

USING THE CASE STUDY METHOD TO EXPLORE THE POTENTIALS AND PITFALLS OF FAST FERRY IN ROCHESTER, NY

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Abstract

Tourism is the largest service sector industries worldwide and is viewed as a vehicle for addressing pressing economic problems in society. Yet, for all its economic potentials, tourism development is a haven for social and ecological concerns. This paper used the case study method to examine the potentials and pitfalls of fast ferry development and service in Lake Ontario, connecting the cities of Rochester, NY with Toronto, ON. Through a method that applied a series of interviews and document analyses, environmental and social concerns were expressed and addressed by stakeholders. The results showed that stakeholders were favorably predisposed to the project as a means of stimulating the local economy while at the same time bringing to the forefront the challenges of using the case study method.

1.0 Introduction

With the sharp downturn in manufacturing jobs in recent years, many governments and investors are turning to service sector initiatives to revitalize the economy. Foremost among these service sector activities is tourism development. This is likely influenced by the fact that worldwide, tourism is expected to generate \$ 5,490.4 billion in economic activity (total demand) by the end of 2004, growing to \$9,557.5 billion by 2014 and demand is expected to grow by 4.5% annually between 2004 and 2014 (World Travel and Tourism Council 2004). Corresponding employment is estimated at 214,697,000 jobs in 2004, representing 8.1% of total employment, growing to 259,930,000, 8.6% of total employment by 2014. In the United States alone tourism is expected to generate \$1,460.1 billion in economic activities and creating 16,688,100 jobs, 11.9% of total employment, by the end of 2004, growing to \$2730.6 billion and accounting for 19,579,800, jobs, 12.6% of

total employment by 2014 (World Travel and Tourism Council 2004). Tourism is the second largest industry in New York State and a major factor in the Rochester economy.

The City of Rochester and its surrounding region has been faced with economic distress since the early 1990s when Kodak and other corporations, in an attempt to compete within their markets, began a process of restructuring that resulted in loss of jobs (McLean's 1993). Given, that the region is adjacent to Lake Ontario and its proximity to the Finger Lakes, tourism was looked to as a potential source for reinvigorating the regional economy (LaBella Associates 2001). Analysis indicates that the region's leaders were correct in viewing tourism as a potential contributor to economic vitality. Mechanisms were needed to bring people (tourists) to the Rochester, Finger Lakes and Genesee Regions of New York. Canada was considered a primary source of tourists. Entrepreneurs began to analyze the possibility of recasting an old transportation system, a ferry. Ferries plied the waters of Lake Ontario from Rochester to various points in Canada from the 1880's. From 1915 until 1950 ferries carried automobiles between Coburg, ON and Rochester, NY. However, no ferries have visited the Port of Rochester for the past 54 years (Chaisson 2003).

In August 2001 the Rochester entered a lease agreement with Canadian American Transportation Systems, LLC, a limited liability company existing under the laws of the State of Delaware, to provide ferry service between Rochester and Toronto. The service will be "high speed", operating at over 50 miles/hour, accommodating approximately 750 walk-on passengers, up to 220 cars and up to 10 trucks and busses (Canadian American Transportation Systems [CATS] 2004). More than just a method of transportation, the venture is expected to be a unique travel experience, offering amenities and ambience worthy of a mini cruise ship. Importantly, the 2.25 hour port-to-port trip will act as a virtual bridge, connecting the national highway systems of Canada and the U.S., and acting as a catalyst for economic development, tourism activity and job growth on both sides of the border (Rochester Environment).

Greater Rochester is an 11 county region with a population of 1.2 million. During 2001, over 1.4 million people visited Rochester, a decline over 2000 that reflects national trends of decreased corporate travel (Rochester Business Alliance). These visitors expended \$226 million. The Greater Toronto region is an area with a population of approximately 5.2 million and attracted 16.3 million visitors who spent C\$3.5 billion/U.S.\$2.4 billion in 2002 (Economist 2003).

The demographic disparity of these cities is apparent, thus, there is a long-standing concern over Rochester's ability to compete on a level playing field. Despite this concern, in 1990 a local Waterfront Revitalization Program (LWRP) was adopted by the City of Rochester as part of its comprehensive plan, and in 1991 the city adopted the River Harbor District into its zoning code (LaBella Associates 2001). This was intended to preserve and enhance the recreational character of the harbor at the mouth of the Genesee River and encourage tourism in the area. This, along with the ferry initiative, has resulted in the realignment and construction of infrastructure including roads, marinas parking facilities and a ferry terminal. However, the researchers believe that it is not enough to build terminals and commission state of the art vessels to transport passengers and cargo. A city as small as Rochester, competing with other large cities, is forced to devise strategies to capitalize on its attractive resources through careful packaging.

1.1 Rochester's Tourism Product

Water, entertainment, sports, culture and family-oriented tourist attractions are fast becoming the major draws for the leisure tourist. Both Rochester and Toronto, but particularly Rochester with a less developed tourism sector, have a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on these and other tourism-related development opportunities as well as convention and conferencing possibilities to transform the cities into destinations that can bring new leisure visitors as well as business travelers to the cities from the surrounding regions, other parts of Canada and the U.S. and overseas (City of Rochester Comprehensive Plan). The Great Lakes Information Network recognizes outdoor recreation in the Great Lakes Region as a way of life. They offer outstanding tourism and recreation opportunities, ranging from pristine wilderness activities in national parks to waterfront beaches in major cities. A well-defined four-season climate supports many types of

recreation from ice fishing, skiing and snowmobiling in the winter to golf, fishing, boating and swimming in the summer. The eight Great Lakes states have about 3.7 million registered boats, or about one-third of the nation's total. The commercial and sport fishing industry is collectively valued at more than \$4 billion annually. Diving on shipwrecks is a growing Great Lakes recreation pursuit, thanks to many underwater preserves and parks throughout the lakes (Great Lakes Information Network 2002).

Birding is becoming a contributor to tourism around Lake Ontario. Lake Ontario is on several major flyways, including waterfowl, hawks and songbirds (Birding.com 2004; West 2004; New York State Department of Environmental Conservation 2004). Economic figures indicate that in New York State alone there were 2.9 million birders, approximately 4,700 full and part-time jobs were supported by birding, \$219 million was generated in retail sales, and \$15 million was generated in state sales tax in 1998 (Dunn 1998). Specifically, both the Rochester/Genesee/Finger Lakes regions of the United States and the City of Toronto and Ontario Province in Canada offer many outdoor recreation, cultural, and historical tourist opportunities (Greater Rochester Visitors Association 2004), (Toronto Convention and Visitors Association 2004), (Ministry of Tourism and Recreation 2004), (Finger Lakes Tourism 2004).

Building on the many recreation opportunities of the area, a local summit of tourism officials was convened in January 2004 to coordinate and share strategies. One potential tourist opportunity identified, but not related to outdoor recreation was shopping as a main attraction for Canadians. Other tourist attractions mentioned were golf, wineries, and the many summer festivals. Additionally, the Fast Ferry nicknamed "The Breeze" is also considered a tourist attraction in its own right (Champagne 2004).

1.2 Ecological and Social Issues

It is apparent that Rochester is fully energized to take advantage of the economic potentials inherent in this ferry project. One common denominator in the proposed development appears to be Lake Ontario, a resource shared by both cities. As such, the ferry project has reenergized the environmental debate and brought the social concerns into focus. Among the key questions are the issues of air pollution, particulate matter exhaust,

wake damage, wildlife impact, noise pollution, and safety (Regan 2004). The Great Lakes with 20% of the world's surface fresh water, is recognized as one of the region's, and for that matter, one of the world's most important natural resources. It offers outstanding tourism and recreation opportunities ranging from pristine wilderness activities to highly developed recreation. Yet for all its tourism potential, size and power, the Great Lakes is fragile. Over the course of history, many types of pollution have inflicted damage and reduced recreation opportunities in the region (Great Lakes Information Network 2002).

For Rochester to take advantage of its harbor resources and to accommodate the Fast Ferry service to Toronto, it had a legal obligation to develop the harbor in accordance with the Clean Water Act of 1977. A Section 404 permit was required from the U.S. Arms Corps of Engineers for disposal of dredged material. The dredging was necessary along the west side of the Genesee River to accommodate the berth of the ferry and other large commercial passenger vessels expected to dock along the river wall. All dredging within the river wall was done hydraulically to minimize turbidity to the greatest extent possible (LaBella Associates 2001).

The Port of Rochester Harbor Improvement and Ferry Terminal Project is subject to the requirements of the NYS department of State (NYSDOS), Coastal Zone Management Program, which provides for the management of the State's coastal resources with the intent of balancing economic development with preservation. The policies are intended to permit the beneficial use of waterfront resources while preventing the loss of living resources, diminution of open space or public access to the waterfront, shoreline flooding and erosion, impairment of scenic beauty, or permanent adverse changes to ecological systems. The NYS Coastal Zone Management Program is carried out in partnership with local governments who have the primary responsibility for directly regulating land use (LaBella Associates 2001).

In addition to the environmental issues, social concerns were also addressed. The project area is located in north central Monroe County, in an area commonly known as Charlotte community within the city of Rochester. The Genesee River and the Town of Irondequoit to the east, the commercial corridor of Lake Avenue and

residential neighborhoods to the west, Ontario Beach Park to the north, border the port area and residential uses at the south end. Also, on the east side of the Genesee River are the U.S. Coast Guard facilities, several private marinas and commercial businesses. Beyond these shoreline uses, areas of single family and multifamily residences commonly known as Summerville (Town of Irondequoit). The waterfront area is predominantly recreational in use (LaBella Associates). The proposed project does not involve physical alteration to neighborhoods within the Charlotte community nor will it result in isolation of portions of any neighborhood, ethnic group, or low-income community. Historically the community was established through its relationship to Lake Ontario and the commercial navigation industry. At the turn of the twentieth century Charlotte was known as the "Coney Island" of Western New York. Parts of the area experienced a brief period of industrial use due to its proximity to the river and railroad tracks. Coal was a major export to Canada. However, the industry faded by the 1930s. Neighborhoods and business owners believe that the port site, in its vacant state, had been a barrier to progress. Both the residential and business communities have long supported the redevelopment of the area and have actively participated in all local planning efforts (LaBella Associates 2001).

Thus, the purpose of this study was to present an overview of the Fast Ferry Initiative in Rochester, NY, analyze the potentials and pitfalls of such development, economically, socially, and ecologically, report the results of the fast ferry development process, based on a case study, and examine the advantages and disadvantages of using the case study method in this research project.

2.0 Methodology

The case study being reported is a research project carried out between 2001 and 2003. This method was chosen because, according to Coolican (1996), Henderson & Bialeschki (1995) and Sayer (1992) case studies are particularly good if an evaluator is examining one situation and does not wish to compare it to another situation, individual, or group. Case studies are both specific and broad as they capture many variables and include descriptions of history and context (Henderson & Bialeschki 1995). The research site is Rochester, NY. The data gathering process included interviews of stakeholders including, local residents, students, visitor association representatives, small business owners, and

government representatives; and a review of various documents. The case study process generated large amounts of data from these sources. The data was coded in order to develop an understanding of information derived, and utilized the “loose networks” (to discover those ideas from interviewees and documents that had links between them) and “tension statements” (a device to explore certain properties of those ideas that were specifically of interest to the researcher and subjects) (Gough & Scott 2000). Network is defined as a collection of nodes (Miles & Huberman 1994) or an extension of the familiar business of putting things into categories (Bliss, Monk & Ogborn 1993). Loose networks propose that networks can be used to promote analysis of any qualitative data that falls into the middle between two extremes. These extremes are, on one hand, data that are clearly idiosyncratic and unique (such as description of a particular event – in this case the fast ferry Project), and on the other hand, data that fall un-conspicuously into simple groupings (such as solutions to problems that are correct, incorrect, or incomplete (Gough & Scott 2000). In addition, elements of Henderson & Bialeschki’s (1995) seven-step evaluative research process were used as follows: 1) identifying the focus of the investigation; 2) outline what needs to be studied; 3) select appropriate measurement tools; 4) develop a plan to collect the data considering effectiveness, efficiency, budget and timeframe; 5) collect all the data; 6) interpret the data; and 7) make recommendations for the study.

3.0 Results

One purpose of the study was to present an overview of the Fast Ferry Initiative in Rochester. The data shows that the concept is not a novel one. Rochester had a rich history in the shipping industry, primarily for industrial purposes. This new initiative is merely a shift to the service sector, with an emphasis on tourism. However, the development process was complicated because of the multiple interest groups involved (multiple government agencies, private investors, multinational governments and investors, etc.).

With regards to the economic, social and ecological potentials and pitfalls, the results of the study showed that stakeholders such as the Visitor Association, Convention and Visitors Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Small Business, Association, Mayor’s Office, and the Renaissance 2010 Tourism Committee,

are favorably predisposed to the Fast Ferry Project. They concede there are risks involved; however, they are confident that the marketing plan dubbed “Two Nation Vacation” will be effective. Documents such as the environmental impact study reveal environmental concerns such as the disturbance of wildlife habitat, pollution, and wake damage. Environmental advocates expressed concern over the limited airing of the environmental issues. However, concerns were assessed and appropriately addressed by the EPA, which approved the environmental impact study. Local residents were more concerned about social issues such as traffic congestions, increased crime and overcrowding. These issues are being partially addressed with new road construction. College students, who represent a part of the transient market, were intrigued by the novelty of the Fast Ferry and would be interested in the initial experience, but were not absolutely sure if they would become repeat customers. The results also showed a potential area of conflict stemming from the fact that the west side of the developments site is owned by Rochester (Democratic) and the east side is owned by the town of Irondequoit (Republican), as well as logistical challenges associated with the cross-border issues as outlined in Figure 1 and evidenced by media coverage, particularly in Rochester, as outlined in Table 1.

The final purpose of the study was to examine the advantages and disadvantages of using the case study method for this study. Since there is no universally agreed view of the coding process in qualitative research, the researchers did not begin the process with a definitive approach in mind. Thus, the sequence of research activities was unclear. The researchers did not bring to the research setting a priori construction of the social setting of the research (Lincoln & Guba 1985) because of the uncertainties surrounding the Fast Ferry Initiative. Despite the initial challenges, the case study

Table 1.—Results of Rochester Press Coverage

Year	Total	Positive	Neutral	Negative
1998	3	1	2	0
1999	1	0	0	1
2000	3	2	1	0
2001	2	1	1	0
2002	26	10	6	10
2003	22	13	3	6

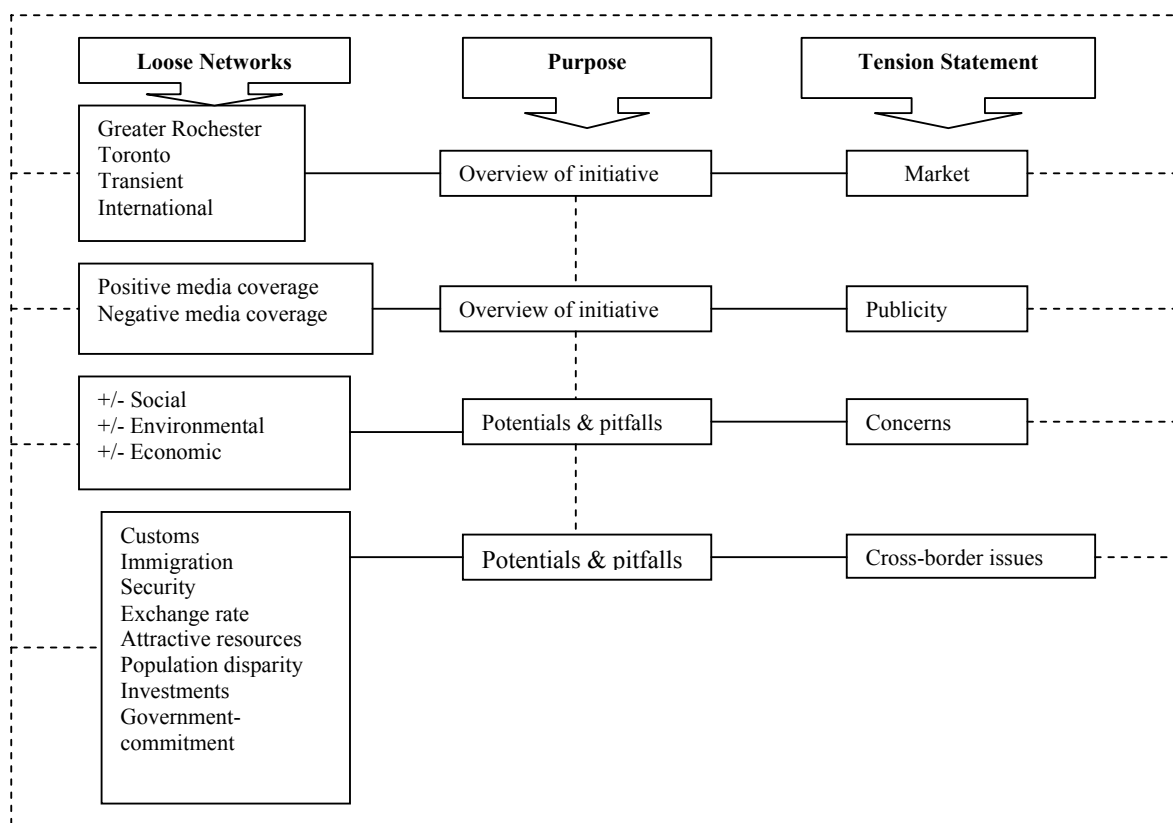


Figure 1.—Relationship between loose networks and tension statement and purpose of the study (solid lines show a direct link, broken lines show that all the elements are interrelated)

method allowed the researchers to collect large amounts of data without prescribing to a definition of what was meaningful. This approach allowed a much easier fit for the “loose network” and “tension statement” concepts (Gough & Scott 2000). The seven-step process of Henderson and Bialeschki (1995) allowed the researcher to later add a systematic structure and process to the research.

4.0 Discussion and Conclusions

It was concluded that organizations, particularly those directly connected with the tourism product, were more supportive of the Fast Ferry project, host residents who were concerned about the social carrying capacity of their community expressed the greatest concern. College students viewed the project as a novelty idea, probably because they are transient and are likely to relocate once they have graduated from college. With the dual ownership and political control of the development site, it is evident that there will be a need for collaboration in the greater Rochester area. However, this is of greater concern with regard to cross-border issues. An

examination of ferry-related headlines in the major Rochester newspaper suggested the ferry initiative was a one sided affair. For example, “Toronto holds off helping to fund ferry, 7/11/02; Canada’s help sought for ferry 10/1/02; Ferry Canadian link unclear 10/23/02; Ferry ‘not real’ yet to Canadians, 1/5/03; Toronto ferry stop has rough edges, 15/03; No sign of ferry port at Toronto, 7/31/03. One could argue that Rochester has more to gain since its waterfront tourism is underdeveloped, and as such needs to be the aggressor in moving the project forward. Toronto, on the other hand, has a thriving waterfront tourism product, and as such, its development efforts need only be peripheral. In order to ease public tension, all parties need to air these and other concerns, such as security, customs, immigration, the level of Canadian investment, and the relative attractiveness and competitiveness of Rochester as a tourist destination.

Recommendations for further research include strengthen the reliability and validity of the qualitative data with quantitative data. The researchers for this study should continue to collect data to see if or how the views of

stakeholders have evolved. The ferry launch date is set for June 18, 2004. This would enable the researchers to conduct interviews of actual passengers. Other methods of data coding and analysis, for example, pre-coding, where the researcher is itic, rather than emic in nature should be applied (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Expanding data collection in order to reflect a more balanced perspective of media coverage and public sentiments, particularly in Toronto would also enhance the research.

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