


### ACADEMIC NOTE

**PASSAGES AND DESTINATIONS: A TOURISM STUDIO ROAD TO RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

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**Abstract**

This paper describes the goals and development of a rural tourism Studio for Masters-level students in the Southern Tier of Western New York over the last decade. The main goal of the Studios has been to explore how tourism may be used to promote general economic development in a relatively impoverished rural area and so help to improve living conditions, including housing. The studio experience is considered to be an important part of the preparation for a career in planning. Studios almost always enter into, and attempt to contribute to, an ongoing planning and development process and are undertaken with the cooperation of local communities and agencies. The paper describes the background of students, their disciplinary skills and work experience, ethnic, age and geographic mix, and general unfamiliarity with rural issues. Also described are the various constraints and compromises with respect to course requirements and schedules, location, local participation and engaging communities. The paper illustrates some of the housing-related findings and recommendations—recreational and second homes, low-income properties, retirement and mobile homes—and concludes with an evaluation of the Studio overall including its limitations and suggestions for a continuing “planning-bus” approach to University-community collaboration.

**Key words:** rural tourism; planning studio community development, recreational housing

**Background**

The goals and development of a rural tourism Studio for Masters Students in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University at Buffalo are the focus of this paper. The studios are considered to be an important part of preparation for a career in planning and are a distinctive aspect of our program. While students learn about the specifics of each semester's topic, the
Studio’s main purpose is not to teach about tourism or rural development per se, but rather to use this as an example through which to learn about planning practice and community development. That said, every effort is made to tackle issues of local concern and make thoughtful and positive contributions to each of the communities studied. The work is organized as a professional planning consultancy with leadership, tasking, and reporting responsibilities agreed among students working as a team. This section provides a brief description of the towns and villages in the study area and the challenges faced by these communities.

Studies have focused on Ellicottville, New York, the nearby villages of Great Valley, Mansfield, Ashville, and Pumpkinville, and several towns along Route 16 from the county boundary at Yorkshire to Hinsdale, including Delevan, Machias, and Franklinville. These locations are all in Cattaraugus County in the Southern Tier of Western New York—the top end of the Appalachians, 50 miles south of Buffalo in and around the so-called “Enchanted Mountains.” The relative location of these areas is indicated in Figure 1. The area was settled from 1800-onwards and especially after the Civil War. Income came from farming and forest products, now largely out-competed or depleted. Like many other small places across America, the counties, towns, and villages are seeking to fill the gap with their economic development departments now renamed to include tourism as a component. There is also an Amish Trail to the west of Ellicottville and a still impoverished Native American reservation to the south, with only some tribal members benefitting from the nearby Salamanca Casino. Both communities remain cautious in their involvement with outside populations.

Most tourist destinations have a unique history that is embellished and exaggerated as an instrument of identity and, latterly, as an attractor for tourists. One goal of the Studio is to help places reveal, exploit, and protect that heritage. In the present case, some years ago, Cattaraugus County adopted the “Enchanted Mountains” tourism promotion tag, somewhat ambitious for an area that peaks at around 2,000 feet! Away from Ellicottville, the rest of the county including Route 16 is better characterized as rolling hills, mixed farmland, once relatively prosperous homes, still-picturesque villages, with residual shops and services. Access to the Enchanted Mountains from the north is via two highways from Buffalo and beyond that Toronto. The speedier route is mostly freeway (Route 219 dual carriageway) passing through Ellicottville while the other Route 16 winds through several small towns.

Within the county, only Ellicottville can be considered highly successful as a winter ski resort and aspiring four-season destination now marketing itself as “The Aspen of the East straight out of a Norman Rockwell painting.” Ellicottville’s success comes from two ski resorts: the public Holiday Valley and private Holimont. Local legend relates that serious skiing began when snowfall in nearby Allegheny State Park was insufficient for a scheduled ski race. This was opportune because it matched the time when Toronto, Canada, another 50 miles north of Buffalo, was growing rapidly. Ellicottville soon became a preferred location for Canadian skiers and owners of second homes.
Snow and, increasingly, affluent Torontoitians drove Ellicottville’s transition; with protective planning (zoning laws that discourage national franchises and ridgeline development), the refurbished village certainly lives up to its claims. In the years since, Ellicottville has seen considerable gentrification as ski enthusiasts and, more recently others, established second homes in and around the village. Certainly the charm of Ellicottville has been preserved and enhanced; consequently property values in the village are significantly higher than in the rest of the county.

The unfortunate effect of gentrification and new development has forced many local families to relocate, for financial and other reasons, into surrounding villages, trailer parks, and scattered squalid homesteads. The variety of housing is illustrated by Figure 2. Again, this pattern is reflected in property prices, commuting, school attendance, and so on. Nonetheless, for such places, housing is arguably not the primary problem. While there are many trailer park and dilapidated homes, there are also many structures and residences, especially in Franklinville, with as much elegance as those in Ellicottville, and with the same potential as primary and second homes. This does not deny the need for other housing initiatives or the income and cost of refurbishing considerations, but emphasizes the importance of bringing new sources of income and jobs to the district and viewing rural housing as part of a broader development strategy.

One confounding issue here in terms of gentrification is that more successful entrepreneurs are often in-comers to the area (because they see potential for tourism that locals often cannot), or more advantaged locals who have travelled and returned to their home community.

Cattaraugus County is the third poorest county in New York State. Economic development is difficult—a typical “town” is 100 square miles with a population of a few thousand and one or two modest settlements. The economic and social contrasts are summarized in Figure 3. This shows relative house prices between towns (roughly a factor of four) and how the dependence on Ellicottville for jobs varies. Places such as Great Valley and Ashville on Route 219, or those closer to Ellicottville provide attractions for visitors to Ellicottville. Towns and villages along Route 16 are further away so side-trips to these places are limited. The better tourism development opportunity is to begin by introducing attractions for travelers en route to the Enchanted Mountains, promoting more travel along Route 16, and hope that this eventually encourages these places to become primary destinations with stay-over accommodation.

**Figure 2. Mobile and recreational homes—old, new, and converted.**

**Studio Planning Goals and Tasks.**

The central “planning task” for the Studios has been to assess whether surrounding villages might foster their own potential and learn from and build upon Ellicottville’s success. The first Studios studied the two nearest towns, Franklinville and Little Valley (the County seat town) proposing several potential tourism projects in addition to suggestions for improving the visual aspect and on-going activities. An apparent problem was that these activities were occasional weekend festivals and seasonal events, and did not provide continuing income that might warrant, for example, new infrastructure or construction. Even were this not so, each locality appears too small to reach the threshold where it might become a “destination” on its own merits to support, for example, small hotels and continuing tourist activities.
Figure 3. Population, jobs, and economic conditions across towns and villages.

Franklinville, the town closest to Ellicottville has an attractive cobbled central square and a Town Hall in an imposing former vaudeville theatre. The town also hosts the largest maple festival in New York State and a variety of equestrian events. The primary goal of the Studio has been to assist these towns to benefit from tourism, economically, socially, and environmentally. One possibility was to brand activities from several locations along a highway leading to Ellicottville into a themed “heritage highway.” The first Studio to explore this possibility was titled “Passages and Destinations,” addressing the idea that visitors to Ellicottville might drive there, or return, via Route 16 enjoying the special attractions. Some of the findings from these efforts are indicated later. For Ellicottville, the advantage is that at least some events and attractions along Route 16 that might be accessed and synergistically add to the overall attraction of Ellicottville as the final destination. Thus, the approach was seen as complementary to their own activities. As shown in Table 1, the Studio themes since then have followed a developing “story” so that students and instructor can build on previous findings.

Table 1. The Sequence of Rural Tourism Studios 2004–2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Final report titles</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Franklinville A Place to Stay: Restoring and Revitalizing a Rural Gem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Little Valley: An Equestrian Trail in a Rural County:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Ellicottville Second Homes: The Contribution of Second Homes to a Recreational Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Enchanted Trail: Passages and Destinations: A Strategy for Connecting Towns and Villages along Route 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Local Tourism Events: The Impacts of Festivals and Destinations in Cattaraugus County</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Route 16 Community Partnership: Building Capacity through Community Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Route 16 Moving Forward: Tourism and Event Planning for Economic and Social Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Ellicottville Building on Success: Identifying New Tourism Opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Repositioning: Adventure Tourism Recommendations for Ellicottville Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planned</td>
<td>A Planning Bus for the Route 16 Communities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the beginning of each semester, students in the department are offered a choice of studios and elect which to join based on interest and prior familiarity with faculty teaching styles. For example, while my own attitude is that the role of the faculty member is to guide rather than direct students’ efforts, other instructors adopt different regimes, some quite rigid in topic, methods, and timetables. A typical Rural Tourism Studio class comprises 10–15 second year Masters’ students with a variety of geographic and social backgrounds and undergraduate degrees. Their undergraduate training may be in diverse disciplines such as environmental design, media studies, anthropology, geography, or economics. Students will have completed about two-thirds of the Masters of Planning program. All will have taken introductory planning classes and a selection of other courses in methods, design, environment, and urban policy. A few may have already taken my tourism policy class. There is often an age spectrum among students in the Studio; older students sometimes have considerable experience in business or the public sector, and are retraining for a new career. Ideally, the mix of students should replicate a
Seeking synergies through co-location of suitable new enterprises and paying attention to land-use and other constraints is especially important for the small villages and towns around Ellicottville. In fact, tourism in the area displays both sides of the agglomeration synergy-congestion coin (Cole, 2012). Ellicottville, while a very attractive destination, has become so overcrowded during ski season and weekend festivals that it badly needs off-peak attractions. Strategic and careful thinking needs to be used in deciding how to fill its remaining sites. The Studios have provided some evidence for this: a survey from one Studio showed that about half of all visitors wanted “nothing more” in Ellicottville village. In contrast, the surrounding villages are too small to achieve the economies of scale and synergies between activities that would enable them to “take-off” as independent or collective destinations. For them, as explained above, the best hope is to work together to create a common theme into which they can select and incorporate their products (Cole, 2012; Razak, 2007; Weidenfeld, Williams, & Butler, 2010).

In addition to theory, time is allocated to explaining underlying principles of project evaluation, discounted cash flow, input-output and social accounting. Students are familiar with online data bases and web searches and a range of research methods. Cattaraugus County has an award-winning online GIS and data retrieval system and Ellicottville has an informative website. Typically, two or three students will devote most of their time to developing GIS mapping skills often working directly with a local official. The main task for me, as instructor, is to ensure that their efforts are relevant to the Studio project and that they interact well with other students and their local advisors, experts, and guides, and emerge with a better sense of tourism as a tool in economic development. Others take on the challenge of developing consultant-level skills into which they can select and incorporate their products (Cole, 2012; Razak, 2007; Weidenfeld, Williams, & Butler, 2010).

Table 2. A Typical Sequence of Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks in sequence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Movie on rural tourism (Extension) and local (Ellicottville and Enchanted Mountains)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Review local and rural tourism case studies, consultant reports, previous studios, scholarly articles</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Exploration of theory and available data</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Site visit with informal discussions and more formal presentation with County, Town, and other officials, and interest groups. Social evening, such as a barbecue or bonfire party</td>
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<td>5. Survey of businesses, residents, second homeowners and short-stay and day visitors</td>
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<td>6. Statistical using public records</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. GIS and other graphics</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Impact analysis, rural settlement accounting, and project modeling</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Final report with recommendations for events, organizations, etc.</td>
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From Theory into Practice

Seeking synergies through co-location of suitable new enterprises and paying attention to land-use and other constraints is especially important for the small villages and towns around Ellicottville. In fact, tourism in the area
but both involve bringing new residents into the town rather than upgrading local housing. In Ellicottville, one Studio recommended that the upper-levels of an expanding local supermarket should be used as apartments for low-income local families. Debating the merits of all such suggestions, balancing the social and economic aspects, and understanding different positions and analyses is obviously a key skill for an effective planner. While detailed robust analysis is generally beyond the capability of most students, they can follow the arguments, and are encouraged to dissect the strengths and weaknesses of planning reports, developers’ proposals, consultants’ advice, and so on.

**Faculty-Student Contribution**

An obvious challenge for the Studio is to assess what might be achieved that mutually benefits students and study-area communities. For students, the hope is that, having taken the class, each would feel comfortable if they were asked to take part in, and eventually, lead a tourism planning department in their future careers. This may seem optimistic but it is the case that the designated officials in small rural counties in the United States still typically have little formal training in tourism planning, are generally overwhelmed by day-to-day tasks, and as a result tend to rely on consultants. Most initiatives lie with local Chambers of Commerce, individual entrepreneurs, ad hoc community, sports and interest groups, and occasional University Extension programs. New York is a “home rule” state. Unfortunately, while towns and villages have considerable local autonomy, they also have very limited budget or planning capability. As explained below, Studios have been useful in addressing both these limitations.

Typically, students self-sort, according to personality and other factors, but those in the tourism Studio appear to have greater initiative, less focused skills, and an interest in life outside the University. With such a group, the sensible role for the instructor is to orient students in a solid direction with a good chance of arriving with a useful experience and a worthwhile report by semester-end (see Table 2). Along the way, the instructor acts as an occasional “trouble-shooter” who resolves domestic disputes and foot-in-mouth on-site misunderstandings, and delivers advice on packaging and presenting their findings; in effect to act as a “consultant” to the project. I typically allow students an hour or so prior to our weekly meeting to sort out their own disputes, and decide on directions and responsibilities. Their faces show that some passionate negotiations have taken place, usually about who their recommendations are designed to serve: the business, visitor, or established resident community, or simply rescuing a pet project. Generally, these questions are resolved by reformulating the objectives to include a mix of initiatives, new attractions (such as a “glamping” site), attractions serving both visitors and community (e.g., a bowling alley), and social projects (on-site low-cost housing). In only one studio was there such irreconcilable (ideological) differences among students that it became necessary to divide the class.

Following the initial discussions amongst students, and preparation of their collective objectives, work schedule and reporting, each student is required to provide a short description of their assessment of the overall goals, how they will contribute with a rough timetable, and what they want to learn. This provides me with some guidance as to my contribution for mentoring and making contacts in the study sites, and also a basis for final student evaluations and grading.

While local officials and communities recognize the circumscribed nature and objectives of a planning Studio, they also feel that students—as potential visitors to the area—are “fresh eyes” that expose the potential and flaws of the area. This is summarized by, not least, their preparation of SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) tables and comparisons with other locales (as in Figure 4). Moreover, it is necessary to encourage future planners to take an interest in, and better understand, rural issues. At least two former students have subsequently taken jobs worked in the area—one as Chief Planner for the county.

**Organization and Limitations**

Given the distance from Buffalo to the Southern Tier, classes have been scheduled on Fridays giving students time to travel and stay for weekend events (such as festivals). Each Studio lasts one fall semester (about 13 working weeks) scheduled as a weekly 12 hour commitment. Typically, after preliminary presentations and readings, students visit the locations under study, and about four weeks is spent in familiarizing students with data and issues.
STRENGTHS

• The diversity of the site
• Natural environment
• Historical assets
• Structural, housing stock and barns
• Many cooperative residents
• Commute times and travel times are short
• Roads and infrastructure seem under capacity, could handle greater use
• Real-estate prices are relatively low compared to region
• Well-connected trail systems with links to other counties
• Close proximity to the Ellicottville area
• An agricultural economy
• Lime Lake and the five lakes of the area
• Highway access at the Intersection of the 86 and the 17
• Open space
• A 400-acre site owned by the county
• Golf courses, drive-ins
• New flood control measures at county line
• Trail markers
• Equestrian assets, trails, barns/stables

OPPORTUNITIES

• Area provides a peaceful escape
• Area is pristine, tranquil, and relaxing
• The potential improvement of many activities
• Off-roading, ATV trails, mudding
• Cycling, Bike Rides
• Rodeo Riding
• Kayaking
• Snowmobiling
• Fishing/hunting
• Hiking
• Horseride riding
• Many hidden gems, historical sites
• Potential artistic assets
• Barn art, Cattaraugus County rides to the art, sculpture parks, Olean squirrels
• Open and inexpensive land
• Many local dog breeders
• Maple syrup farms, maple breakfasts
• Growth boundary may encourage more dense growth
• US 219 may bring regional visitors to the site
• Antique shops and road side stands

WEAKNESSES

• Few overnight accommodations
• Airport is not conveniently located, lacks accessibility
• Distance from the Buffalo metro area
• Little working capital and small budgets
• Disinvestment in export businesses, many have folded
• Gravel routes and commerce may be damaging infrastructure
• Poor signage
• Some building facades are in poor condition
• Corridor lacks a coherent identity
• Little diversity, quality/capacity of existing establishments
• Cultural preservation of the rural character
• Competition with, at times negative views of Ellicottville
• Seasonal homes may sit vacant
• No formal “greeting” when you enter the corridor
• Small tax base, lower densities
• There may be existing political and social divisions
• Missing city amenities, some areas in need of reinvestment

THREATS

• Losing the community’s identity
• Terrain can be dangerous
• Hilly, steep slopes, bank destabilization, winter weather
• New development may “price” residents out of their homes.
• Some existing regulations may be too restrictive
• 219 expressway may funnel traffic away from the corridor
• NIMBYism may inhibit changes
• Appearances of unkempt yards and homes may discourage investment
• Wide open countryside may be unnerving/worrisome for urban residents
• Competition with Ellicottville
• Legislation may favor other areas rather than the corridor
• Politics of the region are divisive

Choice of topics depends on interest but also each Studio contributes to a “story” (see Table 1) whereby problems in one Studio are taken up in later Studios; thereby resulting in overall progress towards a better understanding of the challenges of using tourism as a driver of rural development. There is necessarily a starting point for each Studio based on instructor preferences, requests from local collaborators, recommendations from previous Studios, and not least the University requirement for course outlines, flyers, and “marketing.” Often, students do not take up the ideas proposed by an instructor, but accept the overall framework and recognize the need to make a continuing contribution to the communities. Experience shows that, given the one semester timeframe, there is little point pushing students to adopt topics and tasks that they are not interested in or sufficiently experienced to undertake. As far as possible the goal is to identify and exploit individual talents and show how they can be bundled into a package that is more than the sum of its parts (Cole, 2012). This applies both to the organization of Studio and tourist destinations (and indeed most other activities).

At the outset, students are given an introduction to rural tourism and the region with an outline (see Table 2) of what might be studied and how. Whether this can be undertaken depends on the individual students’ skills and interests (largely unknown until the first or second class session). Students are expected to be reasonably familiar with basic statistics, including linear regression. For example, they are able to explore housing characteristics, commuting patterns, income distribution, and so on across the county. Sometimes the findings are seemingly banal, for example, “the number of households in both county and towns in the study area has increased” or “there are only 1% African Americans living in the area,” but the first is interesting given that population is otherwise declining in rural America, and the second, while the causes deserve discussion, arises from the predominantly Buffalo versus suburbs focus of the program as a whole. Here again, a major goal is that students should see parallels and opportunities to help with similar development challenges and be able to deal with broad development strategies and their idiosyncrasies of implementation.

In the majority of cases, by the end of the semester every student has honed their specialized skills, learned to work together and hit deadlines, met archetype future employers, improved his or her self-worth becoming.

Figure 4. Student collective SWOT analysis in final report.
more confident about their chosen roles in the world and better chances for gainful employment. The students generally give the class a good review with occasional comments about lack of organization and not ensuring that all students contribute equally. The advocated “matrix” organization and grading system emphasizing both individual initiative and group collegiality are, of course, intended to confront this. Whilst students are supposed to both support and “police” each other’s contributions, this does not always happen for reasons of diffidence, power relations within the group, and so on, requiring instructor intervention. For example, it was notable that the weekly results from a survey of visitors to a local pumpkin farm were remarkably consistent. It became clear that, after the first week of this task (counting visitors and matching car number plates), the students involved were simply “manufacturing” their data in the local brew-pub. Obviously, something was lacking in the introduction to statistics class they had previously taken, but at least now they understand better the concept of standard deviation, as it pertains to the vagaries of tourism!

**Connecting with Classmates and Community**

There are formal and informal ways to develop a spirit of camaraderie and shared responsibility amongst students. As noted above, one obvious formal approach is to recommend some type of “matrix organization” whereby each student takes leadership for one component of the project with a secondary role in others, overall making contributions to several aspects of the work: conceptual, interviews and presentation, surveys and data analysis, and drafting and editing. Whatever its merits, this format is at best weakly adopted. Actual organization has varied from year to year. In some years, the class sub-divides into smaller groups (2–4 students), taking a single project such as a local theatre, and between them cost, design, outline, and write-up a proposal. In others, the sub-groups, may outline and then design several projects, while another group takes responsibility for (say) assessing the economic or social impacts and another for editing and presenting the final report. The key seems to be to encourage and maintain good communication between students with an achievable clear objective and timetable, and agreed responsibility (once the inevitable initial confusion has dissipated). For most Studios, the “leaders” who emerge have a greater stake or interest in the topic, while others hone their chosen technical skills.

Local knowledge sources and mentors—planners, officials, businessmen, residents, second-home owners, and informal community leaders—are important, indeed essential to a Studio’s success. This builds on previous Studios and again it is useful that several former students have been employed in the area. Prior to the semester, I spend time soliciting or exploring specific topics and assessing the logistics (distance, amount of work, skills and so on) and meeting with people who are prepared to assist students with particular issues and information. While most of these interactions take place locally, some contacts will drive the 50 miles to the University to present to the Studio at the beginning of the tourism Studio semester. Once the Studio is underway the sub-groups of students link with relevant local counterparts (for example, GIS, drafting, rendering, statistics, and other specialized activities).

Early in the semester students, local planners and officials and residents are invited to an early-season “Guy Fawkes Night” (see Figure 5). The event includes traditional English bonfire and a barbeque (traditional shepherd pie) and fireworks. This has proven to be a useful tool to help establish teamwork between students and familiarize them with the area. It also breaks inhibitions about interactions with local planner and residents. For the residents, the informal event alleviates the suspicion of University–folk and planners in areas beyond the suburbs.

![Figure 5. Bonfire night in the Enchanted Mountains.](image-url)
In terms of both the Studio organization and project, practice-derived theories such as Ostrom's Collective Action Design Principles (2004) and Leksakundilok's work on Community Participation (2004) have proved instructive. While the introductory readings, such as those by Gartner (2004), Marcouiller (2007), Cawley and Gilmore (2008), Cole and Razak (2009), reports, and videos [especially by the Minnesota Extension Service (2001)] are designed to give the students an introduction to the theory of tourism and communities, and organization, this has to be rather minimal as time is limited and students are keen to get moving with the project. Reflecting on what one should have known is as necessary as what one learned since, after all, it is preferred that students will make their mistakes in class rather than later in the field!

Outcome and Presentation

Each Studio ends with a presentation to local communities. Attendance by stakeholders (residents, business and community leaders, local planners) has varied from 10 to 35 depending on time, place, and topic. Publicity is given also in the local press, which typically follows and reports on the progress of the Studios. In a few cases, the suggestions in a final report are implemented. This has been the case for specific recommendations in Ellicottville and along Route 16. The Report on Second Homes was deemed “better than a consultant.” and also won a national prize from the American Planning Association (APA). Whether or not any given Studio makes implementable recommendations, local groups appear to find the Studio as a whole—discussions, receipt of relevant articles about similar destinations or activities, linking with a University, and so on—useful. In some cases, sadly, it is simply that residents appreciate that “someone is taking an interest.” Especially for loose alliances, such as the Route 16 Partnership explained below, the Studios provide a rationale, sense of purpose, and fostered continuity for an otherwise largely-autonomous set of communities, as well as a number of implementable proposals.

Ellicottville Second Homes and Visitor Studies

As a professional report, the Ellicottville Second Homes study was probably the most successful, since it received the APA Carol Bloom Resort and Tourism Award. The project was facilitated in part by the more secure local planning structure—town planner, Chamber of Commerce, and established major core activities (the two ski resorts) and businesses. This made the organization and data collection more straightforward than smaller villages since students were readily provided with information on homeowners, visitors, ski days, and weekly events. The study showed that second homes in the county fell into two categories, the former family homes of migrants to surrounding cities and towns, primarily Buffalo, now often used as lodges for hunting, fishing, and weekend recreation. The newer construction and significantly refurbished cottages belong to recreational homeowners mostly around Ellicottville. A large chalet-style home or fractional ownerships (one-fifth share) near or on the ski slopes fetches up to on-half million dollars, compared to one-tenth that price for an elegant Victorian fixer-upper in nearby Franklinville. Again, the geographic concentration of the impacts is evident. For the Second Homes Study, from discussions with real estate agents and others, students developed a model that used data on the quality, size, age, and distance from Ellicottville as variables to predict variations in the value of second homes, giving insights into the historical settlement and migration, as well as tourism and recreational home-owner preferences.

An important finding was that there is little social connection between occasional and permanent residents, even though the development of tourism and second homes was responsible for the economic rebirth of Ellicottville. This study found that second homeowners do not participate regularly in the local community of Ellicottville; their principal connection being through use of services such as property management, cleaning, landscaping, or restaurant dining. The reason, owners say, is that the village does not offer enough in the way of everyday shopping and necessities. In addition, they do not stay in Ellicottville often enough to support extra facilities. But allowing new facilities (even were space not at a premium) clearly creates village-level planning dilemmas since a subsequent Studio survey of day-visitors showed that they wanted “nothing more” in the village (apart from the perennial issues of parking, and public services, cash machines, and the like) but are interested to have activities that might be located in the area surrounding the village.
Route 16 Events and Partnership

As explained earlier, the main development challenge for the Studios overall has been how to bring economic benefits to the poorer outlying communities drawing on the success of Ellicottville. For this objective, the focus became the collective potential of the towns and villages along Route 16. Earlier studies of the Route’s largest town of Franklinville indicated that it had great potential for tourism development. While Route 16 highway presents a slightly longer journey to Ellicottville from Buffalo, it is more scenic, and the various towns and villages, already have weekend festivals, restaurants, golf courses, and snow-mobile trails. Successful events include the Falling Leaves Regatta, Heritage Days, Sleigh Bell Festival, and an Ice Fishing Derby with as many as 10,000 visitors attending the area’s annual Maple Festival. Studios cataloged these and many other activities and suggested other activities that might be bundled to provide the threshold needed for self-sustaining tourism development.

It is rather difficult to separate the contribution of the Studios from the efforts of the various communities and organizations, notably the Chamber of Commerce in Franklinville and the Mayor’s Office in Delevan. The Studios were certainly instrumental in the formalization of the Route 16 Partnership—initially an informal arrangement between interested organizations and businesses along the highway (Peters, 2010). It was soon realized that the small local tax base and the large geographic size of the Route 16 Corridor made it very difficult for the fledgling Partnership to effectively promote the potential or even exploit existing opportunities. One Studio (influenced by a student who had previously been an AmeriCorps volunteer) examined whether incorporation as a nonprofit organization could provide the Partnership with the necessary institutional infrastructure (e.g., a dedicated staff, revenue streams, and corporate structure) to capitalize on opportunities and promote the region in an effective and organized way, “building capacity for community collaboration.” In 2009, the Partnership filed Articles of Incorporation facilitating funding from the New York State and Federal agencies. The Partnership initiated several events to unite their towns, including the “Sweet Sixteen” charity bicycle tour to raise funds for local soup kitchens, and a 35 mile Garage Sale from Delevan to Olean with an accompanying barbecue-cooking competition between the volunteer Fire Stations along the highway (see Figure 6). Flower-decorated bicycles became a unifying theme of Route 16.

Events, such as the Garage Sale/Fireman’s BBQ, provided students an opportunity to assess the social and economic impact of “development projects” and evaluate how the income from these efforts is distributed. Several observations relevant to the timing and organization are of interest. Garage sales bring many visitors to the area in search of unusual and inexpensive artifacts. They also offer relatively cheap goods for local households (who would otherwise not be able to afford many of the items sold) as well as providing income to vendors, most coming from the local communities, who empty old barns and attics. Since the sales begin early, local households obtain choice items at low garage-sale prices. The more prosperous customers arriving hours later from Buffalo and suburbs expecting to spend considerably more (around $60) are disappointed; the most interesting items are already sold at substantially lower prices (less than $15). This disappointment reduces the likelihood of out-of-town visitors returning the following year for the sale. Thus, there is a trade-off between the savings to local households and the potential income from sales to vendor households (see Figure 7).
Conclusions: Towards a Continuing Contribution

The goal for the Studios is to help promote more general development including improved housing and living conditions through tourism-oriented recommendations. The above discussion has offered a number of anecdotes as to the possible and potential success of the studios, but it would be difficult to identify more substantive change (such as shifts in housing data), even when one might undertake a plausible impact assessment. Although there was clear momentum in tourism development building over the first few Studios, the post-2008 recession reversed this progress. Several retail and tourist-oriented establishments including the art gallery and pizza parlor in Franklinville have closed and more houses are on the market. Sadly, regular casual observation along Route 16 suggests that, with the exception of a few opportunistic highway repairs, the towns and villages are still in relative decline. In contrast, however, the condition of properties and mobile home parks closer to Ellicottville appear to be improving. Beyond the recession, there are both opportunities and threats as the area is a candidate for “fracking.” Olean (see Figure 1) had one of the first oil wells in the United States. The ongoing extension of Route 219 towards Salamanca (see Figure 1) will facilitate traffic either to, or possibly past, the area.

In terms of achieving the goal of using tourism to promote development, the principle problems—apart from national and regional economic crises—are those of continuity, implementation, and financing. For the Studio itself, continuity is only partially achieved because of alternate semester schedule, and other interruptions, including the shifting sands of departmental objectives and politics. Development issues are far more challenging in the communities themselves. Institutions in small localities such as the Partnership are quite fragile and depend on the enthusiasm of a few members; they are affected also by the economic fortunes of individuals and businesses, political differences and changes of leadership. Without some permanent local staff and support, such as that in Ellicottville, it is difficult for them to sustain activities.

While the Studios have provided some continuity for the Route 16 Partnership, this is insufficient, given that they span only a three-month semester each year. To achieve greater continuity, an alternative approach of a “planning bus” is being explored. Modeled on the familiar library buses, the bus could be equipped with computers, data access, mapping facilities, and staffed by students as volunteers or interns on a year-round basis. It could spend perhaps two to three days monthly in each small town and village along the Route 16. This could help individuals, communities, and groups of communities such as the Partnership, and others to organize, raise funds, advertise events and also assist individuals and businesses in the preparation of planning applications, site selection, architecture and urban design services, grant-writing, and the like. Faculty would assist students with more technical issues, such as impact statements, and analysis supportive of community interests. This would institutionalize less intense but continuing support for these communities and provide a variant on the current student Studio experience.

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References


**Program Note**

**Solving Housing Challenges: Examples from a Rural Non-Profit Housing Agency**

Char Thompson

**Abstract**

Since 1970, the Foundation for Rural Housing, Inc. (FRHI), has addressed housing issues in rural Wisconsin. This non-profit has been creative, cooperative and persistent in working with the very poor and some of the more challenging housing problems. This article focuses on the innovative programs FRHI has initiated and provides insightful suggestions for successful rural housing programs.

**Key words:** non-profit, rural housing

**Background**

Solving today’s affordable housing needs creates challenges for communities everywhere. Rural places have unique challenges, including scale and distances. In 1970, the first statewide housing cooperative was formed in Wisconsin to address these challenges. Created by the Wisconsin Rural Electric Cooperative Association (WECA), the Wisconsin Rural Housing Cooperative—now the Foundation for Rural Housing, Incorporated (FRHI)—the agency remains focused on providing safe, decent, and affordable housing for very low-income households in rural Wisconsin.

As stated in their mission statement (see http://www.wisconsinruralhousing.org/), FRHI works to:

- Assist low-income families obtain adequate, safe and sanitary housing.
- Help low-income households acquire appropriate water and wastewater services.

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