're all going to feel better."

CENTRAL PHENOMENON OF DMO AND STAKEHOLDER SOCIAL EXCHANGES: COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

Whereas expanding social benefits initiate the causal conditions for DMOs to form partnerships with tourism stakeholders to develop rural tourism, different objectives and strained relationships can inhibit these alliances. This is further hindered by the lack of trust in the DMO and the perceived effectiveness of the organization. However, commitment to change sets the foundation for the social exchanges and in turn, builds trust.

Commitment to change was expressed by twenty-eight of the thirty participants in various manners as the central phenomenon and believed essential to trust in social exchanges. The commitment to change involves awareness that change must happen with a desire to participate and support it, guided by strong leadership and with influential supporters (Kotter, 1995). As participant A2 indicated, "Bringing all the key players together (industry and regular Chamber members) to support the community and tourism" was the only way that he believed tourism would work in his rural county. DMO E21 from the fifth ranked rural county participating said that she looks for trustworthiness when one indicates they are committed to change:

> They probably don't even know it in the beginning, but I'm looking to see how trustworthy they are. Do they show up when they say they're going to show up? Do they follow through all those different things?

Many of those interviewed spoke of the importance of alliance with Chamber Director A2 stating "There's a team effort here, but we work at it very hard."

Commitment to change was presented in different ways between DMOs and stakeholders. It is as simple as DMO B6 stating, "they're sharing their ideas and their excitement and everything that they've got going on" to establishing a more continual relationship by financially partnering together to form a tourism business:

> Our emphasis right now in this town is tourism. Mr. C and I just purchased a building. Mr. C. and I, we're not money people by no means. It will be a music hall/wedding reception, meeting hall. That's what Mr. C. and I just purchased, what two weeks ago?

Three main categories for commitment to change originated from the interview data through coding. They include unification, responsible involvement, and passion. Following, each of these codes are discussed within the context of the social exchanges and trust involved.

Unification

In business, commitment to change is often discussed with terms such as strategic alliances: all parties trusting that the agreement will be upheld by all (either contractual or non-contractual) and that the other partners will continue in the relationships until the desired goal is achieved. In rural areas wanting to develop tourism, this strategic alliance is normally non-contractual, and unless someone leaves the tourism business, the desired goal is one of pursuing sustainability. Understanding that committing to an alliance with the DMO and other stakeholders requires time, resources, and energy, regional DMO A4 indicated that sometimes it was the only choice rural areas have. She stated that "they need to spend time and effort with us" and:

The state itself is spearheading, it's going to come down to some point, if you really want to see some change in tourism or any other thing, you've got to get in and take county by county and go, "What is their bottom lines?" If they don't have any really a lot of road tax or they don't have any hotel tax, then how do we assist them to come up to not even a level playing field, but to give them some opportunities that the larger counties have that they just bypass us.

Without an alliance with the DMO, many rural tourism areas are lacking the collective tourism source that is needed by the stakeholders to market and represent their businesses. Most participants agreed that it was "easier to work with partners than try to pull things off on their own". In five of the six counties, the majority of those interviewed believe that a significant financial benefit of partnering with the DMO is the accessibility of advertisement. DMO B6 from a high tourism county said "Due to the partnership, it provides relationships that can offer sponsorship (Walmart with Chamber contacts)," while participant B7 believes that "We could not have some of the presence that we have in whether it's the vacation guide or what it is that we're doing in some of those areas, if we didn't have partners." Tourism council board member, D18, said that partnering with a DMO also provides more access to local and regional newspapers. He stated that in his county:

The newspaper, we've partnered with the newspaper, and they've already given us a front page story. They came to the meeting. We invited them. Their editor came. And then, I took pictures. They gave us the front page picture with the newspaper and a nice article on what we're building, and the partners that's involved like Friends of Lake.

All six of the counties' DMOs emphasized that they are affiliated with the local COC. However, not all the participants found that to be beneficial. Main Street Director B7 indicated that, "The difference in us and the difference in the chamber is everybody is our partner," and that, "Making connections within the community and forming

partnerships which in turn benefit everyone," unlike those that partnered with the

Chamber alone. Although the downtown Main Street program is significant in

revitalizing the downtown area and attracting visitors to the area, if someone chooses to

opt out of a Chamber membership, then uniting with the DMO is not normally carried

out.

Likewise, for industry stakeholders and Chamber members, there are considerable

benefits to committing to a relationship with them. One top tourism county offered a

Chamber Partnership that encompassed the Chamber, DMO, EDO, Educational

Workforce Development, Keep Green, Agribusiness, and Leadership, providing multiple

sources of assistance for rural businesses. Additionally, rural DMOs conveyed that being

affiliated with a Chamber offered them more networking opportunities. Tourism council

board member D18 indicated, "they're partnering with this US Fish and Wildlife, TWRA

partnering, the state parks partnering and so we've just now gotten this great partnership

of networking through the other agencies over there that their existence is a direct result

of the lake in tourism," as a result of the Chamber affiliations. DMO A1 said that the

local University provided a "great partnership that can be and that's kind of what that's

growing into," which benefits his stakeholders. Still another DMO emphasizes the

importance of forming an alliance with state and regional tourism representative. D17

said, "Gary has now become a partner with us, and he was at our meeting, out putting this

event together about two or three weeks ago, and he represents the Western Tennessee

districts and X and Y Counties."

All tourism directors emphasized the need for being selective in choosing whom

to align with as well as who sits on their board. For them, it is important that they find

partners that are committed to the community and are decisive when it comes to change.

Five of the six counties emphasized the need to align with the Main Street developers and

stakeholders and support them to revitalize the downtown area. Likewise, all DMOs and

tourism board members interviewed agreed that working with the hoteliers was also a

very important alliance because they needed them to bring in the monies from the

hotel/motel tax. DMO B6, from the second highest rural tourism county that participated,

relayed that selective alliances were beneficial to developing tourism. She was very

strategic when it came to selecting her council members in that:

> She's on our Tourism Task Force. DB knows the importance of tourism.
> And then, BH - I'm going down the list of the four- BH knows, he's on my Sports
> Council, BH. So he's in-tuned and he's in those meetings and he knows what we're
> doing. And then the fourth one is on our board and has been for years, so he is
> one that that is actually taken that information in. You've got to form-- those that
> you can form alliances with, you need to make sure they are the strong ones on
> the County Commission.

Chamber Director A2 from the top rural tourism county interviewed said this in regards

to forming an alliance with stakeholders:

> We're going out and getting events to come to City A, as a chamber, as a group,
> as a group of hotels. That I hadn't seen before. There's a team effort here, but we
> work at it very hard. That's really as simple as that sounds----we work together.
> We don't take it for granted. We're David and Goliath, and we're David because
> we know how to play together. That's really it in a simple-- we're a team, and we
> work at it.

Responsible Involvement

As part of a team, everyone must be responsible in order to win the game.

Chamber Director A2 said, "Right now, it's in their interest to work together and if

everybody else is working together versus one person or one entity, then that entity will

suffer." It takes being committed, trustworthy, and answerable to those that rely on you

to be a responsibly involved participant in the alliance. DMO A1—one of the youngest

DMOs, but also one of the most successful—said this:

> We don't just take the hotelier's money. We really involve them, and we want to know what they think. It's their program. Letting them know that we're fighting for them, spending our dollars to market for people to come in, recruiting business for them, bringing people in on a train or ball or whatever. You have to say hey we're going to…we're involved.

He further states, "We also invite them to be Chamber members, and attend the events,

and then you get out of it what you put into it." Of those interviewed that expressed a

commitment to change and aligned with the DMO, the majority were involved in

numerous ways to develop and support tourism. Some were invited to be a part of the

alliance, while a young banker (C12) indicated that after a leadership training course

conducted by the tourism director, he "expressed the desire to get more involved."

Involvement ranged from simple sprucing up the courthouse lawn to activities that

required more time and an ongoing responsibility. Understanding how important tourism

was to the area, one deputy suggested the following to the Main Street Director B7:

> He said, 'I really wish I could put a few flower pots here.' And I said, 'Okay. You've got the flowers. You've got the dirt. I'll see if I can find you the flower pots. I just want you to paint them black, and I want you to do this, this, and this.' And so he's going to do that. He's going to be putting flowers around the courthouse that are coordinating with what we do for the town.

Museum curator B9 that is actively involved in developing heritage tourism in her county

believes that her involvements outside the Chamber significantly contribute to tourism

growth and stated that:

> I'm involved in all aspects of the chamber, including the Convention Visitors Bureau. I'm also on the board of the Tennessee Association of Museums as vice president for East Tennessee. We have three regional vice presidents. I'm the East Tennessee VP. We're a working board, and that's just a volunteer non-compensated kind of thing I'm on the tourism task force board, and I'm also on the board of the County Heritage Trust. We have two museums. I run two museums

and also the college archives as well. I'm a member of a local mutual advocacy group called NETMA.

DMO E21 also indicated that being involved in tourism encompassed many other responsibilities as she said:

> We have served as a tourist destination bringing people to County. We've also participated in different think tanks, early meetings with downtown business owners, hosted regional meetings supporting the tie in to the Heritage Parkway and meetings discussing the subject and how we can better be involved and supportive of our neighbors and vice versa.

> However, getting others involved and being committed to change in not always

easy in some of the Tennessee rural tourism towns. For the county that ranked the lowest

in tourism, Mayor F26 indicated that, "There's a lot of jealousy, but we know enough to

know that we've got to go outside these boundaries." In one of the top counties, they also

struggle with getting stakeholders involved. DMO B6 indicated that, "for the tourism

workshop we're going to have, we really, really, really need - not in just that but in other

things - we need the restaurant owners to be involved." She said this about one

destination restaurant in her area:

> But they haven't had time. She's not their owner, she is their marketing person now. But we had meetings - two or three last year - that she just said, "Absolutely, they were busy and she couldn't come." I get that, but that doesn't help either.

With limited time for involvement with stakeholders, DMOs have to be responsible in

how they spend their time and resources; being direct and decisive. Chamber

Director/DMO E21 said:

> If I see an area that is easily where I can fit or bring a resource or whatever, I will volunteer. If they do not receive that, then I ask, "What would you like for me to do then?" I give them two meetings. If after the second meeting, I still am not plugged in? I tell them that, and I'm very kindly with it. I try to be very nice, but I just let them know that, "Listen, I'm not a meeting person. It has to go somewhere. I'll be glad to meet with you as long as we have forward motion. If we don't have forward motion, I'm out. I'm sorry. And this might be why you're losing some

folks. But I came to your meetings, I took time out of my life, and I came, but I still don't know where I can help out. You have to be trustworthy and respectable. That's my part. So what I will do is, if I plug into a group, I won't miss a meeting. I won't give an excuse on a meeting. I try to build that trustworthiness right up front.

In determining how to spend one's time and resources, three of the six DMOs interviewed understood that being strategically involved was conducive to building trust and engaging in productive social exchanges. Participant A3—local business owner and Executive Director of the tourism board—said:

> Z is involved in a lot of things other than just the CVB, too. Of course he sits in all of our board meetings, so he hears reports from every different avenue that's going on - whether it be the HLands program, or whether it be community improvements, or the higher education, and so on. He gets feedback from those areas as well doing that. And he goes to the other events and the other meetings as well too. Being visible and communicating, again, that's really the key. That's Z. He doesn't just plan the events; he goes to them too. He participates in them. He comes to the H.O.G rally, he goes to the Hill Climbs down in the valley. He's there.

Finally, Chamber Director/DMO E21 indicated that trust and respect played a considerable part in building and committing to a relationship with stakeholders and said this:

> This is what I tell everybody because I do a lot of leadership training. I draw a stick man, and I'll say, "Now the legs to any relationship is trust and respect, and if you break one, you're only standing on one. But if you break both, you don't have a leg to stand on." And the arms are time and energy. So you herd the relationship with your time and your energy. But if you don't have trust and respect, you don't have anything. And I have found that in relationship building, sometimes they build really quickly, with come fast and furious friends right off the bat. There's sometimes it takes years to build those relationships.

Passionate

To commit to a change that may take a considerable amount of time and effort, one must be passionate and committed to the alliances and their involvement. For some of the participants interviewed, their passion for tourism development was based on

acquiring the social benefits needed by the community. Retail store owner B10

indicated "in regards to tourism, it's one of the many things that I'm passionate about

because it's a big economic driver." He had lived in the community his entire life and

experienced the decline in economic growth and development, but also the revitalization

of the downtown area through the tourism brought about by the Main Street Program.

He is now the owner of a thriving downtown business that draws visitors from all over

Tennessee and the surrounding states.

Others indicated that their passion for committing to align with the DMO to

further develop tourism, partnering with others, and be more involved resulted from

"been passionate from the beginning. They're typically local people," or relocating and

"falling in love with the place and have made a lot of friends and become real active

with the state park there." Many participants stated their passion to commit to change

for tourism is a result of tourism as their livelihood. Park manager D19 was described as

being, "very involved with us, I mean really, and her whole livelihood is based upon that

park and tourism."

Those that described themselves as passionate, or had others describe them in

that sense, were eager to commit to opportunities, sometimes without even knowing

what to do. Local banker C12 indicated that:

> They just kind of threw this Dogwood Festival thing. I was like, "Well, I didn't
> really want to do it. I was passionate about it, but I didn't really know what I was
> doing."

However, many indicated that although they were lacking in how to do something, they

were passionate enough to educate themselves. An elderly museum curator (E25) said:

> We travel a lot and we go on the back roads to all these little towns everywhere. We go to museums and we see signage and things. It's so great and it doesn't cost a lot. And we will come home and try to share that with people.

Twenty-nine of the thirty participants interviewed expressed having a love and passion for their rural area in terms of community, culture, history, environment, and livelihood. They were committed to change by forming alliances and becoming involved responsibly to develop their rural tourism area. This commitment to change has fostered tourism generating sources to build the local community, support the area's businesses, and provide many social benefits for visitors and residents.

STRATEGIES NEEDED TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM: VISIONARY SUSTAINABILITY

Identifiable and specialized strategies are needed to support the DMO's and stakeholder's commitment to change in order to develop a sustainable rural tourism area, thereby increasing the social benefits of the entire community. Many tools are made available to rural areas through the State of Tennessee's Tourism Development website, educational learning opportunities, and meetings with tourism representatives. For a small rural area that is just developing their program or those wanting to cultivate a more sustainable approach, sometimes the mass of information can be daunting, and therefore, many times neglected. Five of the six DMOs mentioned that they were overextended just taking care of stakeholders, marketing, and meetings. After only one year on the job, the newest and youngest DMO (A1) mentioned "You just do it. Putting out fires and I don't like that. That's not how I like to operate. You spend night, day, weekend, early nights, late nights, early mornings, and you just do it."

What was discovered during the study is there are two strategic aspects that rural tourism communities in Tennessee are integrating; all within the context of recognition

and the intervening conditions associated with one's predisposition to tourism. The areas are committing to a vision and the ability to identify and produce.

Committing to a Vision

It only becomes clear if you know why and what to do. For those in the Tennessee rural areas, five of the six counties shared a clear vision for their communities and tourism. The sixth county's DMO was mostly involved with economic development, however the associated tourism council was concerned with the sustainability of the local nature resource the tourism is founded on. The DMOs from the five counties and the tourism council director had a drive and passion they shared with the stakeholders. In these counties, all participants indicated that the DMO has a plan they support and feel will benefit the community as a whole. As indicated by the sixth county's DMO, without a clear vision there would be no why, no what to do, and no commitment to change.

For the rural areas in the beginning stages of the tourism development process, their visions were found to more abstract, but with concrete and immediate objectives. Participant C12 said they were "trying to carve out what we have that's unique to this county and what could bring people in from outside, is something that I want to focus on." Financial resources were expressed to be at the top of their vision, for without funding they realized that many things could not be accomplished. The mayor (F26) stated that current funding was needed immediately for:

> See this municipal building we're building down here, we're moving the chamber down there, no charge. And we've got a great facility they're going to have there. So they won't have to pay rent.

> Well, I just went to a TDOT Grant from one of the renovation with the Main Street projects ended here, on the bypass, which we're in desperate need of sidewalks, because we have a lot of traffic going that way. It was a foot trail. What it is, it's eight-foot-wide, and it's renovating from here to the bypass, street

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lights and landscaping and this eight-foot walkway and everything, and it's a long story. Anyway, hopefully we're going to get that through TDOT, but I'm not sure. And it's very needed.

From the data acquired from the participants, it was realized as a county progressed in tourism development, so does the scope of their vision for tourism and the community. DMO E21 suggested "It's almost that if they can see that, then they can understand why we're doing what we're doing." While in the beginning they appear more detailed and concise, as they grow, they become more visionary. For the county third in tourism, DMO C11 stated:

> I was in City B several times and I got a call from ECD. It's like, "I need your this, your that, and do you have a master plan? Yeah, I need that. I need this." I went, 'Oh. The master plan is very big.'

While DMO A1, from the largest tourism rural area, said:

> Yes, we need a convention space. I feel like that's coming, and we're ready for that. We weren't ready for that ten years ago when they proposed it. We're ready for it now. If you are going to do it, do it right. Don't think about what we're filling right now, think about what we can fill and think about the growth we are going to have in the next 10 yrs.

Although this DMO had only been in his position for approximately twelve months, he had a clear and concise vision and could see great potential for sport tourism in his area. Understanding this potential, he shared it with his stakeholders and there is significant interest by stakeholders for sport tourism. However, his vision continues to grow. He said 'Think about the conferences that we haven't been able to have…I love to have caving conference,' recognizing the current trends, identifying his counties natural resources, and realizing the potential to produce.

Identify and Produce

Sometimes it starts with something given to you. "He donated everything to the city," EDO E22 describes the beginnings of a three weekend Christmas festival with thousands of lights. Sometimes it is something that you have to create, as Mayor F26 of a town just beginning to develop tourism said, "we're going to have a city park and we're going to have a picnic area, pavilion, and the parking lot, and stuff, and then people can canoe or kayak the river". Sometimes it is just merely something that you have. Chamber Director A2 referred to this when he stated, "So the thing about it is, we've got everything to offer here." It does not matter if it was given to the area, they created it, or they just have it, identifying potential producing resources and managing them so they will yield for the benefit of the community is a vital social exchange between the DMO and its stakeholders. Of the six counties that participated in the study, all DMOs mentioned the importance of the following: identify what you have, recognize the importance of planning and building tourism off your present and future resources, coordination, be proactive rather than reactive, attract tourism, commit to the change by simply doing it.

Identifying what you have. All of the participants personally worked with the local DMO on some tourism resource aspect: tourism related businesses, attraction management, event planning, funding, publicity, government resources, and more. Each participant identified a producing resource (either monetarily or experiential), although not all could recognize other prospective producing resources. However, five of the six DMOs interviewed were able to visualize the potential for further development of the rural tourism area and identify untapped opportunities. DMO A1 said, "the convention is

not big enough, but working with new hotel to build one that would accommodate larger events, but until the new convention center is built, we grow sport tourism", implying that if one opportunity is not currently ready, one should utilize the time to further develop other resources.

Participant F26—a local mayor/tourism director—realized the potential for a project currently underway by another agency, saying "Veterans are building a beautiful veterans park right in front of it, which is going to generate the veteran traffic." He went on to express that many resources his county currently uses could be further utilized to draw in visitors. Identifying social experiences that many in rural areas find entertaining, he was resourceful in producing an event to increase traffic, resulting in additional sales tax for his city. He said:

> You look at the fairgrounds. My first year as mayor, we built a track for truck pulling. Truck pulling is huge - truck/tractor. The first one we had out here we put the largest crowd that's ever attended the fair complex. We put over 2,000 people in the first one.

DMO C11 from the third highest county participating realized that when gifted with a resource, it is in your best interest to develop it into a producing resource. He said:

> We're not officially outfitters because we want somebody to do that. We never charge them because that's another category. There's a little block building that they had really big plans for, and we hope that they will come to fruition. We're not in the business of owning a lot of property, the gentleman that was there, as I said, gave us that property, so we're developing that as a river park, and we actually have a rustic trail down there.

The data recognized that local DMOs and stakeholders were not always open to the ideas that non-locals identify and produce without first consulting them. Many locally born stakeholders indicated they do not appreciate non-locals attempting to identify tourism opportunities and sharing this information with them. For many locals,

non-locals can only proceed after they have been involved in the community for a considerable period of time and have earned the respect of the locals. Participant E25—a museum curator from the second lowest county has lived in the area her entire life—said:

> If you're new - and you look at what's working and what's not. You don't change something that is working well. A new person can go into a new place, but they have to get the feel for it first and then make suggestions.

However, chef C15 from the third highest county indicated that as a non-local, it was in one's best interest to identify what was already in place and see what further potential it could have. He found that his best gifted resources were the proximity to major urban areas and the downtown development program. He proposed using what you have geographically and bring in attractions and events for a short period of time to increase visitor traffic and encourage spending. His idea was to:

> Organize some sort of County Food Festival or Tennessee Food Festival or something where you just get all these outside people to park food trucks and tents, set all that up around the square and all that, just to bring people in and show them what a great place this city is.

Recognize the importance of planning. All counties interviewed indicated that planning was something they did, however only four stated that they had a written master plan for the development of tourism. Of the two counties that did not, one DMO was the mayor and the other DMO carried three jobs: DMO, EDO, and Main Street Director. Mayor F26 indicated that one plan was to "figure out a way to get services here.", and they "need to figure out a way to bring things into our community so that we don't have to go outside of the community to live." They believe that tourism would assist them in attracting these service providers, but there was no master plan for incorporating it.

Chamber member F29, a life-long resident from the same county said "If we could get that scenic overlook, it would help with people coming through this area because people will stop on those and get out and look if they're out," but understood that was not planned by stating, "So I think that's one thing that would help with the tourism, but I don't know that it will happen."

For the other four counties, they indicated that understanding what you have, planning, and having concise objectives is the key to identifying untapped opportunities and initiating potential producing resources. Participant D17—the director of a successful tourism council based on one local natural resource—stated:

> We're goal-driven. Every time we meet, we have an objective, and we know what that objective is, and then we collectively put our thoughts together on the most efficient and effective way to get to that objective, okay? The main thing is, you know you have an objective when you walk in there. So that's your focus, okay? And then, we just stay on that objective. Once we've got the outline and the game plan for it, then we'll think about the next one, but it's one at a time since we're small.

Likewise, for one rural area that is growing significantly in tourism, conducting an analysis that identified the county's strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats (SWOT), and creating a master plan were strategies that had a significant impact of the stakeholder's commitment to change and establish trust in the social exchanges between the DMO and themselves. DMO C11 stated:

> The Chamber of Commerce had some type of consultant come in and we brainstormed, and we broke it down to five different areas. They invited people from all over the community, and they had four different sessions in four different parts of the city. And at different times, to bring in different people from different social, economic, or ethnic backgrounds - different locations. But infrastructure and tourism and health and recreation, those type of things, and we brainstormed on what we'd like to see and what do we want to see happen in the future.

Furthermore, he stated:

We've been planning our river park for years. The federal money dried up, so there was nothing for us to do, but we had a plan of action, and drawings, and dreams, and so forth. We had that already out there, and I think by having that in place-- showed the people that were looking for these possible cities for help with grant. I think the fact that we have that plan in place went a long way.

Many of the participants in counties that were involved in planning relayed this sentiment, "That's the next thing that we have and as soon as we finish this project, that's the next project," inferring that planning led them further along in creating a sustainable rural tourism area. They were continually identifying and producing to increase their tourism resources.

Coordination. A DMO in a rural tourism area must not only have adequate support from their stakeholders, but they must offer support in order to garner trust and bring about social exchanges. Limited time and resources hinder the DMO in producing some properties pertinent to building tourism, however coordination should not be lacking. Not only are DMOs limited in time and resources, but many of the stakeholders are as well. Museum curator B9 realized that working with the DMO and the other stakeholders was beneficial to her attraction's support and attendance, but it was not always easy to be fully committed due to obstacles in participation. She stated:

I have a small staff. So, if I want to go to a meeting or a workshop or something like that, I have to find a volunteer to come in and cover the museum, or I just have to close the museum outright.

With all of the rural tourism areas interviewed relying on events to increase tourism and social experiences, coordination and scheduling of events are a necessary social exchange for the DMO and stakeholders. Participant B8—a newspaper writer and Tourism Task Force member—said, "If one person was planning an event, they didn't know that something else big was being planned that same night, we help to coordinate

some things with one another." A local museum curator (E25) also indicated that

coordinating and scheduling events was a top priority for the area. She mentioned:

> I have been on the chamber board. I work with them closely. I try to get them to
> do a calendar event for the county so that everybody knows what's going on all
> the time. We are too small of a town to have two big events going on at one
> time.

Of those involved in events and event planning in the rural areas, they concurred that

working together on hosting, coordinating, and scheduling events with the DMO and

each other provided more successful events spread out over a period of time, thereby

providing repeat business and increased visitation. EDO E22 indicated that by doing so,

"We didn't rush and have everything in one jam-packed weekend. We had it three

weekends."

Be proactive rather than reactive. The rural tourism DMOs and stakeholders

understand they need to be proactive to build tourism in their communities, and if they

are reactive, they may lose opportunities that could benefit the community. DMO C11

indicated that a large and successful yearly event was the product of identifying an

untapped opportunity and developing it into a social experience for the participants and

an economical gain for the vendors. He states:

> All we can do is put together events around that, so my one really big tourism
> event is a thing we call Dfest. Somebody said, "Guys, here's a captive audience.
> Do something." So we did. We brought in vendors, we brought in everybody we
> could get. Food. Feed them, they'll stay a little bit longer. We're not trying to get
> them to linger, because they have to wait a long time, and there's nothing to do.
> So now it's a happening, and it could be 1,500 people there.

If they were not proactive, the DMO and his stakeholders could have lost this

opportunity to a neighboring county or outside vendors. However, by identifying the

resource and realizing a need that corresponded to creating an experience, it created a

social benefit for the visitors and the community. DMO A1 from the largest tourism

rural area confirmed this by saying:

> I see as, here's chance for you all to step up and bust your tail and do something and make them want to stop here. Think of the opportunity. Let's be proactive not reactive.

Identifying an opportunity and recognizing that some are fleeting, rural tourism

areas do what they can to be proactive. Participant D17—a tourism council DMO from

the same county that has a DMO, EDO, and Main Street developer as one unit—realized

that tourism was not growing under this leadership and therefore, "We re-enacted the

tourism committee there, so I'm involved with that, real active." and are significantly

growing the tourism affixed to the only natural resource in the area. One downtown

developer (C14) in the third largest tourism area stated, "we've always been proactive,

but it ebbs and flows depending what monies we have to do with, like anything else,"

but you cannot let the opportunities pass you by. Committed to tourism, he said,

"looking around at stuff that's doable that we can do for high eye appeal for low

investment, we need to look at little things that you just don't see." For the mayor of the

county, who is also the DMO, he realizes that being in his position, he can be proactive

for the tourism and the community. Local Chamber member and business owner (F26)

said:

> He's got a lot of ideas that they're trying to do with the city to try to increase our tourism and put more of an infrastructure in our town we just haven't had in the past with other mayors. They've just kind of stood back and just done the office. And he's trying to actually put some things in place that are going to be here long-term right now.

Attract tourism. For rural areas with limited budgets for marketing and

promotions, the majority of those interviewed indicated that they would, as DMO C11

said, "capitalize on anything we can to promote tourism here" and "the market we're hoping is going draw people from across from another places." The top two counties indicated that marketing consisted primarily of the downtown area and limited areas of the county, while the third county concentrated marketing on events and the downtown area. In contrast, the fourth county's tourism council promoted only the natural resource and accommodations surrounding it, while the DMO only promoted economic development and visitor information. County five promoted mostly the downtown along with three outlying business, whereas the last county only promoted the downtown district. All counties interviewed indicated that downtown was a major focus and as museum curator B9 said, "A lot of the focus is on downtown because there's so much concentrated in a square mile or two."

As a collective tourism source, DMO B6 believes "The more you have collectively, the more people you have working together, the bigger the chance that you're going to have somebody captivated here in our community a day or two, other than just a day trip or stop thing." Although only two counties had significant lodging facilities, all DMOs interviewed agreed that attracting tourism was more than just lodging, and would be pleased with any type of visitor spending in their counties. County EDO E22 stated:

> All of those things that will garner attention to come into the town and to spend money, whether it's just to fill up with gasoline, that's a tax that the city gets. Buying a meal there, eat dinner or lunch, that's money. And then, if they spend overnight, then obviously that's taxed too. So it's just a multiplier effect.

However, in order to do so, a visitor must choose which rural Tennessee county to travel to. With so many in Tennessee, DMOs and stakeholders must be creative in their marketing and promotions to attract tourist to the rural area. They must identify what

they want to capture, produce the appropriate material, and determine an efficient means

of delivery to provide the consumers with a reason to visit. Participant F26 from the

lowest tourism area stated:

> We've got to bring people here from other areas, and if our local people enjoy
> doing what we're going to offer, great. They will spend money somewhere, but
> they're not spending it here. And that's what we're after. We're going to give them
> a reason to come to our county.

Moreover, participant D18—a member of the tourism council in one of the lowest

tourism counties—expressed, "anything that we do to attract people would qualify as

expenditure: advertising in the newspaper, the fireworks display obviously, giving

awards to the winners of the trap shoot for TWRA."

DMOs not only need to attract tourism to the county, but also attract support for

tourism in the county. For the DMOs that have formed alliances with the local

newspaper staff, advertising in the local and regionals newspapers is low on their list of

marketing techniques. Four of the six DMOs have partnered with editors and writers

who are committed to change, encourage others to change, and produce articles that

educate and generate awareness of the local tourism business and happenings.

Participant B8—newspaper writer and member of the Tourism Task Force—said this:

> I know our newspaper is getting-- we're getting ready to make some really major
> changes here. We'll be going more local kinds of things, which is a good thing,
> I'm all about that. But I think it would be good in that, if we had access to some
> good articles and stuff about tourism. But not dull, dry stuff. If we could come up
> with some really pretty people like pictures in the newspaper. If we had some
> tourism things that we could use. I do the accent which is food, fun and fashion.
> We were going to start doing a column about tourism in that, once a month. But I
> don't need to be the one to write it, I need for them to write it. The DMO to write
> some, the others given, but that's just like once a month. I think it would be good
> if we could have stuff once a month from tourism come into the paper.

Magazine owner and editor E23 agreed that newspaper and local magazine articles contributed significantly to reinforcing the commitment to change, while encouraging others to support tourism. She said, "I left the newspaper business and started a magazine because I wanted to affect tourism in a broader sense and that's when I started V Magazine to promote tourism within our county."

Marketing outside the county is very time consuming and expensive for rural tourism areas. Main Street Director B7 from the second highest county said that the DMO "has a big job because she's not only hawking the city, but she's also hawking the county." The DMO (B6) herself said, "I spend a lot of time doing promotion and marketing and PR and that kind of thing and sometimes it seems like a disproportionate amount of time.", and further referred to the time and effort spent as "It's just the nature of the beast." Equally, DMO A1 at the largest county stated that he was "doing everything that I can to market our destination in the best that it can be." Other DMOs indicated that this was done primarily through the State's or their county's tourism website, social media, brochures, the Tennessee Vacation guide, and personal contact. Of those that were interviewed, only one participant mentioned magazine advertisement to attract out of state tourist, with no one mentioning television advertisement. Again, with very limited budgets, this was beyond most of their means.

The Director of a tourism council (D17) stated that they use a website and social media to "represent all of our members, which a lot them are resorts in the area and we just try to publicize for them, and different areas to bring more awareness to Lake," and that they do so by "just by sharing a lot of social media actually," although they "don't deal with many events, but we try to publicize some just to bring visitors here." However,

most of their advertising expenditures is on brochures and feel they have an adequate return on their investment. She stated that:

> We have brochures that we just did the year before last, a new guide, and it's more of a visitor guide, it lists all of our resorts, things to do around the area, so we've developed a pretty nice visitor guide. RL tourism has a long history of putting out brochures, creating new brochures and assisting/promoting E Fest each year. They also assist with reprinting historic books to sell and represent the Cultural History of this area.

Regional tourism director A4 understands that not every rural county can afford to print and deliver brochures, and thus, offers them the opportunity of lower rates through her bulk purchases. This has assisted many in placement in the Tennessee Vacation Guide as well as magazine advertisement. The county with the highest levels of tourism indicated that they used this service, brochures, their website, social media, and the newspaper press. However, DMO A1 indicated that nothing could compare to personal contact with event planners. Although he is conscientious in regards to his expenditures, he makes sure that he can get the greatest exposure if he must travel to away events and meetings. He stated that he travels to sporting events to market his community and relayed the following:

> We're meeting with soccer people, we're meeting with lacrosse, and you have to think outside the box. Went with our ambassador team to semi-final games. We're from City A, here to offer you information. Why not go and market our community? I mean, I'm putting a brochure in front of 25k people? Any day, sure, done.

While all indicated that they traveled some to promote tourism locally, many did not have budgets that allowed for further travel. Nevertheless, this was something that all DMOs indicated that they would like to have to opportunity to do more of.

Just do it. One previous Chamber president and current magazine owner (E23) said she identified a need in the Chamber to bring tourism to the forefront and persuade

more members to commit to change to foster it. She stated, "I was elected president of the Chamber, and I was able to merge those two groups, and then the tourism groups actually cut back under the head of the Chamber, and the Chamber became more aware of the importance of tourism." With forethought and a strategic plan, she was committed to change the way the Chamber normally operated, and change the mindset of the two individual groups to create greater support for tourism in her area. For one small developing rural area, they too are committed to change, but are willing to simply do it, whatever it takes. The mayor (F26) of this town said, "This thing may explode on us but it's okay. We will put them all the way down Main Street and we put them up side streets. Shut the street down. We'll put them somewhere."

Committed to change is important, and with this pledge must come action. Sometimes the action is by the DMO, and sometimes the stakeholders can accomplish more and faster than the DMO. Participant B10—retail business owner in the third largest tourism area—relayed his story of commitment to change and action.

> If it doesn't make it, at least they can't say we didn't try. We're going to give it every effort. We're going to make it happen---I shored up a campaign. We had our, I call it the inner city, right around the courthouse, we managed to get a big grant years ago for streetscapes and new lighting and signage and so forth, and used a pretty green color on that. So after about six weeks of discussion, that's already been approved and funds raised. Our welcome sign looked atrocious so we, through private enterprise, raised all the funding for that in two days, because I've been hitting it hard. I just went to the mayors and talked, and city officials, and Electric. I brought this project up in May, and the June meeting I visited with everybody and we had it outlined and everything was approved, just that fast. It really went through quickly. I'm a doer. I'm constantly building and doing as an entrepreneur and an individual.

Of the DMOs and those interviewed that perceived the DMO was effective regarding tourism, all noted that committing to change and identifying what to do could not be achieved without the support of everyone working together. Chamber Director A2 said,

"Don't go home and try to do this, because unless you've got city, county government, unless you've got your chamber, unless you've got the public and private sector working well together, this won't work.

CONTEXT FOR SOCIAL EXCHANGES BETWEEN DMOS AND STAKEHOLDERS: RECOGNITION

Once a DMO and its stakeholders have established a vision for rural tourism development and have pledged to be proactive in their activities, recognizing the area's tourism context is necessary to strengthen their commitment to change and implement the necessary strategies. By analyzing the stakeholders, resources, environment, the acceptability of tourism, and the SWOT, those involved in rural tourism planning will be able to choose the most appropriate strategic options for the community. Likewise, they will have the foresight to decline ideas that may offer immediate gratification, but are not aligned with their overall vision. Additionally, they are able to commit the appropriate time and resources to meet the objectives set forth in their master plan, consistent with their abilities, but only if they can recognize the context.

DMOs want and need rural area stakeholders to understand why they must change their beliefs, practices, and activities for tourism in their communities. Comprehending the causal conditions behind the commitment to change and the strategies necessary to develop tourism, guides DMOs and stakeholders to perform social exchanges and be proactive in growing tourism. This allows them to meet the needs of the visitors and community, and subsequently, how they can align with the DMO and others to build a sustainable rural tourism area. This encourages them to remain dedicated and loyal to the vision and to each other, even during times of difficulty. It was recognized from the data

that this can take the shape of recognizing the following: the value of others, credibility, leverage and how to utilize it, and the magnitude of tourism.

Recognize Value

DMO E21 described recognizing the value of others as "trying to bring all the resources to the table to help, and then even sometimes just helping them to network with who-- to help them with whatever their vision is." Each stakeholder, whether committed to change or not, brings something beneficial to the table. In order to successfully implement the strategies, the DMO and other stakeholders must recognize the value of their stakeholders: the diversity, experiences, and the creativity they offer to bring about new insight and ideas to successfully implement tourism strategies.

Attraction director E24 from one of the lowest counties in tourism tax revenues stated, "Our EDO person is brand new and I'm not aware of any relationship she's attempting to develop with our tourism folks because I haven't witnessed it or seen evidence of it." Both the EDO and the stakeholder were unaware of the value that economic development can contribute to the growth of tourism in their community, and as such, were not inclined to seek out social exchanges with each other. Conversely, the highest county's DMO (A1) recognized the value of building a relationship with the EDO and said, "Our EC team has worked so hard over the last two years." He realized that working with the EDO could provide him with networking opportunities and information vital to secure events. He also recognized his own value as a DMO in he could contribute to the economic development by creating a sustainable tourism that future businesses may identify as a factor in relocation or development.

Additionally, it is important for DMOs and stakeholders to recognize the value of others in the context as publicist for local tourism. Museum curator E25 has built relationships with other tourism stakeholders and continues to reap the rewards of cross promotion. She said:

> I go to the wineries pretty often to just take trips out and go see them and visit them whatever. We always have brochures there, and they're real good to tell people, 'Come on into town. See our museum.' I think we have a great relationship with all three of the wineries that are nearest us, yes. Because again, I go out there and they say, 'Hey.' I had a little bed and breakfast for a while. I would even have them come say, 'I have people here that need somewhere to stay. Can you handle them?' We have a good relationship with all of them also.

Likewise, all counties recognized the value of volunteers as advocates for local tourism. The DMO from the highest tourism revenue county indicated that being involved in the State of Tennessee's retired recruitment program has presented them with many volunteers who endorse and help organize major events for the destination area.

The majority of the DMOs and stakeholders mentioned it was necessary to recognize the value of the elected officials and to encourage social exchanges with them, conducive to persuading others to commit and implement change. One former Chamber president and now current magazine owner (E23) said:

> Developing and maintaining relationships with your elected officials is an ongoing process you never can stop, and you can also never discount any player in the community because you never know who's going to run for mayor or who's going to be pulled in on his cabinet, so to speak.

While a current Chamber director (E21) indicated that:

> All it takes is one election to blow that. We have politicians, the public sector, we have a strong chamber, and all it takes is somebody who wants to take the bone and run off with it. A new dog, and they take the bone and don't want to play.

Whereas the DMO recognizes the value of the stakeholders, many interviewed recognized the value of the DMO as well. In dealing with the government, an attraction director (E24) indicated the importance of the DMO being there to assist his business, being committed to change, was not influenced by adversity with new and uneducated officials, and supporting his business from the very beginning. He said:

> They were instrumental in developing relationships with the Sanctuary folks that came to town and making sure the connections were made. All the while that's going on, elected officials have come and gone. Some have been on board, some have not. Some have allowed themselves to be educated, some have not.

Participant D18 recognized the value of the DMO in creating networking opportunities where "Every one of these agencies have already said they can see the benefit for them individually and collectively," while DMO C11 from the third largest tourism revenue area relayed that others recognized what his office provided for the stakeholders:

> You may not be here all the time, but this is why it's important for you to be involved with these people." And I think it has benefited him. I think it's benefited all of them because I think they've learned things from each other, and they've helped each other, and they've worked together.

Finally, when speaking of the local DMO office, hotelier A5 indicated when the DMO is committed to change and recognizes the value of the stakeholders, trust ensues in this context. She stated:

> I guess I feel like I trust them because they are genuine. They say what they're going to do, and they do what they say, and they participate. They participate not just in the things that they promote, but other things in the community as well.

For rural tourism to develop and become sustainable, it takes a wide variety of talent to avoid becoming stagnant and complacent. All the DMOs mentioned, in some form, that it takes thinking outside the box to grow tourism. For many, this meant being open to diverse groups of people, recognizing the value in local and non-local

experiences, and being receptive to creative ideas. A co-creator of a tourism task force (B8) believes that diversity in forming alliances to commit to strategies is vital, saying, "we just sat down between us and came up with people in the hotel/motel world, restaurants, museums, and tried to encompass a lot of people, and that's really how it got its start." Likewise, working with others with a different mindset can offer diverse experiences to rejuvenate alliances and motivate others to commit to change. The mayor/DMO (F26) from a town with one of the lowest tourism revenues said of his tourism business partner, **"**He's moved here from Florida. I've never met anybody who loves a town like he and his wife. I'm just telling you. Been the best thing that ever happened to our town." While participant A5 indicated:

> Strangely enough, it's somewhat what I've seen that the people who aren't local are some of the best people because they've been to other places, and they see how it works other places and bring that knowledge to the table.

It was also noted by four of the six DMOs, the importance of recognizing the value of stakeholders' accomplishments and experiences to sustain their commitment to change, motivate them, and build trust. DMO B6, who is working very hard on building the county's tourism, said:

> With a presentation, sometimes you can honor people for their accomplishments and bring up the stats at that same time. That gets attention because everybody likes to get patted on the back, and when you have an awards type of ceremony, you say 'Oh, you know, it's brought in this many people and done this much business.' Then, I think, people would pay attention to that. some people are in the spotlight more than others. And so our job is to make sure that everybody can share that spotlight. I think that's our job.

Subsequently, recognizing the diversity and experience of others allows for the opportunity to find creative solutions to increase tourism. Many of the participants mentioned networking opportunities orchestrated by the DMO allowed them to

brainstorm. As hotelier B5 mentioned, "They don't get this experience until you bring this kind of group to the table and you don't get the history of bringing what I do to the table." It also encourages commitment to change and increased involvement, as one young banker (C12) said, "I have ideas, and I see things from a different perspective. So I'm just trying to get involved as many things as possible." Likewise, local restaurant manager C15 recently located from a large city and believed his diversity and experience opened the doors for locals to experience new tourism trends because it is a "push to go from big cities to small towns like this, and people need to see stuff," allowing them to change and commit to the strategies to further develop tourism in his downtown area.

Recognize the Value of Credibility

Some participants believe tourism for many represents the Smoky Mountains, Nashville, Memphis, and Disneyworld; their small rural area is not a tourism option. Due to this perception, non-stakeholders in rural tourism areas are hesitant to lend their support or are resistant to the changes needed to increase tourism, thereby lacking credibility. Recognizing the value of acceptability and trustworthiness by those outside and inside the rural community can lead to endorsement and garner support. Sometimes outsiders can see what locals miss due to familiarity of the area and complacency. When talking to stakeholders and non-stakeholders in his county, the city mayor/DMO (F26) tell them this story about the State of Tennessee's Economic and Community Development Commissioner:

> Commissioner Boyd has twice on me. 'You really need to look at tourism.' Because he knows what we've got here. Two times he said, 'You know, y'all really need to look at tourism.' That's about as subtle a hint as he can give me and we've done realized that.

In this same county, nestled between two valleys, many visitors have expressed their surprise that the area was not further developed through tourism. The city mayor and Chamber have received the following comments on their lack of development: "There's no comparison. You guys should be smoking. You should just be tearing it up." Another visitor relayed to them, "He said, 'What's wrong with y'all?' I said, 'Nothing. We're working on it.' He said, 'You're sitting on a gold mine. What is wrong with you people?' We told him where we were at, and he goes, 'There's no reason.'"

> A heart surgeon from Chattanooga, and I was explaining everything, and he goes, 'You've never been in this kind of business before have you?' and I go, 'No.' And he goes, 'But you figured it out here. They have something to offer and you're figuring it out.' And he goes, 'This is a unique place.' He goes, 'You figured it out here.' He goes, 'This place is just waiting to blow up.'

The mayor/DMO indicated that these types of comments in combination with the State of Tennessee's push for rural tourism laid the foundation for support where it otherwise had been sorely lacking. He said, "Folks were hearing it not just from us, but they were hearing it from the state level as well, which helped reinforce." Other counties also expressed that outside credibility in local tourism initiatives has made a significant difference in advocating their commitment to change and strategies. A large manufacturing facility moving into one of the counties recognized the potential of the downtown area when they decided to relocate there from another county. Additionally, banker C12 acknowledges that, "they've expressed interest in putting in some type of restaurant downtown, it's like a mustard store or something like that," hoping to attract further tourism to the area.

During the study, it was discovered that DMOs had to convince the residents that their rural tourism area was considered a credible destination by those with significant

economic means. DMO A1 from the largest revenue tourism county still has to convince

his stakeholders and community that tourism is economically viable. He stated:

> We're putting on the event and we put out the bid. We're bringing these people
> in that on average are making $80,000 a year. They're doctors, they're lawyers,
> they're well-educated. This is their vacation. They want to come and spend
> money. They want to shop, they want to eat, they're going to stay the night,
> they're going to have a good time.

Recognizing that many outsiders view rural tourism as a sustainable economic

development, one retail business owner (B10) stated in regards to the locals:

> I think there is some education involved. Just the average person walking around
> the street, I don't think they really realize how important it is. It's like I tell my
> employees all the time, is you've got to look at everything like an outsider would.

> Participant F28 shared that outside credibility has caused locals to recognize the

benefits of tourism and believe that it is worthwhile in their area. He relayed, "Why are

you doing this?' Because they're going, 'Well you can't be making that much money but

somehow you keep doing something next.' And they're starting to go, 'Wait a minute.

What is he seeing that we're not seeing?" Furthermore, many DMOs and tourism

stakeholders relayed that as residents trust that tourism is an option for their community,

more realize the opportunities that it can offer. The mayor/DMO (F26) mentioned that

acceptance is also being established through increased offering. He said of a local

resident's new tourism venture:

> It's canoeing and kayaking thing, and that's how this stuff catches. The guy that
> built our farmers market which is a local guy, just very, very involved, very
> interested in our town too. When I was telling him about this, he and his brother-
> in-law, they bought a 500-acre farm. And it borders the River. They came in the
> other day, they're putting in canoeing, and kayaking, and a shooting range, which
> is good around here.

> However, for some locals, outside credibility is not enough to embrace the

changes made for tourism. It was mentioned by all DMOs, being visible and perceived

as a highly regarded business-entity was equally as important. The Chamber president

from the county with the highest tourism revenue (A2) stated, "Now to the public, we

want people to think Convention Investors Bureau, but the DMO reports to me," while

the DMO (A1) said, "Think about us as the marketing department for the city and for the

county because you don't have that," both recognizing that credibility as a tourism

organization lies in making sure the community views you as a professional business.

Additionally, when dealing with a business, prospective clients and stakeholders want to

trust that the DMO is effective and it is a profitable company. All DMOs mentioned that

financials are a credible source for the following: when in board or government meetings

trying to garner support with non-stakeholders, to encourage current stakeholders to

commit to changes, and in publicity matters. At a local county meeting, DMO A1

indicated members want to know what is in the works and stated, "At county meeting –

it's timely that this is happening, in 3 weeks I'm going to and we have this many

appointments and we're meeting with x." DMO B6 recognized that others need this type

of validation to commit. She said they need, "I guess more facts and figures, which I

already said" and:

> I don't mind doing a report or typing up something this is what we learned. That's
> giving it credibility, that tells me that he thinks this program is important. And it's
> an important part of what's going on here. So I wouldn't mind that a bit.

Recognizing that they can use outside and inside credibility to garner support for the

strategies employed to develop tourism, the mayor/DMO (F26) said "Now people, they're

going, 'You may be on something. You may be on something,'" while a local EDO (E22)

who assists with tourism events stated, "The majority of our old guard were really

supportive and fantastic about it. Two of the old guard were on my steering committee. With that generation and the old guard, the proof has to be in the pudding."

Five of the six DMOs and the tourism council director utilize outside and inside credibility to maintain the commitment to change and to encourage others to become involved. One said, "Now they're listening to me," and believes that residents now trust the DMO and respect what is being accomplished. Stakeholders that believe tourism is a credible economic source for growth, as one retail business owner (B10) stated, "It takes an individual, it takes that champion, or it takes that group of people who say, 'Tourism is my business.' You have to own it."

Recognize Leverage

Tourism magazine owner E23 said, "I think the advantage to working as a team with these entities is that we are able to leverage our resources to mutual advantage for the community and the counties that surround us." Understanding that as a rural community, resources (financial and non-financial) are very limited, most participants agreed they leverage the resources of others to build their businesses and develop tourism. One retail store owner (B10) from the third highest tourism revenue has experienced great success in his business and indicated the downtown area has flourished because "You can't do anything by yourself and everybody builds off of everybody else."

DMOs building alliances and relationships with stakeholders and the EDO is vital to extending the reach of the limited resources and influence. DMO A1 indicated, "You have to leverage those…you use those to your benefit leveraging those relationships." As the DMO of the county with the highest tourism revenue, he recognized the importance of leveraging stakeholders that bring in his financial resources; hoteliers. When the city

wanted to use the hotel/motel lodging tax to pay down city debt instead of tourism marketing, he said, "that's where we leveraged our partners with hoteliers because they have a huge voice in what we do." Likewise, his relationship with the EDO has been fundamental in extending his resources as he said "That's why I worked with the development people to-- because they too are stressing the need for tourism."

One regional tourism director (A4) indicated it was in the best interest of local DMOs to leverage her influential position and resources, and act as a representative for them. She said:

> I have all the mayors and county executives because the development of the districts still invites me to their board meetings. You have the politicians and the chambers don't always go with each other. So it is good for me to be there to more or less represent the chambers of that county.

Likewise, leveraging her own relationships with EDO has proven to be beneficial for her region as well.

> I will benefit from that because they have money, I don't. If they create the overall branding, I don't mind to say, "Okay." Part of this is tourism, and I have my own, but I'm in the big picture. So I figure, let them spend the money to get all of this, and we can still benefit from it.

All of the DMOs indicated that another vital relationship to leverage was with elected officials. All the DMOs and many participants mentioned that without government cooperation, there would be no tourism initiatives in their rural areas. It was mentioned that for those concentrating on developing downtown as the rural destination area, the county officials were harder to work with. Participant E25 in one of the lowest tourism revenues counties stated, "The county, I think I could get them to do it, it might take a little longer because lots of things have to go through the committee and through the commissioners and all that," along with the DMO at the highest revenue county (A1),

who said it is "Sometimes hard, COC to fight legislation at the county level." DMO E21 stated, "I had the city council, a planning commission and zoning stuff, it's not a popular thing. To me it's in the city. Now it's a different story when you get out in the county."

Many mentioned the county mayor concentrated on economic development and bringing in factories, while the city mayors concentrated more on downtown development and bringing in tourism and events. Participant F29 implied that without county support, they are unable to grow tourism as well as they would like and stated, "The city mayor really wants to develop the city as a destination area or place to come to, and the county mayors want to develop as far as factories and different things, and sometimes it's hard."

Nevertheless, for those concentrating on the downtown area as the focal point for tourism, aligning with the city mayor produced many benefits. Stakeholder F26 recognized that the elected officials in the city were being proactive in developing tourism when stating, "several projects that the city's working on, the city is basically just taking the forefront on all of this." While in another county, the mayor/DMO (F26) was taking the forefront on identifying untapped opportunities and potential resources. He stated:

> We're purchasing a lot of property. I had an opportunity to secure the one building, is because we were worried. Somebody could come down there and put anything they wanted to in it. You've got to have something to control that though.

All DMOs agreed they had more leverage if the city and county were unified on the vision for tourism in the rural area. As one participant (A4) mentioned, if the city and county elected officials were aligned with the strategies, then it would "show a kind of a coalition effort and unity of city and county." In her experience, a regional tourism

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director believes agreement between the city and county mayors has benefitted her

DMOs and counties by personally leveraging this union. She said, "The city and the

county mayors, so whenever I want something to get through to them, I'm getting with

and he puts the word out. You have to get as many ways to kill that pig."

All DMOs in the study recognized that alignment with influential stakeholders

has offered leverage when working with elected officials and provided an advantage

when seeking support for the tourism strategies. The influence was predominantly

shown to be both economic status and professional involvement influence. Of those

developing the downtown district as the tourism destination, it was mentioned in every

county those with money were pertinent to the improvements and progression of

tourism. Participant C12 said, "I've been able to form a relationship with him, and he

was a major financial supporter of everything and he's very passionate about all these."

A local restaurant manager (C15) on the downtown development board of the third-

largest tourism revenue producing county mentioned that numerous thriving businesses

downtown were started with substantial economic means. He further said:

> And I've got a very powerful family that owned the bus station. They owned that
> building that I showed you on the corner, where the congressman lives. They
> own half of downtown. They have a very powerful family, and it's two brothers,
> going from old money.

For those just beginning to grow the rural tourism, they also recognize the value

of economically-influential stakeholders. The mayor/DMO (F26) said "it would take

some people with some capital to go in". They also realize the value of stakeholders

involved in professional businesses and organization, thereby earning the respect of the

community. DMO E21 from a smaller tourism area indicated "Eight core people who

basically are on every board and do everything," and she recognized they were

influential in supporting and garnering support for tourism development. Participant

A4—a prominent business owner in the largest rural tourism county—indicated his

involvement has benefitted the DMO and the development of tourism through his

networks and position. He stated:

> I'm on the Chamber's Board of Directors and the Executive Board, and I'm the vice chair of the CMBB and I've been-- this is my third year in that position on the Executive Board. And then I've done two terms on the regular Board of Chamber before that. I've chaired the local committee for that. I'm also on the existing industry committee, and several other things. At the schools here, I'm on their advisory board for their welding program, on the advisory board at what used to be National Status, the core higher education facility now, for the Double E program over there.

> Recognizing that influential stakeholders can direct the course of a committee or

proposal, it was revealed by many DMOs and Chamber members that they are very

selective in who they chose to align with. Business owner F29 in the smallest tourism

area said the mayor/DMO "asked me to do more things with the city," and indicated his

relationship with the mayor/DMO and his position on numerous boards has earned the

downtown tourism development more support and influence: financial, planning, and

voting.

> Well, I don't really do anything other than the COC. The mayor has me on a few boards. He asked me to be on a board for the industrial board. He's asked me to be on the board where they do the south-eastern Tennessee development district.

> Although rural counties compete with each in regards to economic development

and tourism, two counties mentioned that forming relationships with neighboring

counties has allowed them to leverage those alliances, benefitting both counties. The

tourism director (D17) relying on one natural resource based in two counties said, "There

are two counties that touch the lake so there are people appointed through the county

governments of each county, and then through the chambers," and indicated having both

counties on the council has allowed them to further their resources and marketing reach.

Magazine owner E23 from the rural area, growing significantly in tourism revenues, agreed that working with joining counties has allowed them to further their marketing efforts. She said, "L County was the hub, in my mind, and I went to every county that touched L and said, 'Let's create a stronger economy here by getting to know each other better.' We started promoting intra-county tourism and economy."

All DMOs acknowledged they leverage previous successes and have built off of them to garner support, motivate others to become involved, and reinforce the stakeholders' commitment to change to build tourism in their areas. The regional tourism director (A4) mentioned previous success is vital to motivate long-time residents. She said, "Do you know how many have never picked up a magazine? Do you know how many of them have never been out of their county? Out of their state? They don't even want to go out of the country."

A retail business owner from another region (C14) said, "You still got some that are property owners that if you didn't charge them anything, and you did it all for them, they wouldn't want to participate. That's what we're dealing with. We're trying to get them more involved." The mayor/DMO (F26) said, "Because that's putting your money where your thoughts are and it's like, 'Well, we've got to motivate them. They're going to need some help.'" All DMOs indicated stakeholders require a measurable validation of the tourism efforts to motivate them and further sustain their commitment to change. The DMO (C11) for the third highest tourism revenue stated:

> Once we have been successful - and we were last year - then they are buying in, okay? Once they see the fruit of the labor, then they're buying into the program. They can measure that. They can measure, did their sales go up as a result of this? Did they sell more merchandise? Did they sell more food? Did they sell more

gasoline? Did they sell more hotel rooms? Did they sell more bait to go fishing? So they can clearly measure the results.

Recognize the Area's Magnitude of Tourism

Even with recognizing the value of others, outside and inside credibility, and leverage, DMOs and stakeholders interviewed agree the area's magnitude of tourism must also be recognized, in terms of the cost of tourism and limited resources. The vision for the rural tourism area establishes the magnitude. Will they label themselves as a destination or is it tourism? Participant A1—the DMO from the highest tourism revenue—said, "Well you're a county. Yes, but counties aren't destinations, your cities are and that's hard to get across sometimes." Therefore, DMOs and stakeholders must decide if they want to concentrate on the county as a whole (tourism) or the downtown city development (destination). Of the six counties participating, all but one realized the downtown area as the destination, with the sixth determining the natural resource as the destination. Three DMOs stated they were centered on the downtown as a destination, two indicated they were involved in tourism for the county, but less significantly than the downtown destination, while the last did not concentrate on either the city or county in the area in which the natural resources was located.

Many participants mentioned the benefits of tourism outweighed the cost. One restaurant manager (F28) stated, "That's money that stays here, we don't have to offer services," making it a viable solution for their economic growth. Without significant economic development for this area, the town lacks funds for infrastructure, retail services, and improvement in the educational environment. However, there are significant costs associated with developing tourism in rural areas, especially downtown districts. One banker (C12) indicated that stakeholders "Put in a lot of their own personal

money, and of course time," while one retail business owner (C14) located downtown mentioned he had "Spent a lot of time and money to make his store look very good." Local educational attraction director from the second lowest tourism revenue counties (C24) said, "We have also committed over $2 million dollars to developing our Main Street buildings as a part of the Historical area as destination for visitors/residents while also furthering our educational mission." For stakeholders in the downtown tourism area and their commitment to change, one participant said, "they all have a vested interest in it," and are determined to implement their vision and strategies for a sustainable tourism destination.

With the downtown district serving as the destination area for many of the rural communities, the local government was found to be more involved in supporting the changes. DMO C11 from one of the lower tourism revenue areas said:

> We have worked with the City/County Government and local owners to acquire additional property and enhance the Downtown District. We have committed to making needed sustainable renovations and improvements. We have also been financially supportive at a personal and professional level of different organizations working to develop downtown.

DMO B7 said of recognizing the magnitude (cost and resources) of rural tourism in comparison to the unrecognizable benefits.

> Tourism is an enigma. It's very, very hard to quantify. It's very hard to quantify in a small town like this. It's easy to quantify when you go to Dollywood.
> An attraction you can quantify. You can't quantify the other—and it's a lot of work. It's a lot of time and it costs a lot of money to do that. People have no idea. But we finally got it going.

Participant C12, a banker from the third largest tourism revenue county, said he sees the progress of tourism, but realizes that they still have a lot of work to do and a lot more to invest in his city. He said:

We don't have homeless people. We don't have people soliciting. It's relatively clean. Downtown's clean. But just in general, it's relatively clean downtown. There are some neat aspects to downtown. It needs a ton of work, a ton of work. It's way behind, but there are some cool things.

With increased cost as tourism develops and strategies are implemented, DMOs and stakeholders in the study realized that they could not rely on just the hotel/motel tax alone. Two county DMOs responded they did not receive any hotel/motel lodging tax to fund their activities to market their areas. They did indicate they received funds for infrastructure needs, however participant C12 indicated, "A whole lot of places people want to see their money spent, other than downtown buildings." One county needed money to hire a full-time DMO. Even if they did have a full-time DMO, Mayor F26 indicated the need to attended education seminars sponsored by the State of Tennessee's Tourism Development. However, he said:

> Someone wants to go participate, they need money for mileage, going there. They need money for food, and so forth. And so, that's where we're stuck sometimes because it's all based on volunteerism we all need a little help. We need help to buy the building or we need help to fund that. If you want volunteers, they're pretty good about volunteering, but they don't have the bank roll.

All DMOs discussed applying for grants to fund downtown district improvements and marketing activities. The mayor/DMO (F26) from the lowest tourism revenue county indicated the downtown district is their main focus right now. He stated:

> The city owned this vacant lot. It was a burned out building; it was an eyesore. When I came in as mayor, we had a $15,000 grant. It was just boxed up, and we were going to lose that grant within a couple of weeks if we didn't use it.

While some mentioned they hold fundraisers to help support the marketing activities. Recognizing the importance of spending for marketing, DMO A1 said "We know it's going back into marketing dollars to bring more people in and increase the dollar spent." DMO E21 indicated that marketing alone was "one-third of our budget;

our chamber budget is the hotel-motel tax, which is directly tied to tourism". She has actively pursued tourism development and is committed to change and encouraging stakeholders to do so. Understanding that the tourism budget feeds not only the tourism department, but the Chamber budget as well, she said, "That's why we've had to focus on it so intently. But it's worked out good for us, especially the last six years has been our push."

All DMOs and many of the stakeholders mentioned they have State resources that they are able to utilize to best fit their vision for rural tourism. They mentioned that acquiring signage from the State of Tennessee Historical Markers Program for heritage tourism was an important resource for attracting tourism, whereas they did not normally have the money appropriated for it. Two counties said they utilize the prisons for workforce projects to benefit the downtown area development. Another resource for rural tourism areas has been working with TDOT for road improvements and updating signage as the downtown areas have developed. DMO A1 was optimistic about the opportunity afforded them with planning of a new interchange located within his county. He stated, "Think about that growth and something going to go out there. Will it be hotels? Will it be retail? Will it be restaurants? What more will be out there, tourism related, what we're going to be able to market?"

However, even with recognizing the value of others, utilizing leverage of stakeholders to further benefit tourism, having credibility, and all understanding the magnitude of tourism in the rural area, there still seems to be a disconnect with recognizing what the people want in the tourism area. There may be a vision, but whose vision is it? The local banker at the third largest tourism revenue county (C12) said:

We really haven't seen any new business relocate down here. There's several buildings that are for sale. And then we just had a city drug which advertises that they've been around for 100 and some years in the same location, the owner just sold to Walgreens. I consider that a discouraging blow downtown, because now you've got another vacant building. There's just not a lot of things to get people downtown. There's no place to have a drink. That's what we need. There's just not a lot of things to get people down here.

Although these rural counties have the causal condition to develop tourism with DMOs and stakeholder committed to change based upon recognizing the context in which they can develop it, dedication to the strategies and trust in the DMO will not be achieved without understanding the intervening conditions: the predisposition of the community toward tourism development.

INTERVENING CONDITIONS INFLUENCING STRATEGIES: PREDISPOSITION TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

After recognizing the context in which to implement the strategies, DMOs must also understand there will be intervening conditions that influence the stakeholders' commitment to change. These intervening conditions may influence, assist, or hinder the strategies that occur within the rural area's context. The intervening conditions all relate to one's predisposition to tourism developing. During the course of the study, the analysis determined five main concepts of this predisposition: resistance to change, enlightenment, effective communication, legitimacy of the DMO and tourism development, and individual perceptions of trust in tourism development and those involved.

Resistance to Change

All DMO's stakeholders mentioned that their rural communities are resistant to change in some aspects. It was expressed many times "There is an intense fear of change," or "I still think they're leery. It comes from protecting what you have." One

reason for the resistance to change was believed to be complacency, where EDO E22

mentioned "I think a lot of the time there's a complacency in that, well, this is how we've

always done it. and it's worked so far." She further indicated in a rural area "I think that

it's very easy to get stagnated." Reinforcing this idea, Main Street Program director B7

knows it was hard to even get people to come back downtown for meetings to discuss

initiatives. She stated:

> In rural communities, what applies even more crucial to that is if they leave to go home, it is the kiss of death to get them back because they're not going to have it. Same thing when I do board meetings or when we try to do a fundraiser. I will push it and make it happen at 6:00. And Sunday they'll go, 'No, nobody's...' I said, 'I'm telling you, we can't make it 7:00 because if they go home, they're not coming back.'

A local banker (C12) also agreed that stakeholders and residents can become complacent

and resistant to change if they know they will have to do something outside their

established comfort zone. His perception on his rural area's (third largest in tourism

revenue) resistance to change was:

> Downtown City C. I try not to reference that a lot, because everybody around here's, 'Well, we're not City C.' I'm not saying that we are City C. We'll never be City C. That's not what I'm saying, but you can still scale down and still implement the same economic principles and have positive results.

> There was some talk about maybe being able to serve alcohol, and it could-- that would be huge because it has a nice patio. And tonight, it's open from 5:00 to 9:00. They're going to have bands playing, there's going to be couple restaurants. people want a glass of wine, or a beer or a mixed drink, and there's no place to get it. So a Friday night-- you understand what I'm saying, don't you?

What was found during the study was stakeholders and the community are being

educated by those committed to change, however they still remain unmotivated or

unwilling to do anything to support the change. One tourism council member (D18)

said, "People that get it, they get it, and people that don't get it. I don't care what they're

fixed to go and tell, they ain't going to get it," while participant B7 said of the local

DMO, "It's not their fault that there's 34 people sitting somewhere who don't get it."

Even some politicians—those significant in assistance for policies— were noted as

unwilling to support the tourism initiatives as participant A4 indicated, "The politicians,

they feel that the chamber is wasting money. Like they said, "When this person goes,

then we don't need this anymore." It was repeated numerous times during the study.

"We've tried to explain that the money stays home," and "yet still they don't

understand." DMO (B6) at the second largest tourism revenue county described her

frustrations:

> It's a continuous process when it comes to city and county governments. It's all in
> the importance of the education that you give them, because I don't really think--
> the county commission - I've got 21 sitting down there -and when you go to
> speak in front of them, some of them hear it, some of them just don't. And it
> doesn't matter how much you pound and pound and pound. The importance of
> sports tourism, the importance of heritage tourism, the importance of just,
> tourism in general. And you would think that they would want to grasp that,
> knowing that the 7% lodging tax that our hotels collect, flows through the
> county. And the county receives more than tourism does, we get only 1.5% and
> they hold 2%. Like I said, some of them get it, some of them just don't. And it
> doesn't matter what, you get up in front of them and preach, they're just not going
> to get it. I've fallen away from doing individual reports that our board meeting,
> because you're sitting there looking at 25 board members and they're like, glazing
> over, because they don't want to know all the details of everything that
> everybody got going on.

Although the rural communities are educated on the benefits of tourism and the

vision for tourism development, it was mentioned many times that not only is there an

unwillingness to change, but there is a lot of rhetoric when talking about changing.

Local banker (C12) said the stakeholders:

> We want to see this happen, but we don't want to do this, and they always have
> the same talk, but no one ever gets done or nothing ever gets done. It's just a lot of
> empty talk really, most of the time and it's very frustrating. I hear people on that
> board talk about stuff with no plan. I don't know what kind of things that they've

talked about that didn't happen that would cause people to lose trust, but I think that there's probably some of that.

Another aspect of resistance to change in the rural areas participating in the study, is the "good ol' boy network" as one participant put it. It was mentioned many times by locals and non-locals that "sometimes outsiders aren't welcome too much here." Participant E25 was frustrated because "They're coming here for this way of life, but yet they try to change our way of life," while local EDO E22 said:

> I think that there is an air of exclusivity to these groups. Somebody just moves into town, and, 'Well, let me tell you how we did it back home.' Well, I don't care how you did it back home. You're here now. It's kind of like, 'We don't want your kind of help.' And I'm guilty of saying, 'Hey, could we phrase it as here's an idea instead of this is how we did it back home? Because I know it sounds stupid, but it gets on all our nerves.'

When asked about the conflicts working with a DMO and stakeholders to implement the necessary strategies, many locals and non-locals mentioned resistance to change in terms of "A disadvantage would be - not necessarily the organization - but the individuals themselves." Those educated in the value of tourism, as participant E22 spoke of tourism board members, "And you will have people that do not want you to succeed in new endeavors because that's not how they did it, and they were right, and that's unfortunate," and C15 said, "to the point where they'll pooh-pooh an idea because they didn't come up with it." When businesses were added to a downtown area, the reaction or the community according to a restaurant manager (C15) was:

> It's almost like a lost cause. Yeah, a lot of the locals are just kind of like, 'That won't work. That's stupid. Why do they open a restaurant down there? That's not going to work. Now that the B opened, which is a restaurant. The other competitor, you know he was kind of mad at first. 'That won't work, why is he coming down there?'

When asked most of the DMOs and those committed to change, implied that all rural

areas have, as one said, "There's always naysayers. The hardest group to get in touch

with will be those who own property here and don't care about home." For some

residents that have lived in the area their entire lives, raised a family there, and built

businesses, they do not want anything to change. One young banker (C12) expressed his

frustration working with other stakeholders in his county by saying:

> There's a lot of old money, and a lot of people that have been in the same position
> for a long, long time, and they have what they want to get done. There are just a
> lot of older people that are on a lot of boards and just have to go in order to
> represent their business, but aren't really passionate about it. They still have this
> mentality from the '20s and the '30s, although most of them weren't even there
> then. So they still feel that's their identity.
> They think they're very smart. Most of them, they do just fine as it is. The same
> thing is we also have the high school football mentality. That's what I've decided
> to call it. Which is this is my county, I'm not going to work with your counties.
>
> It's just people like that that don't, it's just narrow-minded individuals really. You
> got a small-minded type deal with outdated thinking. The Church group was
> very adamant against selling alcohol on the square for the rallies that we used to
> have. That caused them to leave and go to City D, Tennessee.

Some of the DMOs, and those under the age of forty, realized some of the older

residents and board members hinder the influx of new ideas from younger generation.

Participant C12 said, "It's really hard to crack in and find a niche, especially when you're

younger," while the DMO of the same county (C11) who conducts the young leadership

training agreed. "You've got that different age-- there's a different age group," indicating

his frustrations with some of the older board members. However, sometimes you many

not want to, but DMOs have to fight the individuals that are resistant to change as this

regional tourism director (A4) suggested when dealing with rhetoric in the rural areas:

> I don't go in like I'm the older person and you've got to listen to what I say and
> there's still people who do that, but it's not working out as well for them as it does

for us here so--Everybody's got an ego, and sometimes you kind of butt heads and find a way to work around and get what you need to get done.

Enlightenment

One common weakness to tourism development, was how do you commit to change to increase tourism, if the stakeholders, government, and communities do not understand tourism? EDO E22 mentioned, "I think so many times they don't realize for every dollar spent here there's a ripple effect." In all of the counties participating, this was a common struggle as an intervening condition to their strategies. Regarding understanding tourism, it was implied that this constituted the lack of interest and although educated by the DMO, the lack of motivation. Many participants expressed that for some stakeholders and residents in the area, there was intentional naivety.

Participant F29 indicated:

> I think that people realize that we need tourism in our county, but the people that have been here for so long have got used to this being such a quiet little town that they're not as involved. They just have gotten so accustomed to going out of town and buying the things they need and then come back here in and live that it's just become a way of life for them, instead of everybody just getting together and trying to bring what we need here. And I think that's where we are.

Another DMO (B6) went on to say it is difficult to get the elected officials to commit to change due to their predisposition to tourism development.

> I've approached him with it. I don't know that he's so interested in it personally, but maybe it's not something that he wants to see happen. I've mentioned it to him, but he didn't seem to be interested in it. He was more interested in a walkway or something on the river. I don't think he's as involved as what he could be. He's more worried about the land tax system than the other things stuff going on with the county and more the basic fundamentals than he is.

> As a property owner, it's important. And I don't think people realize that sometimes that their property taxes go up when your sales taxes doesn't come in. It'll say, 'tourism expenditures' on there, 82.5 million or 85.3 million or whatever, they don't know what that means. To simplify that, give us a report, and to simplify that would be great. Sometimes I've asked HER 'Can you define

this for me'? When it says, 'If not for tourism, every person in County would pay $237 more in taxes.' They don't know what that means. They don't understand that. They can't grasp that.

I think that sometimes tourism, it's too much fun, and economic and community development is so serious that it certainly can't be connected [chuckles]. It's like, "Oh, we're too busy for that. We're doing serious business over here, and you all are just playing" That's just my perception of what I have observed, true or not. It's not always true, but it can be true.

The DMO who is also the EDO and Main Street Developer (D16) said this of her own feelings toward tourism "We had a tire business, and it never really benefited us, that I could see. But if you're selling food, or gas, or whatever, basically food, because we have some local restaurants that are pretty famous for their food." Participant F30 indicated:

A lot of people didn't see much need in it. There are those in the community, some government board, that might not get some of the things that they need to do the mayors are the most popular person in town, but they don't know what's going on. You have to educate them.

During the course of this study, what was found was not the lack of education in economics, but a lack of recognition in how to motivate and inspire the community to understand the causal conditions for tourism and the vision for the area. DMOs from five of the counties stated they spent hours and hours educating stakeholders and residents on the tourism economic multiplier, developing training materials, and assisting tourism businesses with the basics of website development and social media. One banker (B12) stated, "But there's so many people that don't understand basic economic principles like that." The regional tourism director (A4) who works with numerous counties in Tennessee's rural areas said, "I have said, 'Okay, listen to me.' And I have to show them in almost like a picture book," while the DMO (A1) for one of the larger tourism counties

mentioned "That's why we have the snapshots. And we show them, this is what it brings

in." The DMO (B6) from the second largest tourism revenue county still has to visually

educate her community, saying:

> It was a chart. It was like a flow chart. It had this person visiting an area, and then
> it would come down in the two, then these two broke down into three or four, and
> then this and that was-- That would be really neat, to come up with some kind of
> visual to show people. Because it really impressed a lot of people.

Even going as far as putting the stakeholder's website together for them after countless

hours spent providing seminars and training materials. She indicated she was frustrated

and responded:

> One of my biggest things is the website. It's their front line. We may have someone
> that can't afford to put a website together, doesn't have a clue how to put a website
> together, but they've got that partner page on TNVacation.com, which they can use
> that landing page and all their advertising, which would only drive more traffic to the
> Tennesseevacation.com website. Museum can put that link on their card or whatever,
> but if we do that, we've got to make sure it's as up-to-date as possible.

With all the education afforded to the stakeholders and residents, many appeared

not committed to change and were still resistant to change their perceptions. Participant

A3— business owner and Chamber Executive—said:

> You just have to educate them that this is the right kind of people, and this is
> going to bring a good thing to our county. Whereas if you just go before the
> county commission and say, "' want to use these fairgrounds, we need you all to
> vote on it, because we're going to have a motorcycle rally,' they'll be like--You
> know, it's not what they picture in their mind. They picture it torn up and so on
> and so on. A lot of these people are just good old boys, good old folks, that may
> not be educated or whatever, and may not understand that bringing a rally here is
> going to bring in 3 or $4 million worth of revenue and we're going to see the taxes
> from that, and it's going to help fund the schools and the CVB and so forth. And
> they don't understand how that works. They think, 'Well, this is a bunch of Hell's
> Angels coming in,' and you just have to educate them.

However, when stakeholders are educated and lose their intentional naivety, they become

enlightened about tourism and its benefits, adjusting their predisposition to tourism

development. For some it takes a short period of time as local business owner C14

stated:

> The community is grasping it more and maybe understanding it a little more, but
> they're becoming more accepting of the influx of people that we're getting. I think
> all in all the atmosphere is better as far as accepting tourism and understanding it.
> I think in one of the biggest moves buy through the downtown. I think that it's
> just maybe a bit more prevalent, more where people are understanding it more. I
> think as the farmers market grows, it's not really caught on good yet. Of course,
> the produce is just now starting to come in. I'm hoping more people will take
> advantage of that.

While for some areas, it takes years and even decades for the community to be aware and

understand the magnitude of tourism and its benefits. Participant F30 mentioned, "I think

they're beginning to grasp it. I think it's taken years. It's taken a long time. They're

beginning to grasp it and understand what it could mean to the community."

Furthermore, when they do, the commitment to change becomes stronger, there is a better

relationship with the DMO, and trust in the organization and the process strengthens.

DMO C11 put it:

> It was like 'Oh!' They had their ah-ha moment. But until they had that, it was
> three years. From the time the conversations began until-- because they just
> weren't open to it. And, honestly, it was actually when we were doing the
> presentations to the county commissioners, and they just happened to be there,
> and it was like, 'Ah,' and the angelic choirs began to sing, and it's like, 'I got it.'

Empathetic Communication

Recognizing others' resistance to change and enlightening them about the benefits

of tourism, requires communication between the DMO, the stakeholders, and the

community. Many participants mentioned that communication was key in getting

information and networking. However, the "lack of organized and focused

communication and strategies," can demotivate one's commitment to change for tourism

development. DMO A1 from the highest tourism revenue area stated, "Don't let your partners be blindsided on little things or big things. Keep them in the know."

Many of the stakeholders interviewed discussed how personal conversation have made a difference in their relationships with the DMO and other stakeholders. DMO B6 mentioned she interacts with her stakeholders constantly, just like her regional director interacts with her. "Mr. D. is amazing, he's constantly texting me, 'How are things going?'" They appreciate receiving e-mails for detailed information and personal communication represents to those in the rural areas, a sense of caring and concern for the stakeholders individually. DMO B6 said:

> You grasp a hold of them and you talk to them individually. Because the others rely upon them to come to them and say, 'What do you need?' If we can't do it, we know people who can help her. We can send folks that work with us or get that information out, so we work together to make each thing successful. It's a small town. A few phone calls and emails go a long way.

When dealing with rural area newly elected officials, one regional tourism director (A4) indicated that she has to build a rapport with them before beginning to talk about their commitment to change initiatives to develop tourism. As a non-local herself, she believes getting to know them has garnered more support than coming in and telling them what they need to do, which is normally what they expect. She said of her experiences with them:

> I come in with in a conversation. We talk about the world. I've notice that when I let them talk about them, and their county, and the history of their county, we can go way back. And they feel that I'm interested in them, so I'll break the ice.

When talking to stakeholders, a DMO (E21) from a county that is growing significantly in rural tourism approaches communication to educate and motive her stakeholder as such:

I just sort of step back and just present ourselves and see if there's a way that we can help them or whatever. Really, it's pretty much opening up to their experience. It's opening up to asking them questions to see what they--and then it's a element of time. I listen. And if people start using those words like nobody, never. They start using the negative words, I try to find out why. And is it you? Are you just tired? Is there really a committee? Are you trying to do too much? This is my fourth county mayor and fourth city mayor to work with. Basically, again taking that same approach as to, 'What do you know, what do you don't know and what are you willing to know?'

It was noted by many DMOs that not everyone was willing to work with others and support tourism, but it is still imperative that you communicate with them and garner their support. In this sense, the DMOs need to be enlightened as to why there is such a resistance to change and be proactive in talking with the stakeholder before the situation becomes worse. Represented as a caring, respected, and trusting DMO by her stakeholders, DMO E21 said:

Yes, those are people that you need to have discussions with. You need to understand why, where they're coming from, and maybe why they're against it. Is it just fiscal? Is it just, that's not how it's always been done? That type of thing. So yes, that education is very important to see where they're coming from and maybe get them better clued, more information as to why we're doing it.

She also emphasized that as DMOs for rural counties that need all the support they can get, "Trusting a person in this position, to me, is that they're available, they're consistent, they listen. Yes, you're going to jump in and have great ideas or have some ideas that you want to--but listening, asking questions."

Another important form of communication that was mentioned numerous times during the interviews, was the importance of timely communication. For some DMOs, they discovered that giving the stakeholders too much information at one time, was not the most effective way of obtaining support for a project. DMO B6 said "I try to give it to them in little bites of pieces," and another said "I have figured out-- I've tried to just

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give them like, little things instead of telling them everything we're trying to do, I've tried to emphasize certain things." However, not all stakeholders want a piece of the information, they want the entire portion so they can plan accordingly. A Main Street Program director (B7) at another county prefers to have all the information at one time and said of the DMO "I think it's a different perspective looking at it from-- now she's needs to get information out to people, she needs to promote It's a little bit different, more specific of what she needs to do."

However, as much information as the DMO provides the stakeholders, all five of the six DMOs and the tourism council director agreed that meetings were vital to garnering support and changing one's predisposition to tourism development. Hotelier A5 mentioned, "You get it all together, and then us as a group become better because of what each of us bring to the table," while others said, "If you don't come to the events, you don't stay informed," and you get out of it what you put into it." A newspaper writer (B8) and visible member of the community said:

> I feel like I'm knowledgeable about what's going on in the community, but we have yet to have a Tourism Task Force meeting that I haven't learned something that I was clueless about. And so, I know the others have learned things. I knew a lot about what was going on in the community, and we realized that other people were clueless, and they were kind of working against each other. If they're busy as the owner or the manager and everything, then send us someone that can speak for you or share the information with you.

Chamber/DMO tourism meetings were found among all counties to be held once per month (five DMOs and one tourism council director), in additional to some counties that offered Main Street Program meetings and Downtown Development District meetings separately. It was noted that three of the six counties did not have EDO representation at their tourism meetings. These three counties were the lowest in tourism

revenue. In regards to public officials, some attended the meetings if they were informed that it would involve the city or county. DMO B6 at one of the top three tourism counties mentioned:

> I would say that both mayors would be there - if we had something. In previous years, most of the time-- again we may have to call and say, "Hey, you need to be here because it's going to affect the city." We have to lead them. But I think the mayors would both be supportive. I think economic development would be there. The city would be represented, the county would be represented, economic development, and I'm saying of course that the chamber would.

Legitimacy

Four of the six counties placed an emphasis on working with DMOs and board members that were considered locals. The two counties that did not emphasize a preference for locals was the top tourism revenue county and the tourism council board; both have a significant amount of relocated retirees in the area. When using the term local, for some counties it meant living in the county the majority of their lives as DMO C11 stated:

> The Chamber needed a director, and I got the nod because I was from the county. I remember when AH interviewed me, he said, 'Are you born and raised here?' I said, 'Yes.' 'That's good.' That's usually not a problem, but there's that old, 'Oh, you're from downtown,' or 'You're from local.' So I'm from local stock.

It was mentioned by many DMOs and stakeholders that they grew up in the area and perceived they knew everyone in the area, thereby creating a relationship built on local ties. They believed this commonality to be important when making decisions and acquiring support in regards to tourism development. Participant E25 said:

> In our community, there is a core group of people who have always worked on tourism, and they have developed the museum. They made sure that the depot did not get destroyed. They've created a little discovery center and helped with the theater.

When speaking of her active involvement in tourism, museum curator E25 replied, "I've been here all my life and they've all known me. The mayor and I graduated together. It's just a lifelong thing. I've been here all my life. Everybody knows me. They know what I did and my family." When speaking of working with a local EDO, she trusted her because "I know her, what kind of background she has and all that. She's easy to work with and I know her. I had her in school and had her kids. She's going to be good to work with." Many participants indicated they went to school, church, or grew up with other stakeholders and the DMO.

However, in the two other counties, some were considered local because they had lived in the area for a considerable amount of time. It was noted that the regional tourism director was now considered a local by the DMO and the other stakeholders when it was said by A5, "Yeah, she is from Germany, but she's lived-- she's been here for 10, 15 years. Long enough to be established." Another new board member had only been in the area for a short period of time and although he had garnered the respect of the locals, he is still not considered a local "he is not from here, he moved here."

Nevertheless, having local representation did not necessarily persuade the community to commit to the strategies to develop tourism. In the counties participating, it was discovered one county was recognized as a legitimate business (highest tourism revenue county), while two others were legitimate, but due to partnering with the Chamber of Commerce (counties two and three). The fourth county in tourism revenues was not considered by others a legitimate business, thereby a tourism council was formed. Finally, the fifth was just beginning to gain recognition as a legitimate business, while the sixth county was not recognized at all. The lowest county recognized that to be

perceived as a legitimate process would need a designated paid DMO. The mayor/DMO (F26) said, "You have to look at it as an industry. But the problem is, is if you don't have somebody that's in a paid position, it won't be." The fourth county said of her job as EDO, DMO, and Main Street developer (D16), "I'm at the Visitor Center, which belongs to the city, and so we get information maps, brochures, really nice restrooms. It's just like a typical visitor's center. So I'd answer all their questions, maps," acting as more of a visitor center manager than an actual DMO responsible for bringing stakeholders together. Even the DMO (C11) from the third highest county mentioned "I don't spend a full day on tourism. That's secondary."

However, to implement the strategies necessary to motivate others to commit to tourism development and increase the societal benefits, five of the DMOs mentioned it is expected to be a legitimate business with, as participant E23 said, "Numbers. They're important to business men, and they're important to economic developers for sure." DMO C11 indicated he had to "show them the numbers" and A4 said "Our public officials, they would be fairly pleased with the numbers. I think there's a feeling that we are trustworthy, and we are working serving, and we are representing the interests of our county and our community." Without the numbers, the DMOs indicated, the strategies would not be considered legitimate, and thereby lack support and trust in the DMO. Subsequently, DMOs communicated this to their stakeholders to further the social exchanges and the relationships as DMO A1 said:

> You bust your tail for your partners. I want my hotels to know that were bringing people in. You build those. They trust that hey I'm bringing 40,000 people into town over the next. Work with these hoteliers everyday and we have to have them.

Moreover, some elected officials recognized that rural area tourism needed a legitimate

DMO and tourism attractions in order to sustain tourism initiatives. Although excited

about her community's tourism growth, EDO E22 has remained leery of the changes and

lacks faith in the tourism strategies saying:

> But there are some things in communities that are run by volunteers, and they
> just drag and lag. But when you give someone some incentive, and you're able to
> recruit someone who has the passion that they have to work for a living, and
> you're able to empower them with a salary, then things are going to work. It boils
> down to putting food on their table and paying the bills. It's not for lack of
> interest. It's just lack of ability to do something. There are plenty of people in this
> community who could run the theater, who could run a farmers' market, who
> could do a lot of things if the money were there to pay them so that they could
> just live.

Perception of Trust

All participants indicated that trust plays a part in committing to change and the

social exchanges with the DMO and other stakeholders to implement strategies needed

for developing rural tourism. For some participants in rural areas who are beginning to

grow their tourism, they are hesitant trusting others. One business owner (F29) in the

smallest tourism area indicated his county had a problem previously with someone who

was inappropriate with funds. He said:

> As far as anyone on the board, I think that everyone that's been selected in the
> boards that I'm on are very trustworthy people. I know that as far as what they
> say, if they-- when you live in this small town, you have to be able to trust the
> people that you're working with. I think that most of the people that have been
> selected for any of the boards I'm on, whether I found them inside the meetings
> or out, have been very trustworthy. I would not think anything otherwise. I don't
> think that a person should be turned loose 100% with anything. I think that it
> should be a general consensus, and no matter how much you trust them, you still
> want the best for the community and the best way to do that is work in big
> groups. I don't think this should rely on one complete person.

While the Main Street Program Developer (B7) also referred to financial

misappropriation resulting in the lack of trust for stakeholders. She stated:

> You have to trust that when you're being invited to the table to do something and
> you're being asked to plunk down $200 for this ad, you need to know that your
> $200 is going to the ad, that it's not doing to somebody's pocket. You need to feel
> comfortable that if you're going to participate in that, that that's what you're
> doing, that somebody's not lining their pockets with a portion of it.

However, many indicated building the community's trust was important to

changing the mistaken perceptions of tourism development in their rural area with one

saying, "You have to build their trust and you can plan things that will come out right

that will help build the trust," to get to the point where as DMO A4 indicated, "I feel

with quite a number of them now I have their trust."

For those in tourism that are non-locals, it was found they have to work harder to

gain trust from the DMO, other stakeholders, and the locals. One museum curator (B9)

in the second largest tourism revenue county believed:

> Small towns like these folks they were born here, their folks are from here, they
> went to school here. I am a foreigner, even though I'm born in Tennessee and
> lived here most of my life. I'll never be a hometown girl. They have a lot of
> networks that are just in place from birth. They went to church with so-and-so
> and they've known so-and-so all of their lives and stuff. I've been here seven
> years and it has-- it's taken me a while to feel like to get in the club I guess. For
> them to think of me as part of the town's network. I've had a harder time earning
> it because I wasn't born into it. They're professional folks, and I trust that they've
> got my back. I hope that they trust that I do as well.

Discovered from the data, integrity and reliability can influence the stakeholder's

perception of the DMO and the stakeholders' ability to trust them. This was said of a

DMO (E21) where her county is experiencing significant tourism growth:

> It's the whole ethical character stance she takes. One of the key things in her
> personal life is her ethics, her morals. All those things make her who she is, and

yes, that's why people like her and are excited that she's in that position because they trust that she's going to make the right decisions, not a personal decision. She's going to make the right decision.

While the DMO (E21) herself said that integrity was vital to developing her relationships and building trust. She wanted her stakeholders to know that she fully supports them at all times and stated:

> You would know I've never missed a meeting. I've always done what I've said. And something happens, you wouldn't think a thing in this world about it. You're going to say 'You know something came up, or she would be here.' So that trustworthiness, that trust we've built. And then if I do what I need to honorably, or respectably, you know that you can send me anywhere to represent the event or your business or whatever. And I'm not going to do anything that would cause you embarrassment.

Having integrity and being reliable also means being visible for four DMOs. All mentioned that attending various meeting and showing up for events were not only part of their jobs, but necessary to build trust from the stakeholders. Many stakeholders affirmed this and mentioned the presence (or lack of) the DMO at meeting and involvement in events. For them, transparency is not only the financial numbers, but in the efficiency of the DMO's time in development tourism. The DMO (A1) from the highest tourism revenue county said:

> County commission meeting. So I went and didn't really plan on being called on, but they're talking about sports tourism. Being in front of them, being available, being transparent, being in front of them is the biggie. Showing up at meeting. So again, being visible, being in front of them. A bit transparency that you have to have. Don't sell yourself short, but do what you say you're going to do, and then do that one other thing.

Whether local or non-local, most participants agreed they felt more committed to tourism development when the DMO and other stakeholders move beyond integrity and reliability, to caring and concern for the stakeholders and the community. The regional

tourism director (A4) indicated in smaller rural areas, it was common to see "In small counties, they're usually the ones with the largest families and the biggest land. And so, to them, it doesn't matter," where "the city alderman, or the county commissioner, they couldn't care less." Nevertheless, the counties flourishing in tourism revenue were discovered as having caring and concerned DMOs and stakeholders. One restaurant manager (C15) said of this Chamber and DMO, "I really do think they care. I really think they have the best interest for the city at heart, I really do," while Chamber director A2 said "People don't question our hearts. They might question our head. We make mistakes. I'm talking all of it. So, there is a trust here." Likewise, the magazine owner (E23) said this of her DMO:

> She is very caring and concerned person, so she always puts people first. Reliability and dependability? She is, of course, both of those things to a high level. What she always does, though, is puts that person first, puts people first. If there is an event planned, and there's an emergency in the community, the people are going to come first. The event will go on, but if there's a personal thing that happened, she's going to make sure that the person involved - if she's responsible for any part of them - they get taken care of.

The newest and youngest DMO (A1) significantly cares about his destination, community, and visitors. When working with his stakeholders and the visitors, for him it is much more than a job. He creates a strong relationship and builds trust with them, supporting them when needed. He stated:

> Sports teams, you want to cry with them. It's about that relationship. It's about that experience…to build trust, and build that…ultimately build the relationship and strengthen that. Somewhat take that for granted (relationships in community) They're going to help me. They actually care. It's a care thing…we care about these young men. I care about the fans coming in and making sure they they have a great time. This weekend is about those young men playing football…this is their super bowl…catch myself getting emotionally attached. Whatever team wins, you are helping them through out the process.

Consequently, this caring, concern, and support leads, as he put it, "I want my hoteliers to know that I'm fighting for them. I want them to know that I'm fighting for them every day and bringing it. I do that with internal staff, our CVB staff." His Chamber director (A2) affirms this stating, "That we as a community have seen the big picture and are providing a community that can support their corporation, and that's huge. I see that at the chamber."

CONSEQUENCES OF THE PROCESS: INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Consequences are the end product for a process system (either good or bad), while the end product for a change process based on commitment is acceptance and sustainability. The consequences of committing to the process of change and engaging in social exchanges with the DMO and stakeholders to develop a sustainable rural tourism area were found to be predominantly beneficial to everyone and the community. As the social exchanges increased in frequency and responsibility, all participants, when asked, said that as the relationships grew, trust became greater between the parties. The DMOs indicated this assisted in solidifying further commitment to change and grow for rural tourism development. Consequences discovered in this study not only related to the causal effects, but also produced three more benefits for residents. They include: improved relationships between all members of the alliance, a domino effect in regards to cooperation, and the ability to present themselves as an inclusive community.

Improved Relationships

Discovered in the data was the concept that improved relationships were a consequence of the process to commit to change. Although some relationships were long-standing, they still benefitted from forming an alliance and committing to social

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exchanges based on tourism strategies designed to fulfill the vision they have for the rural area. One business owner (F29) in the lowest tourism revenue area said, "If you've lived here in a small community, you've lived here for over 30 years, you develop a relationship with people in the community." In regards to trust, he indicated, "As far as trust, I think most people in this town know who they can trust and who they can't." Many of the participants indicated that as a long-time local, they have relationships with the mayor, significantly benefitting tourism development in getting things accomplished quicker. A local museum curators' relationship with the county mayor has also benefitted the DMO and the tourism community. Participant E25 said, "I have a good relationship with the county mayor. I go to him and I say, 'Here's what we need.' And we got county road signs up that says, 'Welcome to County' or something more inviting. We got that done. He's real receptive." Likewise, the DMO (B6) from the second highest tourism revenue generating county indicated a trusting friendships between herself and a stakeholder and its effects:

> I got a good relationship with the county mayor, was good friends with him before he even became county commissioner. And now he's with the mayor, so I can pick up the phone, or I can text him and say, 'What in the world are you doing? What were you thinking?' Or, 'I need your help here.' Just like with the TDOT Grant that we just turned in. It was a $50,000 matching grant. I called him up and I said, 'What do you think about this?' He said, 'Go for it.' So, the city signed off-- the county signed off for it and we're good to go, because he knows the importance of tourism. So it's one of these members.

For those newly developing tourism and new to the office, building relationships for tourism starts with personal relationships and establishing a rapport. The newest DMO (A1) of the strongest rural tourism area said, "First what I did, establish a rapport. Rapport with all of the interested people, all of the shareholders, as well as the politicians, as well as the chambers. You have to create a relationship." After developing that

rapport with them, he indicated, "You build a lot more trust off a personal relationship, other than a business. Build that trust and a personal relationship and they can trust you in business because business is where you talk money." Another DMO (B6) from the second largest tourism area indicated that growing a relationship was necessary not only with the stakeholders, but with the state as well. She said:

> I took the position and then it started growing-- you have to grow those relationships. There wasn't really a strong relationship with Mr. JW because that was huge. There wasn't really a strong relationship with the state, and I didn't have as close a relationship with Mr. JW, but the girls in the department did. And then of course Ms. S. came in. And then everybody started learning, Ms. CN and some of the other people, and then the trust started building in the product that we had to put out there. And then, I think it's all in the relationships. I think that our county tourism has a really good relationship with the Department of Tourist Development, with Ms. P. and with Ms. C. and all those girls down there.

Due to building these relationships by supporting the tourism process together, five of the six DMOs and the tourism council director indicated their relationships have strengthened and consider them very good or excellent. The tourism director (D17) said about her relationships with stakeholders: "We're all friends and colleagues, and just here to help support each other and support the lake as much as we can," while the mayor/DMO (F26) of another city said, "Well, it's a small town. We all have good relationships." The majority of the participants mentioned it takes the process to get stakeholders to commit to change. Subsequently, the youngest DMO (A1) said as a result of the process and the relationships formed, "This core of people gets it. They get the tourism value. They get the revenue value. They get that tourism is top five industry in this region. So those relationships are key in educating others they get back to." His Chamber Director (A2) said the sustainability of their tourism, "It depends on the

relationships. We've been in a season where we have really good working relationships.

That's the key."

Cooperation and the Domino Effect

One of the consequences of the change process is the cooperation observed by all

participants and its domino effect on the stakeholders and the community. Chamber

director A2 said, "Right now, it's in their interest to work together. If everybody else is

working together versus one person or one entity, then that entity will suffer," as his

rural area is experiencing a considerable tourism growth substantiated by those

committed to the change. Hotelier A5 of the same county said about the DMO: "He can

do anything, and yet he knows where his partners lay that can help and get what he

needs accomplished. So he's done really well." DMO E21 said that her job was more

than market a destination, it is to do:

> Anything I can do to make this successful, not as a business, but as a community,
> that's what I really want to do. You've got to be able to work together, and you've
> got to find a compromise so that everybody's happy. And I guess that's the biggest
> issue.

With the vision in place and a commitment from the DMO and stakeholders,

hotelier A5 indicated, "They all cooperate together. They all see the big picture and work

together on these programs." Other participants acknowledge the process has as

participant C14 put it, "Making connections within the community and forming

partnerships which in turn benefit everyone," while B7 stated, "Collaboration is very

important to me and to every community." Although the stakeholders are committing to

change to pursue the social benefits, the consequences have a domino effect on

cooperation for the entire community. DMO E21 indicated that this domino effect has

garnered more awareness and support for tourism and said:

The momentum's building, though, so it's almost like it that you have to convince one person at a time, but once you convince that person they're part of the team, and then that one person goes and tells another person. When you hear them repeating what you've said, then you know that, hey, they're a part of the team.

Many stakeholders realize the DMO is vital in sustaining the process and instrumental in getting the necessary resources to initiate foundational products. DMO C11 said, "Sometimes you move the puzzle pieces together, close to each other, and then you just let it happen," while the mayor/DMO (F26) indicated, "In other words, doing the Farmers Market was to get people downtown. So it's like 'build it they will come' kind of situation." Realizing the DMO is necessary for continued growth and opportunities, participant E23 said in regards to her DMO, "what she is doing now, and we are opening more doors, that's another thing is opening doors of opportunity for these other agencies because the better we do, they do and better they do, we do."

Many participants mentioned that cooperation on tourism initiatives encourages the community as a whole. One said, "it all feeds down into it," and repeated tourism benefits everyone as it "feeds off to each other." One Main Street director (B7) that works closely with her DMO said, "What a lot of people don't realize what we do is what benefits our little downtown and our 13 blocks of the main street district ultimately benefits this entire community," and working with the DMO. "So we spend the money, and everybody else reaps the benefits." The consequences of committing to change for tourism extends beyond the local rural area. One tourism council member (D18) of one of the smaller tourism counties indicated:

> The TWRA, they're always looking for an opportunity to interact with the citizenry to get people involved with the lake, to get people involved with hunting and fishing. And the more people that buy fishing license and hunting license, the better they do. So everybody's got benefit in this thing----individually and collectively.

Retail business owner C14 also agreed that the domino effect was a consequence of the process of them changing. He said:

> If this place is successful, then those next door will be successful. It all just kind of trickles down from everybody. But that's just the biggest thing. It's about everything. Because if the town grows, we'll grow with it. It doesn't matter about anything else, really, honestly.

Identity: Present Themselves as an Inclusive Community

Throughout the process, rural DMOs and stakeholders used the causal conditions, context, intervening conditions, and strategies to determine how they want to present themselves to visitors, other stakeholders, and the community. What most participants mentioned in some form is an identity (a brand image that encompasses a collective version of the rural area with common goals), and a sense of belonging for all. This identity is what motivates others to commit to change to further tourism development. For those already aligned with the vision, it fosters their commitment to change through different contexts and intervening conditions.

Many participants from the three lowest tourism revenue counties were concerned with how they present themselves and how others perceive them as one said, "our best foot forward." The mayor/DMO (F26) indicated, "Our effort has to be how to make everything exceptional. Because that's how you create an image, and right now we don't have one," while participant B7 from another smaller tourism county indicated, "They're still trying to make things nice, and neat, and keep everything hunky-dory." Still working on establishing an identity, one mayor said, "Look, I want people to drive through here and say, 'This is the prettiest town in Tennessee.' And if we shoot for that,

and we get, 'This is one of the prettiest towns in Tennessee,' I'll accept that," and EDO

E22 reiterated it with saying:

> If you will fix that hair, put on that makeup, and dress you up a little bit, throw
> on those earrings, it helps your general feeling, and how you approach your day,
> because you feel better. That's how I see the downtown.

Main Street director B7 suggested that all rural area must constantly monitor their

identity: how they present themselves as a community and how others perceive them.

She perceives the community identity as a partnership between economic development

and tourism stating:

> When it comes to recruiting, when it comes to bringing new businesses, they
> often look at the downtown. They look at how you keep your community, and is
> it neat? Is it vibrant? In smoke and mirrors, you can do a lot with flowers, plants,
> benches, flags, and banners to make people think that your community is alive,
> well, and ticking even if it's struggling.

The DMO (A1) from the most successful tourism county said the same:

> If they're focused on getting these from the relationships with these decision
> makers and bringing in this new manufacturing - new industry, then there needs to
> be a subsection in the community that works on fostering a relationship and helps
> incorporate those individuals into our society. That would be an example of
> landing an industry and then fostering a relationship, and having people totally
> buy into your community and want to invest in more than one way.

Establishing a community identity further encourages a common ground for the

stakeholders, one social exchange a DMO can provide in rural areas. Hotelier A5 said,

"The benefits working with a DMO is everybody gets on same page, because everybody

gets caught up in their own world. A house divided cannot stand," and a Chamber

director (A2) indicated that a key factor in sustainable rural tourism is, "You've got to

have everybody working together for the greater good". DMO E21 further indicated:

I believe all parties agree that that the purpose of tourism is to provide a vital means of livelihood for this community, our home. Using that as common ground from which to start, I don't think there are any major trust issues.

Having a common goal has created a sense of belonging for many of the communities interviewed: increased volunteer support, charitable giving, and increased involvement. For some, this has been an unexpected consequence of the process as participant E22 said, "So, a couple of these eight people came to us and said, 'How are you getting all these people to do all this? How are you getting so much community involvement and support?' And I said, 'I asked them.' Likewise, another participant stated, "'We've never seen the community come out and volunteer like that.' So that's part of the success, and we're just growing it. We're just getting those numbers and getting that community together to do more things." After seventeen years of watching her rural area building the local tourism, local hotelier A5 believed that volunteering has increased as tourism has developed. She mentioned:

> There's a volunteer aspect of this community. It's part of the community. It responds to the churches. It's part of the churches. It's part of the university setting. It's part of the business setting. It's part being the pride of the community, and the pride of seeing things succeed in this community. The system isn't perfect, but it's part of what we do.

Participants also indicated that as they developed a common goal and volunteering increased, so did charitable giving. By hosting a three weekend Christmas festival, EDO E22 was very proud of the way her community came out to support the businesses and the charities. She said, "Charitable giving for three main charitable organizations that beg for money every December, doubled, in some cases tripled, and you can't tell me the decoration and the atmosphere and the general spirit didn't have

something to do with it." Another community has also seen the increase in donations as his tourism community and events have developed. DMO C11 stated that tourism:

> It's been good for the community, and it grows this--the local Kiwanis. They have a thing where they do a raffle, raffle off some big-ticket items like a $50 ticket, but their first time out I think they gave $50,000 to the library.

The atmosphere of the rural tourism area and the increased spirit of giving back, has also created a sense of inclusiveness to those that recently moved to the area. One retiree (D18) mentioned, "I've gotten really involved with them, and they've taken us in." DMOs and stakeholders have realized that it is important for their communities to include more people to create that sense of belonging and garner additional support for tourism. Participant E23 said, "We have an event, and we're able to pull in a lot of groups, then that's effective, we try to pull in every single group we can think of in the community and get them to be a part of it." This gives locals the opportunity to create relationships with new residents and share in the spirit of community with them. Participant E25 disclosed:

> New folks move in here that really love our county. They came here because they wanted to. They love it, and they will do anything to help it. And I trust them. We trust them for that. They will go out and say good things about us and stuff.

With increased sense of belonging and inclusiveness, the rural areas interviewed were striving for and realizing a real sense of community for families and residents. It was understood by all DMOs, as participant A3 put it "The more they do to improve the area, the better it is for their family, their future family members." One local banker (C12) from the county with the third highest tourism revenue said:

> This city needs a family event. It needs some place where you can go and just hang outside and listen to music or whatever. That's what people are dying for right now. Something going on where you could bring your family and sit down and have a picnic or whatever. That's kind of the way that this town is going. That's a huge draw for this town, need to see that there's something for their kids to do. There's a big push for community, which is good because it's kind of

changed. For a while, nobody knew their neighbors and all that, and I think that's changing. Events like tonight are good, just to bring people downtown and let people know what we have downtown.

By recognizing that the causal effects have given them more beneficial consequences than they could have imagined, many participants mention they were proactive in building a stronger commitment to change to strengthen its inclusive community identity. Participant F30 said, when referring to other stakeholders, "I think that they care about the community and are doing what's best for the community, not necessarily just for their sales." It was mentioned by all the participants that the key is involvement and trust by the DMO and the stakeholders working together to commit to the social exchanges that are necessary for developing rural tourism. Some recognize that, as involvement and trust increase, "We're wanting to see that community again. We're wanting to see development of the downtown. We're wanting to have events," as participant E22 implied. Counties more developed in tourism have also noticed a maturity in involvement and trust between the DMO, stakeholders, and the community. Chamber Director A2 said, "Trustworthy. I think it's all they've ever known. I came here 12 years ago, hard to believe, and my predecessor was here 37 years, and this has been the structure." Aspiring to this level, it takes involvement for the sake of the community. Hotelier A5 expressed, "We're not only involved in this room. We're involved in this community. There's not one person at this table who's not involved in this community."

As a newcomer, large financial supporter of the downtown area, and educational attraction director who has aligned with the DMO in his county to grow tourism, participant E24 believes tourism is growing because it is their community, their identity.

Realizing that it takes everyone working through the process together to remain committed to the vision, he also recognizes that they are a community for the community. He believes that "Those individuals have a love and passion for the cultural history, environmental issues and tourism generating areas to build the local community and support the areas businesses."

Figure 4 characterizes the common, as well as insightful disposition of the data. The causal condition of the rural area wanting to expand their social benefits produces the phenomenon of motivating the DMO and stakeholders to commit to change to develop tourism. The strategies needed, visionary sustainability, are conducted successfully in the context of recognition with the intervening conditions that may arise, stakeholders' predisposition to tourism development. Finally, the consequences of the strategies were realized as and inclusive community identity that is conducive to achieving the causal conditions for the rural tourism area. Finding were organized within Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory axial coding paradigm model to retain the grounded theory convention of data analysis.
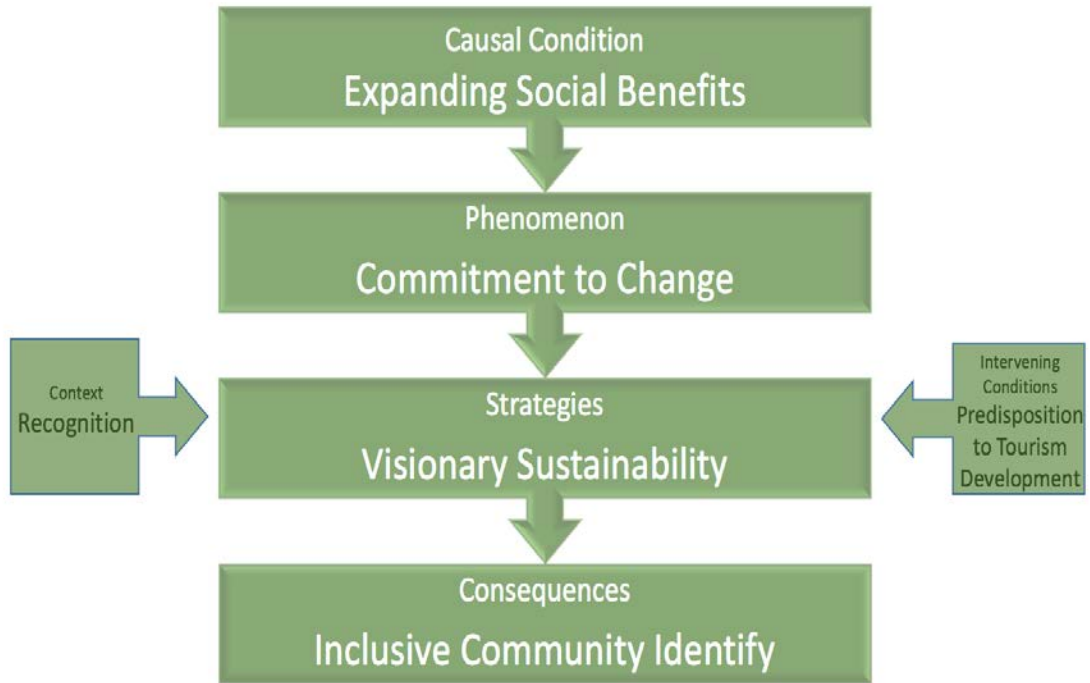
Figure 4. Findings - Grounded Theory Axial Coding Paradigm

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

Chapter five reviews the completed research by summarizing the categories and how they relate to existing literature, introducing the grounded theory for this study. It also discusses the implications for practical use, presents the limitations and the prospects for future research, and offers a conclusion. According to Charmaz (2006), grounded theory allows the researcher to obtain a comprehensive view on the framework and circumstances of the participants' perceptions by disclosing their opinions, goals, and activities. This study is unique in its attempts to understand the social exchange patterns of rural Tennessee DMOs and their stakeholders, and closes the gap in literature in regards to the effects of trust on the relationships and exchanges.

Reed and Runquiest (2007) indicate using grounded theory as a means to acquire data through personal interviews used to describe involved social processes. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to discover the social exchanges that DMOs in Tennessee rural areas currently utilize to form alliances with the EDO and local stakeholders. In addition, the study sought to understand the DMOs and stakeholders' perception of trust by studying the social exchanges that contribute to these relationships.

For the purpose of this study, there were three central research questions, representing the interview topic domains:

1) The discovery of the perceived benefits to the tourism area when DMOs form strategic alliances with stakeholders addressed the social exchanges involved between the DMO and the stakeholders.

2) The perception of trusting the DMO was determined through the stakeholders' perspectives of effectiveness when the DMO forms strategic alliances.

3) The EDO's involvement was discovered with the central question of its involvement in cultivating relationships with the DMO and local stakeholders to form alliances to grow rural tourism.

Analyzed from a theoretical perspective, the findings obtained from the interview data are considered to have significant relevance to developing the rural tourism industry in Tennessee. Moreover, these findings lead to the conclusion that the commitment to change, although considered uncomfortable for many in the community, are necessary to implement the strategies needed for societal benefits and an inclusive community identify.

SUMMARY OF CATEGORIES

Participants in the study depicted the basic social process of aligning with the DMO and working together on tourism initiatives as the commitment to change; the core category. Although it is similar to the social processes in change management literature, it is unique in the context of rural tourism areas in Tennessee. This summary acknowledges the similarities and differences between the grounded theory found here—commitment to change—and a similar theory found in literature, Change Management (Lewin, 1947). Subsequently, this grounded theory study was found to be more comprehensive and specific with five main categories forming the framework for the core category to explain the social exchange process between the rural DMOs and stakeholders in Tennessee.

Core Category

Commitment to change was established as the core category of the social process, providing clarification of the overall process of five main categories. It is comparable to

the process of change management identified in business models. As a process, the ADKAR method (Prosci, 2016) proposes awareness of the need to change, desire to participate in the change, the knowledge necessary, and the ability to implement the change daily. The Satir Change Process Model (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, Gomori, 1991) was utilized in family therapy and identifies a late status quo, chaos, practice and integration, and new status quo. Kotter's (1995) 8-Step Model expresses creating a climate for change, engaging and enabling the organization, and then implementing and sustaining the change.

Although the commitment to change in this study identified with different aspects of each model, it encompasses the unique aspects of tourism and rural areas. Established between a rural DMO and the stakeholders, it does not require a formal contract, but instead is built upon various levels of trust. This is indicative of stakeholders accepting some level of costs attributable to the lack of options in economic growth and development in rural areas. It requires unification of all stakeholders to grow tourism and become sustainable. In rural tourism, this alliance matures and grows as the rural tourism area does, increasing the scope of the vision, the number of stakeholders, as well as the infrastructure necessary to sustain the growth.

The commitment to change recognizes that all individuals must be responsibly involved; requiring participants in the alliance to cooperate and collaborate to encourage trust and further solidify their commitment to change. Change Management models found in the literature review asserts that one's motivation to participate is governed by management or leaders, while in rural tourism, stakeholders motivate themselves with the incentive of increasing their own business equity. In essence, you get what you put into

it. Although not discussed in the change management literature reviewed, the stakeholder's passion for the rural tourism area is equally important in the commitment to change. It requires considerable time and effort to commit to change and engage in the social process with one's alliances.

Main Categories

Commitment to change responded to these social processes in the following main categories:

- expanding social benefits
- visionary sustainability
- recognition
- predisposition to tourism development
- inclusive community identity

Expanding social benefits is the first main category. It is the both the first step in the process and the causal condition for the social exchanges needed to form an alliance between a rural DMO and stakeholders. The Satir Model (Satir, et al., 1991) indicates the causal condition is aligned with complacency and familiarity, while Kotter's (1995) 8-Step Model defines potential threats as a causal condition. Recognition of the need to expand the rural community's social benefits was the key causal condition for commitment to change. The reduction in economic growth and development, social experiences, and the loss of the downtown as the community strength was gradual to the residents, while tourism was not typically recognized as an economic source for rural areas. However, with the development of rural tourism in other Tennessee areas, over time rural tourism was recognized as a viable way to expand social benefits.

Visionary sustainability is the second main category of the social exchanges between rural DMOs and stakeholders. The ADKAR Model (Prosci, 2016) indicates that leadership must provide those involved in the change process the necessary training and education platforms so they will know how to specifically change. Visionary sustainability strategies are developed with a vision set forth by the DMO and the stakeholders for the good of the rural community and participants. Initially they are abstract, but as tourism develops, they grow more substantial and encompassing. These strategies also rely on stakeholders' ability to identify and produce in terms of the following: identify what you have, recognize the importance of planning, coordination, being proactive rather than reactive, attracting tourism, and just do it. Therefore, the stakeholders and DMOs must work together to continually identify and produce the most strategic, efficient, and effective social exchanges to grow a sustainable rural tourism area.

Recognition of the context in which rural areas can develop tourism is necessary to implement the strategies and reinforce one's commitment to change. Recognizing what the rural tourism area has and what is lacking, supports stakeholders in understanding why it is important to commit to the change. Additionally, it clarifies which strategies align with their specific context and are best suited for the community and its vision. Kotter and Schlesinger (2008) state management must identify what resources they have and what is needed in regards to the facilitation of education necessary for change. However, this grounded theory study addresses additional context in terms of recognizing the following: the value of others, credibility, leverage and how to use it, and the magnitude of tourism.

The *predisposition to tourism development* was established as an intervening

condition to the strategies set forth by the alliance. It was observed in the change

management models and literature review that resistance to change can be the result of

misunderstandings, fear, complacency, and lack of trust (Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008).

Commitment to change—vital to visionary sustainability—is influenced, strengthened, or

hindered by the following predispositions to tourism development: unique attributes of

resistance to change found in rural tourism stakeholders, enlightenment through

awareness of tourism benefits and motivation to support, and empathetic communication

between parties. Another predisposition was based on the legitimacy of the DMO and

stakeholders; identified as a local and a professionally managed organization. Finally, a

stakeholder's perception of trust was addressed as an intervening conditioning in regards

to financial resources, ethical character, visibility, and finally, caring and concern for the

stakeholders and the community as a whole.

An *inclusive community identity* is the final step and the consequence of DMOs

and stakeholders committing to change and engaging in strategic social exchanges. The

consequences are in addition to the causal condition of expanding social benefits. The

ADKAR Model (Prosci, 2016) states the last step is reinforcement to sustain the change,

while the Satir Model (Satir, et al., 1991) believes there is a new status quo where the

change becomes the norm. In the social process model of social exchanges between a

rural DMO and stakeholders, the consequences are more than a new process that is

established. It is improved relationships between the alliance partners and the

community as a whole. With this, there is increased cooperation that establishes a

domino effect in regards to volunteerism, charitable giving, and continued growth and

opportunities. Lastly, the creation of an identity encompasses a brand image, a community self, and a sense of belongingness and inclusiveness for a real sense of community, for locals and non-locals alike.

Identification of the Grounded Theory

It was identified after theoretical integration, the grounded theory of *commitment to change* stands between the realization of the need to expand social benefits for the community and identifying the appropriate strategies needed to support the development of rural tourism. When the DMOs and stakeholders decide to expand benefits, they engage in social exchanges that are built upon trusting the DMO as being both dependable and reliable. At this point, all parties commit to change, further increasing trust in the DMO and its vision for the development of tourism in the community.

Upon recognizing the context in which to develop tourism and realizing any predispositions to its development, the DMO is able to create sustainable strategies that are unique to the rural area's resources. At this point, the rural area will begin to see the expansion of social benefits and as such, the DMO is not only perceived as dependable and reliable, but also as concerned and caring in regards to the stakeholders and rural community. As social exchanges continue, trust increases, as does the cooperation and support for the DMO and visionary sustainability, creating an inclusive community identify. Over time, this results in a sustainable rural tourism area as seen in Figure 5.
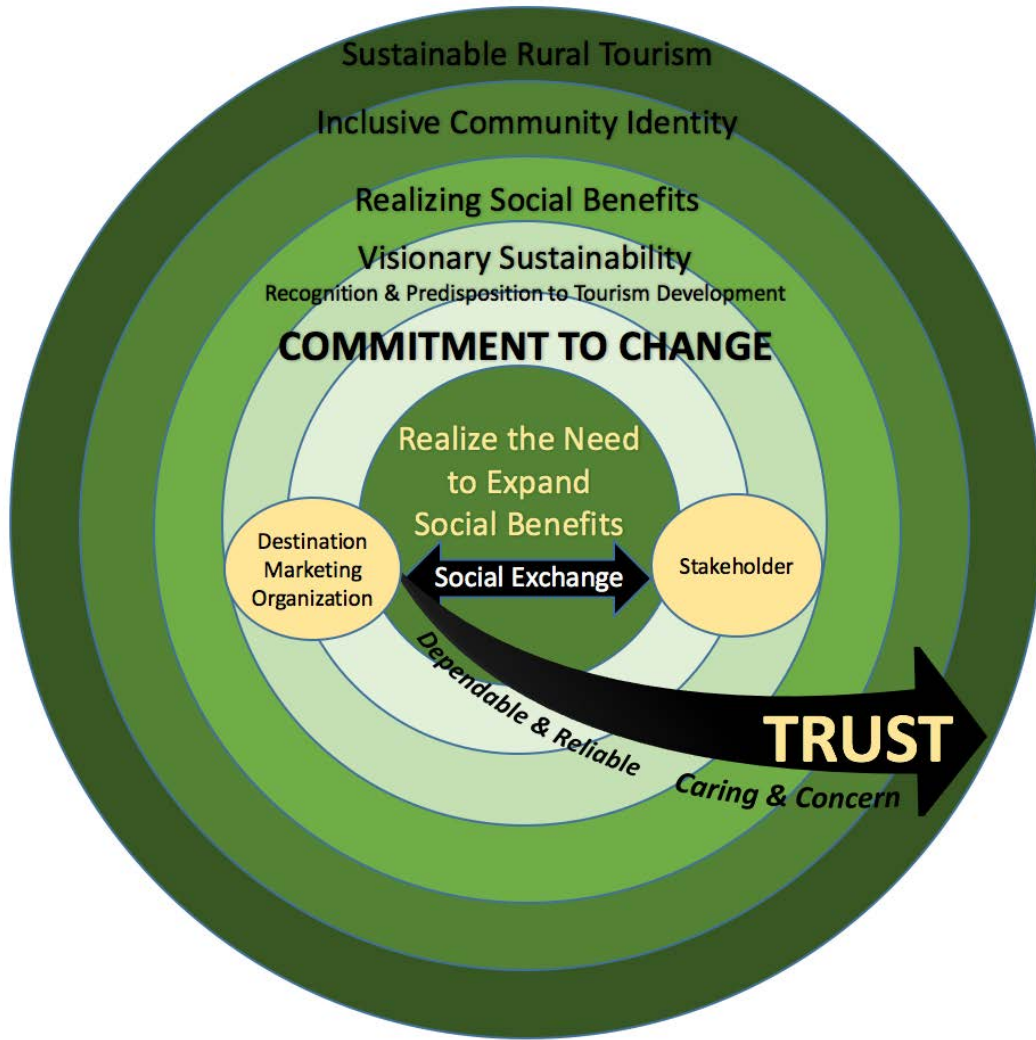
Figure 5: Grounded Theory of the Social Exchanges between DMOs and Stakeholders in Rural Tennessee Areas

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICES

The design of grounded theory allows for real-world application, with the social processes recognized as providing extensive relevance while remaining variable, thereby offering appropriate and effective implications for practice (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Committing to change depicts the social processes between DMOs and their stakeholders in rural Tennessee tourism areas. The social process provisions allow for the theory to be utilized to guide DMOs in formulating strategies that strengthen the alliances and build trust for successful rural development. Developed from data acquired through interviews with DMOs and stakeholders in these area, commitment to change encompasses the two provisions of the social process theory.

Utilizing Strauss and Corbin's (1998) guiding paradigm, the steps of the social exchange process between the DMOs and stakeholders are visibly outlined and in process order. Deductively developed through the participants' personal perceptions and experience, the theory illustrates how commitment to change is vital to the social exchanges where strategic alliances play a critical role in the DMO's ability to produce the stakeholders' intended results; expanding social benefits for the rural community. Forming an alliance with local hospitality/tourism businesses, the lack of incentives and strained relationships can inhibit beneficial collaboration to increase tourism in the rural destination area. The guiding paradigm also indicates where the process can fracture; when the context is not recognized and with stakeholder's predispositions to tourism development. The implications for practice consist of conducting a social process analysis that addresses each stage to assist DMOs in counteracting the disconnect between DMOs, EDOs, stakeholders, and their communities. This analysis will provide the DMO with the following information:

1) Knowing what social benefits are desired by the rural area to motivate stakeholders to commit to change for their own personal benefit, as well as the community's. This can be utilized when communicating with stakeholders and used as a reference point during board, town hall, or city/county meetings to seek support or assistance.

2) Determining what is needed in different alliances in regards to support, interaction, involvement, and trust to build a stakeholder's commitment to change. Not every stakeholder needs the same things from the DMO and therefore, a DMO would know where to invest more time and energy. Additionally, some stakeholders that are seen as very passionate could be teamed with others lacking in this area to garner additional support and ideas.

3) Recognizing the context will allow for the DMO to efficiently and effectively utilize these resources for strategic planning in regards to support during board meetings for development and funding, sponsorship for community happenings, and assistance in fundraiser and scheduling events.

4) By realizing what areas of the stakeholders' predisposition to tourism development are either lacking or hindering the DMOs efforts, diverse ways of communication, education, and motivation can be incorporated to dispel the disconnect and encourage support of the tourism strategies.

5) A master plan for the rural tourism area can be developed from the analysis of the visionary sustainability strategies that incorporate the social benefits, commitment to change, recognition, and predisposition to tourism development. This master plan can be used in acquiring grant funding in

regards to searching for grants, planning different phases of development corresponding with different grants, and when needed, readily submitted for state funding when needed.

6) Through this study, a DMO can discern the analysis of the consequences of the social process and use them to further motivate stakeholders. From including more non-locals to participate in tourism meetings to sponsoring events that builds the brand image such as adventure tourism, the analysis can be used to direct DMOs in providing activities and happenings that align with this concept. Subsequently, it will assist in building the trust necessary for the DMO to fully embody the destination's brand image that is inclusive off all residents, thereby creating a unified inclusive community identity.

LIMITATIONS

Using a qualitative method of research, some limitations of this method are acknowledged. First, by using purposeful sampling techniques in grounded theory where participants exhibit abundance and deficiency in experience, knowledge, and relationships marketing to support alliances, it limits the generalizability of the study. Therefore, the sample was not a thorough representation of the population. In this study, rural tourism alliances were limited to the DMO and the stakeholders. Findings from the analysis may not be generalizable to rural Tennessee areas that do not have a DMO or instead, the tourism department is managed by the local government.

In addition, data collection was limited to six rural areas in Tennessee from the highest and the lowest tourism revenue markets, therefore not taking into consideration areas in the middle of the spectrum or those recognized as rural by the U.S. Census or the Office of Management and Budget. Additionally, the concentration of the analysis was

done based on individuals' perceptions of other individuals' capabilities. Therefore, findings may not be generalizable to rural areas that are going through a period of adversity, decline, or in the initial planning stages. Finally, data analysis in grounded theory is used to break down the data, identify the concepts, and subsequently, using them to develop a core category that addresses the totality of the categories (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

FUTURE RESEARCH

This grounded theory research was exploratory to understand the complex social processes of social exchanges between the rural DMO and stakeholders and, accordingly, studied several concepts regarding rural tourism. While thought too small to advocate tourism, rural tourism areas in Tennessee provide a viable framework in terms of understanding change management, leadership, and management. Although this study describes the basic social process in social exchanges and the participants' perception of trust, additional research in rural tourism is central in the areas of the following:

1) Determining specific DMO aptitudes and personalities that rural area stakeholders find enhance their support of the social process and for the strategies needed to develop a sustainable rural tourism area. A quantitative study could be used to further indicate the significance of each variable discovered, as well as any mediator or moderator necessary in a rural tourism environment.

2) Do rural tourism stakeholders prefer a leadership style or a management style (based upon how their DMO department is chartered in regards to government and committees)? This would necessitate further research on leadership and

management in terms of servant leadership, the differences between male and
female leadership in rural areas, and leadership and management styles and traits.

3) Finally, it would be obligatory to explore if there is a correlation between the
growth of rural tourism and the DMO's gender where it has been emphasized in
this study that there is a good ol' boy network by increasing the number of
counties participating and studying all levels of rural tourism development.

By focusing further studies on these questions, research will progress the literature on
rural tourism and specifically, the DMO leadership needed for a sustainable rural tourism
area. This additional research has the potential to influence education in the areas of
leadership, small business (profit and non-profit) development in rural areas, as well as
city-county planning and development.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this grounded theory study was to focus on the social exchanges
between DMOs and stakeholders in rural Tennessee tourism areas and to close this gap in
literature.   Additionally, an illustrative model of the social processes was created to be
utilized in assisting rural areas in developing tourism through the process of commitment
to change. Through identifying the social exchanges and perceptions of trust, this study
subsequently ascertained the social processes needed to expand social benefits for the
community. Furthermore, the research isolated effective strategies while recognizing the
unique context for each rural area and intervening conditions that can alter a
stakeholder's commitment to change. Finally, the social process clarifies the concepts
vital to the process, as well as the consequences for the community as a whole.

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APPENDICES

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

How rural counties integrate tourism into their economic development plans;
A study into the social exchange between the Destination Marketing Organization,
Economic Development Agencies, and county stakeholders.

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate an interview for the purpose of obtaining information from various Tennessee tourism and economic development planners, along with city and county leadership, and local stakeholders on how they are successfully expanding their tourism industry. This would provide the State of Tennessee Tourism Department information that can they utilize as a handbook for success for rural communities wanting to integrate tourism into their economic development plans. **Additionally, this information will be used in the researcher's dissertation in 2015.**

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

I will be conducting an approximately 30-minute interview in a location at_____. The interview will take place following observations at the town hall meeting previously and may include questions associated with those observations. The interview will be audio recorded in order to be transcribed verbatim at a later time. Participant may be further contacted at a later time via e-mail or phone for clarification or additional information.

RISKS

I will be using informal and open-ended questions in order to alleviate any stress. Please share with me whatever you feel is important and will benefit yourself and the county as a whole. I perceive no risk (beyond those encountered in everyday life and the possible breach of confidentiality) in that you will only discuss what you want to discuss in terms of tourism.

BENEFITS

With the information analyzed and interpreted, it creates the opportunity to create a handbook for success for your rural communities to increase tourism or successfully integrate tourism into your economic development plans.

CONFIDENTIALITY

All information from this interview will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports, which could link participants to the study.

If the participant wishes, their names and interviews can be shared with the State of Tennessee Tourism Department in order to provide additional feedback to them. If you wish to share this information with the State of Tourism, disclosing your name and interview content, please sign and date here: _____.

Otherwise any information presented to the state will be entirely anonymous (no names, no locations, no interview content as a whole shared)

Page 1 Initial here _____

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time you may contact either the researcher or the University of Tennessee Department Head.

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PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this interview is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty or withdraw at any time.

CONSENT

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this project.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Interview Protocol

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the perceived benefits to the tourism area if DMOs form strategic alliances with stakeholders (government, community, and industry suppliers)?

RQ2: What are the different stakeholder perspectives of effectiveness in the tourism area where the DMO utilizes relationship marketing to form strategic alliances?

RQ3: What level (if any) does the EDO assist in cultivating relationships with DMO and local stakeholders in order to form a strategic alliance to promote tourism?

Topic Domain #1: Perceived benefits of stakeholders; Social exchanges and trust

Lead off Question: I noticed that your county has exhibited noticeable tourism growth. Tell me about your growth and the DMO's strategic alliances that contributed to this.

(Covert categories: social exchanges, multiple perspectives on DMO's contributions, perceived trustworthiness of the DMO, reconciling different stakeholder perspectives, reaching consensus with stakeholders on tourism endeavors)

Possible follow-up questions
1. Ok, so you say that the stakeholders all worked together to promote events and historical information to boost tourism to your county. What would you perceive to be the significance of work that you put into it?
2. How did the other county Mayors feel about promoting one of the smaller areas over theirs?
3. How were you able to justify this one tourism area to the other county stakeholders?
4. Using this justification, describe your relationships with the other county stakeholders (government, community, industry suppliers)?
5. What is your opinion as to the extent of how trustworthiness of the DMO plays an important part of forming strategic alliances with the county stakeholders?

Topic Domain #2: Effectiveness of DMO's strategic alliances; Trusting the DMO

Lead off Question: It seems as if your county's tourism is being well represented. In your opinion, how effective has the promotion of tourism been for the local stakeholders?

(Covert categories: perception of trust relationship with the various stakeholders, leadership roles, equality of participation, group identity, conflict resolution, group dynamics, power dynamics, being heard, reaching consensus)

Possible follow-up questions
   1. What sort of disagreement have you had with the stakeholders?
   2. Which stakeholders seem to be more controversial and why do you think that is?
   3. What are some of the ways that you work on strengthening the relationships with the stakeholders?
   4. Discuss a time where a project almost did not get passed due to controversy.
   5. How were you able to overcome the objections?

Topic Domain #3: EDO involvement in tourism and strategic alliances

Lead off Question: In terms of tourism, sustainable growth is supported by not only the industry stakeholders, but the EDO as well. In your opinion, what level of involvement has the EDO displayed in forming relationships in the county that are integrated with tourism?

(Covert categories: relationship with the various stakeholders, group identity, conflict resolution, multiple perspectives on EDO's contributions, reconciling different stakeholder perspectives, reaching consensus with involvement on tourism endeavors)

Possible follow-up questions
   1. During the tourism meetings at town hall, is the EDO office normally in attendance and participatory?
   2. Outside of the business development, does the EDO visit and promote local tourism businesses?
   3. Does the EDO promote tourism as an attraction to entice businesses to the area?
   4. What sort of disagreement have you had with the stakeholders?
   5. What are some of the ways that you work on strengthening the relationships with the stakeholders?

Appendix C: Initial Coding Categories and Codes

Codes Generated A-Priori, In-Vivo and Interpreted

- Acceptance
- Alliance
- Altruistic (Selfless)
- Approval
- Astuteness
- Background
- Belonging
- Blame
- Brand Image
- Branding
- Building
- Caring
- Clueless
- Collaboration
- Common Goals
- Communication
- Community
- Complacency
- Components
- Concern
- Confidence
- Connecting with Others
- Cooperation
- Coordinating Events
- Cost of Tourism
- Creativity
- Creative Thinking
- Credibility
- Critical Thinking
- Cryonism
- Cynical
- Decisive
- Dedication
- Delegation
- Dependable
- Destination Vs Tourism
- Detail Oriented
- Dexterity

- Diverse
- DMO
- Domino Effect
- EDO
- Educate
- Egotistic
- Emotional Banking
- Empathetic Listening
- Exchange Cooperative
- Exclusivity
- Expectations Unrealistic
- Experiences
- Fairness
- Familiarity
- Financial
- Friendship
- Honestly
- Hypocrite
- Identify & Produce
- Influence
- Information
- Inherent
- Innovation
- Integrity
- Intrinsic
- Involvement
- Just Do It!
- Knowledge
- Lack of Faith in Trends
- Leadership – Govt
- Learning
- Legitimate
- Leverage
- Listening: Emphathic
- Local Ties

- Marketing
- Meetings
- Mission Statement
- Mistakes Made
- Modeling
- Motivating Others
- Naïve About DMO
- Networking
- Noncommittal
- Objectives -Shared DMO/Sh
- Opportunities
- One Stop Shop
- Overselling
- Participation
- Partnership
- Pass The Buck
- Passionate
- People Skills
- Personalization
- Personal Contact
- Personal Agenda
- Perspective
- Power - Lacking
- Present Oneself or Community
- Prestige
- Proactive Not Reactive
- Problem Solving
- Professionally Mgd
- Promoting
- Realism
- Receiving Education But
- Reciprocity
- Recognize
- Recognize & Appreciate
- Relationships

- Reliable - Stable
- Resistance to Change
- Resources
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Retrogress
- Rhetoric
- Scheduling
- Seek to Understand
- Selfish
- Service - Servant Leadership
- Stakeholder
- Sharing-Ideas, Excitement,
- Short Sighted
- Stagnated
- Standards
- Strategy
- Support Lacking
- SWOT- Needed
- Synergy
- Timely Info
- Timely Interactions
- Transparency
- Trust
- Under Promise Over
- Value
- Vision Blinded, Visionary, Tunnel
- WOM
- Work Relations

Appendix D: Final Core Category and Subcategories

Coding Paradigm	Category	Sub-categories
Causal Conditions	Expanding Social Benefits	- Economic growth in the community - Economic development - Social experiences - Revitalizing the community
Phenomenon	Commitment to Change	- Unification - Responsible involvement - Passionate
Strategies	Visionary Sustainability	- Identify and produce - Vision
Context	Recognition	- Value - Credibility - Leverage - The area's magnitude of tourism
Intervening Conditions	Predisposition Toward Tourism Development	- Resistance to change - Enlightenment - Communication - Legitimacy - Perception of trust
Consequences	Inclusive Community Identity	- Improved relationships - Cooperation and the domino effect - Identity: Present themselves as an inclusive community

Appendix E: Sample Coded Transcript

TranscribeMe!

35 don't want to talk about it and talk about it and talk about it. Let's get it done. Then the hand)*decisive*

36 rail project here's how we did that. It was kind of 65% city, 35% county because the county

court house had some of the black slightly rusted rails that are still there even though all this

38 new green is around it. So I went to city mayor and county mayor, the biggest expense was) *recognize*

39 the paint. And so the city is furnishing the paint and the county is furnishing all the materials, *value govt*

40 rollers, buckets, canvas and then the trustees from the jail are going to start that program

41 soon and paint every hand rail. They're yellow. They're black. They're pink. They're brown. All   *gov't*

42 around the city and it will show a kind of a coalition effort and unity of city and county and it's)*coalition*

43 really going to have a-- it will have a $200,000 project look to it for literally peanuts. And   )*creativity*

44 that's the kind of things I'm going for. I like to take a little money and really stretch on eye

45 appeal and that's the projects we've got going on. So we've really got a lot going on.

46 *And now what have you noticed about, in getting all this stuff done the relationship involved. Are these people you've been in*

47 *relationships for a long on time, or--?*   *SH influence*   *locals*

48 Yeah. These are board members that I've had association with, too. I've been on that board,   ) *SH involvement*

49 some of us have for 18-20 years, and now we're seeing some new blood evolving. I'm glad to   )*recog/app*

50 see that. It was pretty amazing, I just went to the mayors and talked, and city officials, and   *idea*

51 ▮▮▮ Electric. I brought this project up in May, and the June meeting I visited with   )*proactive*

52 everybody and we had it outlined and everything was approved, just that fast. It really went   /*strategy*

53 through quickly. Something like this is molasses most the time, when you're begging for

54 funds, because we did have to raise some money. Once they saw my plan, and you've got two) *strategy*

55 of those ugly light poles in front of your business, you want to contribute, and everybody   )*personalization*

56 jumps right on it. Of course, city attorney▮▮▮ helped me too, he made calls, I made   ) *personal*

57 calls, because he loved the program and he furnished the paint through his-- he owns▮▮   *contact*

58 ▮▮▮▮. All paint is coming through him and his cost and supplies and then they

59 even send a paint rep from Memphis to look at our project. I walked it over with them, what

60 type paint would be most suitable, so it has just been a joy. I mean everybody I've talked to,) *Credibility*

61 receptive to it, ticked to death, and then, too, you've got all these folks downtown and

62 they're not out a nickel on the rail project, no private funding. No private funding. And then) *financial*

63 of course, the light poles, that was a different thing and then the sign was a different thing, *$ efficient*

64 but we managed to raise those funds in no time. It is, it is, and when they see-- I don't want

65 to brag on myself, but I'm a doer. I'm constantly building and doing. And when you do that)*proactive*

66 and as an entrepreneur and an individual, when you don't got big pockets full of cash laying *financial $*

67 around, you learn to take $500 and make it look like 5,000. And you get into government   ) *efficient*

68 sometimes, we appreciate their help, but they can't do that. They have to bring in engineers,)

leadership/govt

Appendix F: Memo Samples

Memo D160505-001

Concept: Critical thinking per generation

Goes back to change management and common goals in order to change the thinking of the older generations and those resistant to change. As those wanting to change, they have to understand how others think and offer personal advantages, but decrease what others would view as a person disadvantage.

EDO and DMO – sell the location, sell the community, sell the belonging.

I like the word rhetoric when dealing with those that say they want things done, but do nothing. Pomposity is part of it (airs, arrogance, conceit) So thinking along those lines……

Good ole boys (cryonism) and being exclusive (egotistic) leads to lots of rhetoric with no motivation to assist or willingness to support or cooperate, therefore one that is pompous (putting on airs of superior intelligence and wisdom, but no ideas to make better or support).

Interesting to note this participant talks about uneducated not only in terms of tourism, EM, what is downtown, but also in the lack of those educated in the area (people don't stay), lack of education in the trends and what people want, lack of education in that they are afraid of the unknown consequences (resistance to change), lack of education in diets. This person has lived there, moved somewhere where tourism flourished, got a college degree, married someone from an urban area, experienced much more, but yet he is seen as "uneducated" in their ways and eyes. The older generations don't recognize the value of the younger generations or appreciate what they can offer.

Memo B160623-001

Concept: cooperation

- Relationship building due to downtown re-development to bring more people in in order to make money and offer more services to community.
- When you have nothing else, you can make tourism
- Interesting to note that many times it has been mentioned that the locals do not like new people coming in and telling them what to do or even suggesting idea. Even for some that have been in the area for over a decade (as much as 35 year), they still feel as if they are not a local or even considered a local. It seems as if the locals are protecting themselves and their way of life and in turn, segregating (discriminating and keeping separate) from those not locally born. I hate to use the word segregate in this study.
- Of further note, there are some on the low end of tourism that they just now realize that they have to open up to other areas, wanting to "protect what you have" and fearful of newcomers and new services coming in.
- Therefore, it seems as if complacency creates a resistance to change, creating fear and distrust in especially newcomers, but also locals trying to change, even if it is for the good of the community.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Memo Date:7-3-16

Concept: Change

While watching a video about Grounded Theory with Prof Kathy Charmaz and thinking about my memos, I thought again about what I heard, saw, and coded in regards to rural counties and those that were growing. I immediately thought about the good ole boys' club, their resistance to change, and then change management. Then it hit me…. could the benefit actually BE commitment to change?

Change is needed in order for rural counties to go from a complacency approach of their way of life (farms, industry, etc.) and to embrace rural tourism, having events downtown, go from naysayers to support & cooperation, volunteering, welcoming newcomers to the community and embracing their ideas (instead of saying I'm so tired of hearing this is how we did it). It's a big deal to not only change the community/downtown area, but it's even bigger to change attitudes.

One that definitely impressed me by far above the others was P County. They embraced the change, supported the change, were excited about the change, trusted the change and the people associated with the change. The other counties had hang-ups in certain areas…therefore resistant to the change.

Memo L160504-001

Concept: Identify & produce

- This is not only in terms of products or services, but also in people (SH). Identify those that are passionate and what strengths they bring to the table. Utilize them…they want to help. If someone has good relationships with government or has/is working in government, they know they ins and outs. Utilize them to help educate you, speak for you, present for you. If someone is a historian, utilize them to rally others that are part of wanting to preserve. They can also sway those that are resistance to change. Historians/preservationist want to preserve and respect what they have, but they also want to show case it.
- Do a SWOT on your people!
- Don't negate those that are not local. If they love the area, use them. They belong sometimes more than those that have lived there all their lives and never lifted a finger to help.

Memo D160504

Concept: New SH, love of community

NOTE: healthy relationship between your brand and its community parallels that of a healthy relationship between two people.

When he speaks of his community, he talks about loving it, and therefore will do whatever needs to be done to be successful, not him personally, but success for the community.

He works with others even when they are not workable, butt heads, etc. to get what needs to be done for the community. Therefore, it seems as if the community is an entity in this sense.

Appendix G: Table of Participants

Participant ID	Profession
A1	DMO
A2	COC President/CEO, tourism board member
A3	CVB Chairman, local business owner
A4	DMO – county and region, tourism board member
A5	Hotelier, tourism board member
B6	DMO
B7	Main Street Director, tourism board member
B8	Journalist, co-chair tourism board
B9	Museum Director, tourism board member
B10	Retail business owner, tourism board member
C11	DMO
C12	Banker, tourism board member
C13	Banker
C14	Retail business owner, tourism board member
C15	Restaurant manager, chef, tourism board member
D16	DMO, EDO, Main Street Director
D17	Tourism Council Director
D18	Tourism Council board member, county executive
D19	State Park manager
D20	Journalist
E21	DMO
E22	EDO
E23	Magazine owner, journalist, former COC President
E24	Attraction manager
E25	Museum manager/curator
F26	DMO, City Mayor
F27	Manufacturing Director
F28	Restaurant owner
F29	Business owner, Chamber board member
F30	Journalist

VITA

Angela Sebby was born in East Tennessee. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Human Services from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in May 2011, and graduated with a Master of Business Administration from Lincoln Memorial University, Tazewell, Tennessee in August 2012.

She began her doctorate in the Department of Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in August 2012 and completed her doctoral program with a major in Hospitality and Tourism Management in August 2016. During her Ph.D. program, Angela received the Ida A. Anders Scholarships and designed and taught classes in Tourism Management and Current Issues and Trends in Customer Service, as well as assisted in Human Resources Management, Hotel Management, Food Science, Event Planning Services, and Small Business and Entrepreneurship Management.

She has received certifications in Graduate Teaching from the Tennessee Teaching and Learning Center, University of Tennessee, as well as in Certified Hotel Industry Analytics (CHIA), Certified Hospitality Educator (CHE), Flipped and Hybrid Teaching, Change Management, Six Sigma Lean Professional, and Serv-Safe Alcohol. She has accepted a tenure-track assistant professor faculty position at Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina, and will start her academic career from August 2016.