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Using Importance-Performance Analysis of Resident Perceptions to Inform a Tourism Development Framework

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Gateway communities commonly border, serve as entry points to protected lands. Due to their high quality of life, gateway communities have become a magnet for a growing number of people be they permanent or seasonal residents. But it is generally because of their unique natural attributes that they face issues of tourism development and growth. As a result, gateway communities offer important lessons for other rural areas grappling with rapid growth and change. A variation of Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA)was used in this study whereby residents evaluated environmental, socio-cultural and socio-economic area attributes. IPA was chosen to serve as an additional input for communities interested in employing a tourism planning framework such as Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP). The findings suggest environmental attributes make the area special with them considered both important and of real concern currently and in the future. With the exception of a few items no other examined attributes were perceived the same as the environmental items. The modified IPA used in this study is a tool that can help inform a VERP framework intended to address tourism development as well as provide a visual means for those interested in better understanding resident perceptions..

KEYWORDS: Importance-Performance analysis, gateway communities, tourism planning, Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP)

INTRODUCTION

Gateway communities serving as entry points to our nation's public lands are desirable to live within due to high quality of life indicators, but are commonly subject to indiscriminate growth. As McMahon (1999) noted, "no place will retain its special appeal by accident" with gateway communities often seen as "ground zero" in the struggle between indiscriminate development and planned growth. Many examples exist of gateway communities that fell short of planning for a sustainable future (e.g., Pigeon Forge, TN, Gettysburg, PA, Las Vegas, NV). To compound the situation gateway communities are commonly geographically limited in what direction and to what degree they can be planned. Furthermore, not all residents of gateway communities benefit equally from tourism with many fearing that tourism growth will seriously impact environmental quality and community aesthetics, as well as lessen ability to enjoy local

recreational amenities (Allen, Hafer, Long, & Perdue, 1993; Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Cavus & Tanrisevdi, 2002; Keogh, 1990; Murphy, 1981; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1987). At the same time, these areas face extreme pressure to grow through second home ownership, retirees, and tourists (see Howe, McMahon & Propst, 1997). As a result, gateway communities offer important lessons for other rural areas grappling with rapid growth and change.

Harrill (2004) suggested the challenge for tourism planners is to equitably distribute impacts and benefits while recognizing the many sectors that make up the industry. "This balancing act requires an in-depth understanding of the social, economic, and environmental dynamics within a community" (Harrill, 2004, p. 262). As such, this study utilized a variation on Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) to assess socio-economic, socio-cultural and environmental perceptions of residents to help inform a Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) planning framework. Originally developed by the United States National Park Service to monitor and manage carrying capacity in national parks (National Park Service, 1997), the VERP planning framework is suitable for the tourism planning process, particularly if sustainable development is of primary concern as it can be used to assist in monitoring both visitor experiences and resource conditions (Manning, Leung & Budruk, 2005). The current research used the VERP planning framework as a foundation and means for determining the perspective of residents living within a gateway area in an effort to help identify important indicators and conditions of concern so they can be incorporated into the larger planning process.In tracking these indicators, it may be possible to identify problem areas before they have degraded to the point that the entire experience is compromised. By including and analyzing the perspectives of community residents within the VERP framework, a better understanding for prediction and planning may result. In this way, it may be possible to not only document the current condition of a destination, but to also guide its development toward a sustainable community that can continue to host an ongoing tourism product. It may result that it is not the changes themselves that have limits, but is rather the rate of change that has residents dissatisfied (Horn & Simmons, 2002).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism is complex in nature. Previous research has suggested an intricate relationship between economic development, tourism development, and expected and perceived social, economic, and environmental impacts by residents resulting from tourism (see Johnson, Snepenger, & Akis, 1994). In particular, many studies have examined the perceptions of individual stakeholder groups in order to better understand how these influence their support or satisfaction with ongoing development (Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003; Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Cottrell, van der Duim, Ankersmid, & Kelder, 2004; Jurowski, Uysal, & William, 1997; Long, Perdue, & Allen, 1990; Pizam, Uriely, & Reichel, 2000). Resident perceptions are often a primary concern in the planning process with numerous studies having focused on perceptions of tourism related development and attitudes toward tourists (Allen, Long, Perdue, & Kieselbach, 1988; Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Ap & Crompton, 1993; Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Johnson et al., 1994; Mansfeld & Ginosar, 1994; Sheldon & Abenoja, 2001; Tosun, 2001).

Some have suggested that without stakeholder understanding and support, sustainable development of tourism in a destination is nearly impossible (Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Andriotis, 2005; Ap, 1992; Puczko & Ratz, 2000). User conflict will likely result as a consequence of different individual interests and perceptions of the costs and benefits associated with various outcomes of tourism development (Davis & Morais, 2004; Ioannides, 1995; Markwick, 2000; Reid, Mair, & George, 2004). Informed planning and responsible management are both necessary to ensure fair and successful tourism development (Inskeep, 1991; Pucko & Ratz, 2000; Yuksel, Bramwell, & Yuksel, 1999).

Both positive and negative community impacts resulting from tourism development are often divided into three categories for study and assessment (Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Liu & Var, 1986). These are socio-economic, including such elements as tax revenue, personal income and increased jobs; socio-cultural, referring to aspects such as community spirit, chance to meet new people and crime rates; and environmental, including litter, noise, wildlife and erosion (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005). The understanding of how to address these needs will better foster positive local support for new and ongoing tourism initiatives (Hardy & Beeton, 2001; Sauter & Leisen, 1999; Simpson & Wall, 1999).

Rate and concentration of development have also been shown to be of great influence on perceptions of impact. For example, Butler (1980) showed that as tourism development grows, residents can be expected to show increasing signs of resentment and hostility toward visitors,

while Akis, Peristianis, and Warner (1996) found that residents with more exposure to tourists tended to regard such interaction as positive. Horn and Simmons (2002) found that in an area where tourism is more spread around with a lower ratio of tourists to residents, tourism is viewed as being under local control and so is generally supported whereas an area experiencing a series of rapid changes generates more negative perceptions.

Another consideration that influences residents' perceptions of tourism related impacts is how they are directly influenced by or benefit from the industry. Social exchange theory, "a general sociological theory concerned with understanding the exchange of resources between individuals and groups in an interaction situation" (Ap, 1992, p. 668), helps explain this occurrence. Social exchange theory has now been widely used by tourism researchers as it is generally agreed that tourism development brings economic benefits in exchange for social and environmental impacts (Andereck et al., 2005; Ap, 1992; Gursoy, Jurowski & Uysal, 2002; Harrill, 2004; McGehee & Andereck, 2004). As such it is necessary to look at the type of impacts that accompany tourism development as perceptions of these are likely a result of one's connection to the industry and the area, hence the exchange suggesting higher benefits results in higher tolerance and fewer benefits results in lower tolerance. Further, those who benefit from tourism have been shown to be more likely to support its development and to view the costs of tourism as less of a hardship than other residents do and so may favor its expansion at the expense of other stakeholder interests (Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Lui & Var, 1986; Taylor, 1995). Conversely, residents who initially had high expectations for tourism development could lose feelings of support when their expectations for economic development are not met and perceive that socioeconomic and environmental impacts exceed anticipated levels (Johnson et al.,1994).

However, residents of communities already dependent on tourism are still able to differentiate between its economic benefits and social costs and that such awareness of negative consequences does not necessarily lead to opposition of further tourism development (King, Pizam, & Milman, 1993). Therefore, education to increase knowledge of the benefits of tourism has been demonstrated to help improve overall support (Andereck et al., 2005; Banks & Brothers, 2003; Davis, Allen, & Cosenza, 1988). An interesting proposition by Akis et al. (1996) suggests that as tourism development increases, the view that development is positive declines, but as the number of visitor's increases, positive views of tourists increase. If this holds true, it may not be the increase in numbers of visitors that leads to negative perceptions, but rather the corresponding perceived negative impacts of the tourist-related development. In developing and attracting tourism to an area, the goal then ought to be to achieve outcomes that obtain the best balance of benefits and costs for stakeholders, residents and tourists (Ap, 1992).

Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA)

IPA was first introduced by Martilla and James (1977) as a means by which to measure client satisfaction with a product or service. The IPA approach recognizes satisfaction as the function of two components: the importance of a product or service to a client and the performance of a business or agency in providing that service or product (Martilla & James, 1977). In this way, IPA examines not only the performance of an item, but also the importance of that item as a determining factor in satisfaction to the respondent (Martilla & James, 1977). The combined client ratings for those two components then provide an overall view of satisfaction with clear directives for management and where to focus agency resources.

This method has proven to be a broadly applicable tool which is relatively easy to administer and interpret resulting in extensive use among researchers and managers in various fields. Initially, these studies have been utilized in the field of health care services, dental offices and financial institutions (Bruyere, Rodriguez, & Vaske, 2002). IPA continues to be widely used in hospitality, sport, tourism, recreation and entertainment sectors and while it is commonly used for understanding customer satisfaction, Tyrell and Okrant (2004) suggest that IPA has a place in economic planning processes where the prioritization of issues (e.g., tourism development) is most relevant.

Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP)

Balancing visitor use and resource protection in parks and protected areas is an ongoing challenge which demands that research address both the social and biophysical factors that impact resource capacity (Manning, Lawson, Newman, Budruk, Valliere, Laven & Bacon, 2004). In order to ensure ongoing support for local tourism initiatives, local residents must feel their concerns are being heard and impacts being addressed amidst the push for ongoing development. The types of conditions that are related to tourism development and that should be monitored for change have typically been

grouped in the literature into three categories representing the economic, environmental and social characteristics of a destination area and host community (Ahn et al., 2002). Various frameworks and models have been developed to lead managers and researchers through the process so that not only can desired baseline conditions of a resource area be determined, but also so that necessary indicators and standards may be put in place to enable recognition of when degradation or too much change has occurred. Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) is a framework originally designed by the United States National Park Service to monitor and manage carrying capacity in the national parks (National Park Service, 1997). VERP is one of several frameworks that seek to provide a systematic way to monitor impacts in order to assist with managerial decision-making. Although VERP has been primarily used within the national park system, additional applications are now underway in several park units and interest has also been expressed by other management agencies (Manning et al., 2005). Other such frameworks include Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC), Visitor Impact Management (VIM) and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) (Manning, 2001). Nearly all such frameworks were first developed to assess one particular type of setting, agency or area and subsequently expanded beyond its initial use. McCool (1994) states that in order to manage for sustainability, there must be a technical planning system in place to address problems and force explicit decision-making, as well as a public involvement process oriented toward consensus building. That is much of what the current research has attempted to do.

The VERP framework consists of nine elements, however VERP need not be followed in the exact numbered sequence (National Park Service, 1997). In the current application, certain elements are more pertinent than others, in particular, element 2, develop a public involvement strategy and element 7, select indicators and specify standards for each zone and develop a monitoring plan are most relevant with the intention being to allow community members to voice what they feel are the most important indicators of resource quality in the area. The rest of the framework includes element 1: assemble an interdisciplinary project team with various backgrounds and expertise that may be needed to assist the core team; element 3: develop statements of park purpose, significance, and primary interpretive themes and identify planning constraints; element 4: analyze park resources and the existing visitor use; element 5: describe a potential range of visitor experiences and resource conditions (potential prescriptive zones); element 6: allocate the potential zones to specific locations in the park (prescriptive management zoning) that prescribes future conditions and is not descriptive of existing conditions; element 8: monitor resource and social indicators in order to set priorities and; element 9: take management action (National Park Service, 1997).

As stated, certain elements were more essential to the current study than others, namely elements 2 and 7. Element 2, develop a public involvement strategy, looks to all involved stakeholders to help identify and define the various issues and concerns associated with the resource and in this case, the prospect of tourism development in the area (National Park Service, 1997). In most tourism planning literature, the need to allow all relevant players the chance to voice their concerns and help contribute to the planning process is deemed a central role to sustainable development options (Akis et al., 1996; Allen et al., 1988; Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Horn & Simmons, 2002).

Element 7 prescribes that indicators (specific, measurable variables that will be monitored) are selected with standards (minimum accoeptable conditions) specified for each zone and that a monitoring plan is developed based on these indicators and standards (National Park Service, 1997). However, this aspect of indicator selection is rather challenging and even once relevant indicators are selected, it can be difficult to measure and assess actions that are necessary for subsequent steps in the process (Lawrence, Munasinghe, & McNeely, 1994). For the current research, Importance-Performance Analysis, which seeks to determine the importance of an item (a type of indicator) making up the home community and then assess its performance based on a set standard (as perceived by local community members), is used in conjunction with VERP so that a graphical model can then be developed for monitoring and management purposes (Martilla & James, 1977).

While it is inevitable that tourism development will induce sociocultural changes upon the host destination, the type and magnitude of these changes depends upon the degree to which carrying capacity is met or exceeded in terms of ongoing development (Saveriades, 2000). While Getz (1992) argues that “capacity” is more of a management concept rather that an absolute limit to possible development, Mansfeld and Ginosar (1994) found that locals have a certain social carrying capacity threshold with respect to tourism development and that there exists a tolerance level above which they will start to express their irritation and dissatisfaction with the ongoing outcomes of tourism development. VERP provides the framework necessary to determine the indices based on respondents'

perceptions and feelings toward the level of development as it pertains to the tourism industry. In particular, this conceptual framework is presented as being useful in dealing with problems such as carrying capacity (environmental, physical, as well as social) that are characterized by conflict and the need for compromise (Jacobi & Manning, 1999). It is this need to determine such a balance between conflicting interests and existing characteristics that mark the search for sustainability.

METHODS

Study Site

Watauga County of northwestern North Carolina in the United States is a typical gateway community area. Bordering the Blue Ridge Parkway and several miles of the Appalachian Trail, both National Park Service sites, containing a national forest, a large regional state university, the popular towns of Boone and Blowing Rock, and consistently ranked one of the best spots for outdoor adventure recreation (Adventure Sports Magazine, 2005), the area has seen tremendous growth over the past 10-20 years. What was once a small, economically depressed, mountain region has become a tourist and second home hotspot. Non-permanent residents (i.e., second and third homeowners) account for just under 50% of the property owners in the county, while the population has grown over 30% in the last 20 years with the largest employer, Appalachian State University, having also grown by over 25% (Mountain Keepers, 2003). With four distinct seasons, ample outdoor recreational opportunities, a wide variety of artistic and cultural offerings and some of the best summer weather in the southeast, the rural natural landscape and small town community is facing tremendous pressure and growth.

Survey Methods

Data collection consisted of a 3-page survey instrument with a prepaid return envelope mailed to 1,200 randomly selected addresses provided by the county tax assessment office in 2006. In addition to the environmental, socio-cultural, and socio-economic attribute items, standard demographic questions were posed to participants including their place of primary residence and related zip code. A financial incentive was included to encourage participation with follow-up postcards mailed to non-respondents a couple weeks after the first mailing. Overall, 270 surveys were returned for a response rate of 21.4%.

Data Analysis

The survey included a scale of thirty-four items, originally based on a study conducted by Ahn et al. (2002). The items consisted of 10 environmental, nine socio-economic, and 15 socio-cultural attributes and features of the county (e.g., number of restaurants, amount of open space, traffic) that respondents were asked to evaluate utilizing 5-point Likert scales to assess: 1) importance of the attributes in making the county a desirable place to live (Importance; where 1 = very unimportant and 5 = very important), 2) perception of the current condition of the attributes (Performance; where 1 = poor and 5 = excellent), and 3) perception of future change (Future; where 1 = large change for worse and 5 = large change for better) (Table 1). Lastly, the survey included a number of demographic related questions (e.g., is the county your primary residence, zip code, etc.). Data was analyzed using Microsoft's Excel and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS version 14). The mean values for each of the thirty-four items making up the three sections of the survey enabled the establishment of the x and y coordinates necessary for the IPA. The resulting IPA scaling of the coordinates for each item enabled a visual representation of these perceptions as measured attributes are displayed in graphical form.

The modified importance-performance-future analysis was conducted by plotting conditions and change based on importance of area attributes versus how conditions are perceived to currently exist (Performance) and how tourism might impact the conditions in the future (Future) according to the residents. The point at which the crosshairs on the Importance-Performance-Future matrix are placed can be particularly critical. Martilla and James (1977) prescribed that the crosshairs of the matrix be placed at the mean values of the observed (reported) importance and performance ratings, while the crosshairs might also be suitable at the middle point of the scale being used. According to previous research (Bruyere et al., 2002; Hudson & Shephard, 1998), reasons to move the crosshairs include wanting to set a standard of quality that significantly exceeds neutral and so reflects a higher standard of service or in an effort to allow for management priorities to be more narrowly recognized and addressed.

In this paper, the value of "4.00" was used as a crosshair on the "Importance" x-axis versus the overall or categorical means (environmental, socio-economic, socio-cultural) because the researchers wished to focus on area attributes reported as "important" to "very important" versus at the midpoint in order to better direct planning and

management efforts (Bruyere et al., 2002). "Important" items should therefore receive the most attention with what kind determined by whether they are also deemed to be performing adequately or not. In addition, the future perception of residents was included as an extension of performance to provide additional insight. The means used for Performance and Future were determined given the categorical means for the performance of the environmental, socio-economic, and socio-cultural items. As such, the mean used for the 10 environmental items was 2.67, while the mean for the socio-economic items was 2.82, and for socio-cultural 2.99.

Table 1 Thirty-four Community Attributes Grouped into Three Categories – Environmental, Socio-Cultural and Socio-Economic

Environmental	*Socio-Cultural*	*Socio-Economic*
Amount of pollution	Safety from crime	Amount of local tax
Amount of uncontrolled development	Improving existing health care facilities	Making housing affordable for average income residents
Quality of natural environment	Community spirit	Personal income
Amount of erosion Amount of litter	Amount of noise heard Variety of shopping facilities	Amount of new buildings Attractiveness to invest
Amount of wildlife	Historical buildings	Availability of hotels
Protecting more habitat for existing wildlife	Quality of transportation Number of people	Encouraging more national chain stores / restaurants
Providing tax incentives to help sustain existing farms Amount of open space	Variety of restaurants Variety of entertainment Awareness of local culture	Providing tax incentives to preserve existing downtown character
Preserving undeveloped mountain tops and slopes	Developing more bicycle / pedestrian trails	Number of jobs
	Chance to meet new people	
	Expanding the State University	
	Amount of traffic	

Figure 1 provides an example of how the Importance-Performance-Future Matrix used in the study appears. Quadrant IV representing items considered "important" to "very important" ($M \geq 4.0$) and underperforming (performance $M \leq 2.67$) were labeled "important and in unacceptable condition." Note: The categorical mean for the performance of the environmental items (2.67) was used for example purposes. Quadrant I representing items considered of lesser importance ($M \leq 4.0$) yet perceived to be performing adequately ($M \geq 2.67$) was labeled "not as important and in adequate condition." Items considered "important" to "very important" ($M \geq 4.0$) and performing only adequately (as all performance means were less than 4.0 or "good") were represented in quadrant II which was labeled "important and in adequate condition." Quadrant III represented items labeled "not as important and in unacceptable condition" where performance was ≤ 2.67. Separate matrixes were created for the environmental, socio-economic and socio-cultural items factoring in the different performance means.

The attributes plotted within quadrants II and IV have the greatest potential for both positive and negative perceptions that may result from continued tourism development in that these conditions are rated important by residents and as they are performing well or not, they are most recognizably impacted or changed. The first quadrant, "not as important and in adequate condition," is also of interest in that the condition of these attributes which are not as important to residents might signify overkill in terms of their performance and represent the use of resources and efforts which could better be used elsewhere in the planning process. Interpretation of the IPA then is relatively straightforward and provides direct suggestions to area planners and managers as to what to do.

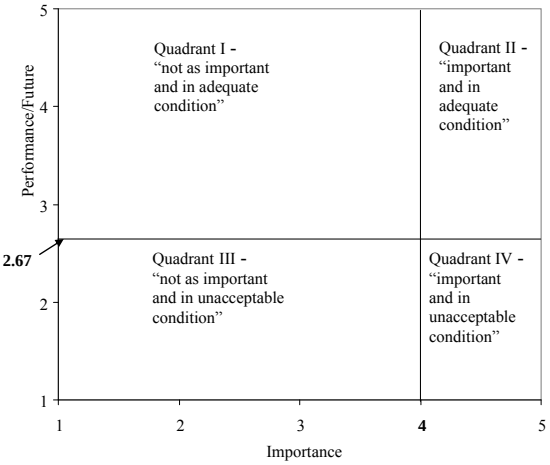

FIGURE 1. Importance-performance-future matrix and quadrant descriptors used in study. Represents example using overall mean (2.67) for environmental items as y-axis crosshair and "important" (4.0) as x-axis crosshair.

RESULTS

The average number of years of residence in the county was 45.9. Over half of the sample was male (54.3%). Nearly half of the sample (46.4%) had a bachelor's degree or more while a third (37.7%) had only a high school diploma. Four of ten (41.4%) had an average income under $45,000, while 21.5% had an average income greater than $90,000. Nearly all respondents were Caucasian (96.2%) reflecting the general population in the county. While the average age of the sample (66.3) was not truly representative of the county population (US Census Bureau, 2006), over 20% of households in the county have a member over 65 years of age which, from the authors' experience, makes up a group which tends to be most committed and vocal about tourism development issues and concerns.

Table 2 represents the average scores of importance, current condition, and perception of future for each of the items. For importance, residents rated nine of the 10 environmental items "important" to "very important" ($M >$ 4.00), while rating only three of the nine socio-economic and five of the 15 socio-cultural items "important" to "very important". Perception of current conditions found six of the 10 environmental items below the overall mean (2.67). Six items were also found below the overall mean (2.82) for the socio-economic items. On the other hand, only six of the 15 socio-cultural attributes were considered to be performing less than the average (2.99). Lastly, resident perceptions regarding how they think tourism might impact the attributes if it continues to develop as it has the previous five years found eight of the 10 environmental items feared to experience between "some" or a "large" change for the worse with all 10 items less than the overall mean. Four of the nine socio-economic items had means less than the overall average (2.82) yet each of these had means between "some" or no change. Nine of the 15 socio-cultural attributes were evaluated less than the average (2.99) with two items, the "amount of traffic" and "amount of noise heard" between "some" or a "large" change for the worse.

Figure 2 represents the importance-performance-future analysis of the 10 environmental items. Quadrant IV revealed four items representing environmental attributes considered both important and underperforming: "preserving undeveloped mountain tops and slopes" (B), "amount of uncontrolled development" (C), "amount of erosion" (E), and "amount of litter" (F) (Figure 3). These same four items as well as "amount of pollution" (A), "quality of the natural environment" (D), and "amount of open space" (G) also were identified by residents as real concerns in the future if tourism development continues as it has in the past five years. Quadrant II revealed three items "important and in adequate current condition" yet each attribute's future fell within Quadrant IV. Two of the remaining items, "protecting more habitat for existing wildlife" (I) and "providing tax incentives to help sustain existing farms" (J), while technically in Quadrant III due to their importance score, were of concern in their current and perceived future condition. Lastly, items D, G, and H ("amount of wildlife") revealed large differences between perceptions of current condition and future concern with the future much less optimistic than the current situation.

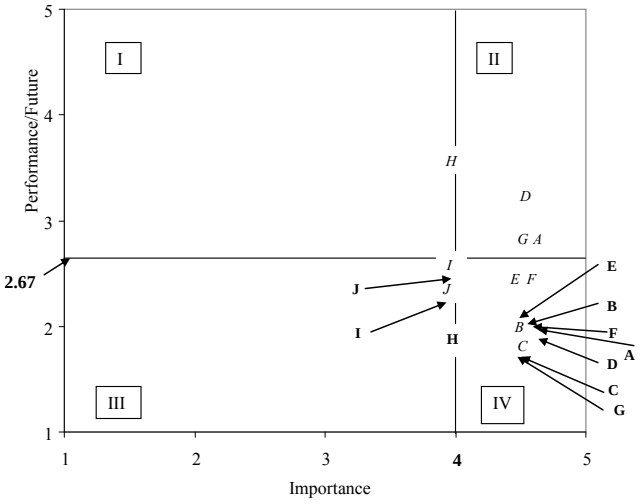

FIGURE 2 Importance-performance-future matrix of environmental items. Italic letters represent the Importance/Performance scores. Bolded letters represent the Importance/Future scores. Uses overall mean (2.67) for environmental items as y-axis crosshair and "important" (4.0) as x-axis crosshair.

Figure 3 represents the importance-performance-future analysis of the nine socio-economic items. Quadrant IV revealed four items representing attributes considered both important and underperforming: "amount of local tax" (Z), "number of jobs" (AA), "making housing affordable for average income residents" (AB), and "personal income" (AC). Two of these four items, Z and AB, also had item means below the group mean (2.82) concerning the future if tourism development continues. In addition, item AD ("Amount of new buildings"), while not considered quite as important (M = 3.85), was of future concern by residents with a mean of 2.45. Quadrant II revealed two items, AA and AC, important and in adequate future condition yet each, as reported previously, had current condition (performance) means placing them in Quadrant IV. Two of

the remaining items, AE and AG, fell in Quadrant I and could possibly be considered attributes that need little attention by planners. In addition, item AA ("amount of jobs") revealed a fairly large difference between perception of current condition and future concern with the current opinion less hopeful than the future.

Table 2 Mean Importance/Performance/Future of Attributes

	Attribute/Feature	*Importance*	*Perform.*	*Future*
Environmental	Amount of pollution (A)	4.60	2.84	1.86
	Preserving undeveloped mountain tops and slopes (B)	4.54	2.01	1.98
	Amount of uncontrolled development (C)	4.53	2.01	1.77
	Quality of the natural environment (D)	4.45	3.16	1.90
	Amount of erosion (E)	4.44	2.63	2.04
	Amount of litter (F)	4.44	2.52	1.89
	Amount of open space (G)	4.38	2.88	1.78
	Amount of wildlife (H)	3.95	3.47	1.92
	Protecting more habitat for existing wildlife (I)	3.95	2.64	2.32
	Providing tax incentives to help sustain existing farms (J)	3.98	2.41	2.54
	Safety from crime (K)	4.77	3.48	2.15
	Amount of traffic (L)	4.57	1.70	1.39
	Amount of noise heard (M)	4.39	2.33	1.69
Socio-Cultural	Community spirit (N)	4.19	3.51	2.81
	Improving health care facilities (O)	4.20	3.57	3.51
	Number of people (P)	4.00	2.98	2.08
	Awareness of local culture (Q)	4.15	3.06	2.75
	Historical buildings (R)	3.96	2.64	2.74
	Quality of transportation (S)	3.91	3.16	2.71
	Variety of restaurants (T)	3.60	3.44	3.50
	Variety of shopping facilities (U)	3.66	3.04	3.43
	Developing more bicycle / pedestrian trails (V)	3.57	2.85	3.17
	Variety of entertainment (W)	3.48	3.13	3.33
	Chance to meet new people (X)	3.33	3.36	3.35
	Expanding the State University (Y)	2.76	3.02	2.86
Socio - Economic				
	Amount of local tax (Z)	4.49	2.38	2.27
	Number of jobs (AA)	4.32	2.65	3.26
	Making housing affordable for average income residents (AB)	4.25	2.22	2.23
	Personal income (AC)	4.09	2.67	3.00
	Amount of new buildings (AD)	3.85	2.96	2.45
	Attractiveness to invest (AE)	3.60	3.23	3.06
	Providing tax incentives to preserve downtown character (AF)	3.45	2.73	3.02
	Availability of hotels (AG)	3.27	3.79	3.09
	Encouraging more national chain stores/restaurants (AH)	3.02	2.58	2.75

Note: Perform. = Performance. Items were evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale with Importance (1="Very Unimportant" to 5="Very Important"), Performance/Condition (1="Poor" to 5="Excellent") and Future (1="Large Change for Worse" to 5="Large Change for Better")

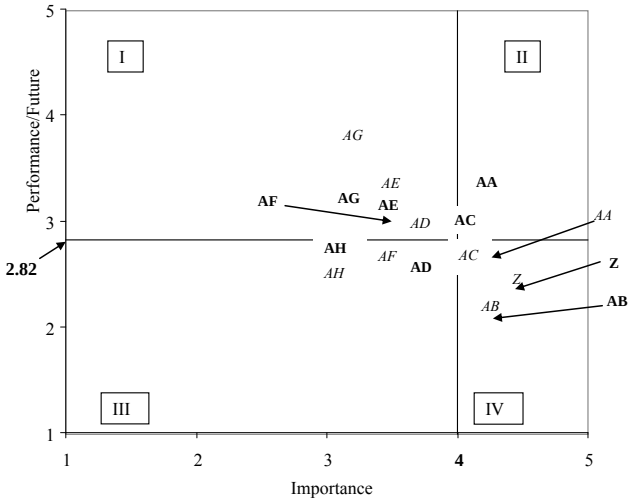

Figure 3. Importance-performance-future matrix of socioeconomic items. Italic letters represent the Importance/Performance scores. Bolded letters represent the Importance/Future scores. Uses overall mean (2.82) for socio-economic items as y-axis crosshair and "important" (4.0) as x-axis crosshair.

Figure 4 represents the importance-performance-future analysis of the 15 socio-cultural items. Three socio-cultural items, L "amount of traffic", M "amount of noise heard", and P "number of people" were identified as important and in unacceptable current and future condition. Considered important ($M \geq 4.00$) but not as great current concern, items "safety from crime" (K), "community spirit" (N), and "awareness of local culture" (Q) had future condition means below the group mean (2.99). In addition, item R ("historical buildings"), while not considered quite as important ($M = 3.96$), was of current and future concern by residents. Four of the remaining items, T "variety of restaurants", U "variety of shopping facilities", W "variety of entertainment", and X "chance to meet new people", fell in Quadrant I and could need less attention by planners. In addition, three items (K, N, P) revealed significant differences between perception of current condition and future concern with the future view less positive than the current.

DISCUSSION

We looked at the relationships between the importance of various attributes and features in a community and resident perceptions of current and future conditions of the same via the incorporation of a modified Importance-Performance analysis (IPA). In particular, we used IPA to help identify issues of concern so they can be incorporated into the larger Visitor Experience and Resource Protection (VERP) planning process. This was done to provide further insight for community and tourism officials responsible for future planning and development choices. Knowing how residents feel about various attributes in the county can help provide guidance for officials before attempting to move forward with the VERP process (Element 7 – Selecting Indicators and Specifying Standards). Otherwise, indicators and standards could be established (e.g., there shall be a minimum of 10 acres of open space for every 100 in the suburban parts of the county) that put residents at serious odds with planners making community and tourism development even more contentious.

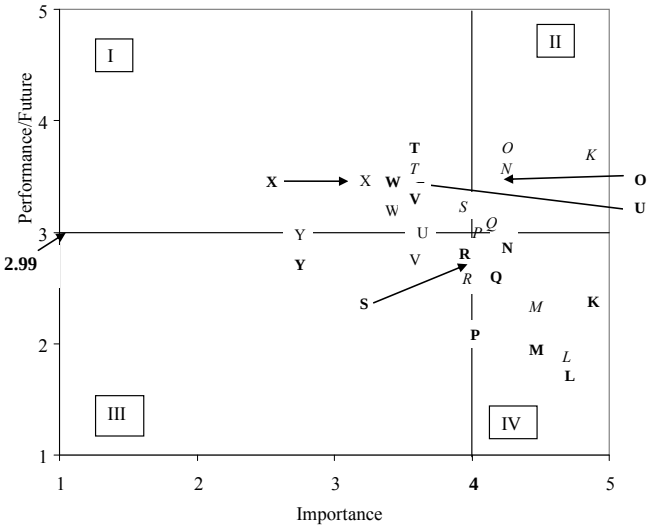

FIGURE 4. Importance-performance-future matrix of sociocultural items. Italic letters represent the Importance/Performance scores. Bolded letters represent the Importance/Future scores. Uses overall mean (2.99) for socio-cultural items as y-axis crosshair and "important"(4.0) as x-axis crosshair.

Much as with other gateway community and county studies, the general findings from this study revealed that the natural environment makes the county special (e.g., Cavus & Tanrisevdi, 2002; Liu, Sheldon & Var, 1987). Not only is the natural environment considered important, there is real concern about the status of its current condition. With the exception of a few items (e.g., amount of local tax) no other socio-cultural or socio-economic attributes and features were perceived the same in importance and concern for current condition as the environmental items. Whether it is concern about the amount of uncontrolled development, amount of open

space, or simply the quality of the natural environment in general, respondents in this study value the environment.

Overall, none of the items was rated, on average, as in "Good" to "Excellent" current condition or was perceived to be changing for the better in the future ($M \geq 4.00$). Rather, half of the 34 items rated by residents were below the respective group mean regarding their current condition, with 23 items observed below the group mean concerning the future if tourism development continues as it has the previous five years. The five items evaluated as of most concern in their current condition included: amount of traffic, amount of uncontrolled development, preserving undeveloped mountain tops and slopes, making housing affordable for average income residents, and amount of noise heard. Eight of the ten environmental items were of significant future concern with the amount of traffic, crime, noise and people, as well as tax and affordable housing of considerable socio-cultural or economic concern. Each of the findings in this study should aid planners attempt to find the balance between meeting commerce, community, and nature-based needs.

CONCLUSIONS

The utilization of a modified Importance-Performance analysis (IPA) (Martilla & James, 1977) has great potential in helping decision makers visually see how residents value their communities and the surrounding area both currently and from a future standpoint. It is of particular use when used in combination with the VERP planning framework as it addresses the second element (i.e., develop a public involvement strategy) and thus provides guidance for following elements, based on the assumption that different areas are better equipped to accept certain types of tourism development (e.g., chain restaurants versus hiking trails) and should be managed in a way to better align environmental or societal characteristics with the desires of various stakeholders. Moreover IPA can aid in the seventh element of VERP, selecting indicators of resource and social conditions and associated standards, as we identified some of the most important conditions (i.e., attributes/features) of the area and as such indicators to measure any changes in the conditions can be developed. For instance, the median income per capita below a certain point as an indicator of personal income, or the number of acres lost to new development as an indicator of the amount of open space, each tied to a specific standard.

In this study a number of unacceptable attributes and features were found, thus steps need be taken to change them so they become more acceptable. With the addition of the "future condition" component to the study and analysis, initial and ongoing attention by tourism development planners can be placed on attributes and features that particularly stood out as areas of concern. Noting the differences between current and future condition be they favorable or not can certainly aid in planning processes where decisions must be made in a short period of time. Not all planning horizons are the same and in areas, such as the one in this study, where great pressure is placed on elected and appointed officials to among other things approve building permits, improve roads, and protect open space, having some sense of what residents think about the future can aid in dealing with time sensitive issues.

This study has helped identify initial areas of concern where too much change has occurred or is likely to occur and therefore needs to be monitored. As Ahn et al. (2002) describe, once a comfortable level of consensus is reached in terms of identifying development zones and condition indicators, planners can then develop baseline data to monitor change and use in later elements of the VERP process. In situations where development seems controlled or managed, fewer negative perceptions seem to exist (Madrigal, 1994; Horn & Simmons, 2002). In addition, Akis et al. (1996) found that it may not be the increase in number of visitors that leads to negative perceptions, but rather the corresponding perceived negative impacts of the tourism-related development instead.

Finally, IPA also provides decision makers with a tool to help stakeholder groups visually understand the similarities and differences they may have with other stakeholders. While the placement of the crosshairs in the IPA grid can have real implications for the conclusions that will be drawn, we chose to take a more conservative approach by employing a cutoff value above the overall sample mean for importance so that only those items perceived as "important" to "very important" would be considered in Quadrant IV (i.e., "important and unacceptable condition"). Had we utilized the overall mean for importance as a cutoff value, as others have in previous studies (e.g., Williams & Neal, 1993; Richardson, 1987), we would have drawn some slightly different conclusions.

In sum, gateway counties and the communities within face the ongoing battle of trying to balance commerce with nature and community sense of place. Recognizing the findings from this study, county and community planners, and tourism development officials, need recognize that if the natural environment continues to detrimentally change

in not only perception but also physically and ecologically, the area could lose value in the minds of its citizens and large tourism base. As Lankford points out (2001), tourism impact research should be designed to provide planners with information that will allow them to address local concerns and issues. The information becomes the starting point in developing citizen involvement that will aid the process of discussing impacts, mitigation strategies, and to ultimately decide of the scope and intensity of tourism development (Lankford, 2001). If the information provided identifies which groups of residents are more concerned or opposed to development, the planner has insight into how to work with concerned citizens from a tourism development content and level perspective.

There is a continued need to guide planning and development decisions based on the understanding of how negative changes in one aspect of the community may overlap or cancel out benefits gained in another. Planners may therefore be better informed to enable tourism to be a proactive force which not only aims to maximize positive returns to a community's overall growth, but also works to minimize the costs to the environment and resident culture (Sauter & Leisen, 1999). It makes little sense for a community to develop and promote tourism if area residents' lack of support leads to negative feelings toward the industry and off-putting reactions toward tourists (Taylor, 1995). Research that provides a better understanding of the intricacies between economic, environmental and social impacts, real or perceived, may aid in achieving this balance.

Finally, future research efforts should attempt to segment residents into distinct stakeholder groups. While not the intended purpose of this paper, resident segmentation approaches have been conducted by a number of researchers (e.g., Banks & Brothers, 2003; Bruyere et al., 2002) to enhance understanding so that similarities and differences that may exist between groups can be taken into consideration in tourism policy, planning, and management efforts. Incorporating segmentation results from IPA into the VERP framework should provide additional information for tourism development planners to potentially avert dissatisfaction among groups who might feel their voice was left out of the planning process.

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