

*Informing rural tourism development
through the
rapid rural appraisal method:
Insights from Northwestern Canada*



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Overview

- Describe Rapid Rural Appraisal
- Introduce the context of the study area
- Outline the study design
- Show observations
 - Tourism development
 - RRA method
- Discuss realities of application and share insights on use in other contexts



- “Partly due to the flaws in conventional approaches, there has been a recent rapid expansion in participatory methods and approaches. These began with the development of data gathering methods which came to be known as *rapid rural appraisal*”

(Pretty and Vodouhe, 1998)



Rapid rural appraisal (RRA)

- Emerged in late 1970's
- Response to disadvantages of brief visits to rural areas by professionals, and limitations of large-scale, long drawn out surveys
- Used in disciplines such as health, agriculture, international development, anthropology
- Little documentation of method in tourism development



Principles of RRA (Chambers, 1990)

- Learning rapidly and progressively with flexible methods;
- Offsetting biases of “quick and dirty” methods or “long and costly” ones
- Learning from and with rural people, face to face
- Triangulating methods
- Optimizing trade-offs between quantity, relevance, accuracy and timeliness
- Critical self awareness



Menu of methods in RRA

- Secondary data
- Direct observation
- DIY
- Key informants
- Semi structured interviews
- Chain interviewing
- Key indices
- Key probes
- Workshops and brainstorming
- Group walks
- Mapping
- Aerial photographs
- Diagrams
- Ranking and scoring
- Quick quantification
- Timelines
- Stories, case studies
- Short, simple surveys
- Rapid report writing in the field



Strong potential to assist rural tourism development?



NTRIP Study Team, May 2006

- Rural areas often have limited research resources
- Want information that is timely, information rich and locally specific
- Link to train students on research methods



Study context

- **Vancouver Island, Victoria & the Gulf Islands**
Ranked North America's Top Island to visit >
- **Vancouver, Coast & Mountains**
Perfect for both outdoor and urban adventures >
- **Thompson Okanagan**
Famed for its vineyards, orchards, lakes and beaches >
- **Kootenay Rockies**
Canada's Mountain Playground >
- **Cariboo Chilcotin Coast**
A land without limits steeped in adventure and history >
- **Northern British Columbia**
A vast, spectacular wilderness waiting to be explored >





Status of rural areas



- Rural areas predominantly resource-based (Fishing, Forestry, Mining, Agriculture)
- Resource-based industries in decline
- Rural depopulation
- Seeking diversification options



Status of rural tourism development

- Provincial efforts to “double tourism revenues”
- Effort to see each region benefit
- Concentration of tourism in “Big three” or Victoria, Vancouver and Whistler
- Interest in tourism development in rural areas but lack of capacity, support systems and resources



Study design

- Purpose
 - To pilot the RRA methodology in a rural context and to compare receptivity and results to alternate methods of identifying tourism assets
- 3 week study tour
- University study team (9 people)
- Trained in multiple methods
- Practiced methods on route
- 5 day intense RRA in Taylor, B.C.



Methods employed



- Secondary data
- Impressions in other communities
- Key informant interviews
- Chain interviews
- Site visits
- Host families
- Journaling
- Video/digital images
- Mapping
- Report in the field



Findings – on tourism

- Key assets for product development
- No shortage of ideas (or enthusiasm) among residents
- Lack of understanding of how to proceed
- Unclear on available resources
- Divergent perspectives
- Tourism not on the radar (booming oil and gas industry)
- Tourism myths abundant
- Acute labour shortages impacting the industry





Findings- RRA method



- Intensive study
- Cumulative learning
- Methods inform one another
- Importance of flexibility
- Need to speak “rural”
- Difficult to reach saturation of data
- Massive quantity of data – but rich insights
- Difficult to share entirely with community
- In field report writing was useful for researchers and community



Comparison to workshop method

Workshop

- Key informants and community leaders identified prior to
- Residents work with limited outside perspective or background in tourism development
- Action plan incorporates limited options
- Tangible next steps and roles outlined
- Little support for implementation

RRA

- Interview wider spectrum of people in the community
- Wider range of opportunities identified
- Encouraged dialogue on tourism in broader community
- Helped build capacity
- SWOT and recommendations provided but no action plan
- Little support for implementation



Insights on further use

- Recommended for rural areas in early stages of development
- Strong way to develop links between University-community partners
- Excellent applied research experience for students and policy makers
- Consider time frame carefully – what is rapid?
- Clarify role of the process and engage community in presentation/discussion on results
- Incorporate participatory approach to succeed in implementation



Closing thoughts

- “The focus is less on what we learn, and more on how we learn and with whom. This implies new roles for development professionals, leading to a whole new professionalism with new values, methods and behaviour”.

Pretty and Vodouhe



Questions?

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Resources

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