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Social movements and tourism-related local action

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ABSTRACT

Social movements often emerge as a response to oppression generated from uncertain economic conditions. This study focuses on the role of HandMade in America, a regional economic development organization, in cultivating the change-agent components of social movements (consciousness-raising, networking, and self-efficacy) in seven tourism-reliant communities. Results from interviews, focus groups, and a review of archived publications indicate that HandMade's distinctive approach cultivates social movement components via its *Visioning and Charrettes*, *Clean, Green and Screen Projects*, *Project and Grants Cycles*, *Annual Cluster Meetings*, and *Ongoing Contact with HandMade*. These important findings force a theoretical debate as to what constitutes a social movement organization and a practical debate for tourism developers to view their efforts in a different light.

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Introduction

Rural tourism experts are often in search of examples of rural tourism development that minimize negative effects of tourism while maximizing positive impacts. This notion has been applied to a number of areas of rural tourism research, including cultural impacts (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009; Griffiths & Sharpley, 2012), agri-tourism (Di Domenico & Miller, 2012; Ohe & Kurihara, 2012; Phelan & Sharpley, 2012; Tew & Barbieri, 2012), rural community behavior and resident attitudes (Davis & Morais, 2004;

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Hwang, Stewart, & Ko, 2012; Kastenholz, Carneiro, Eusébio, & Figueiredo, 2013; Lee, 2013), leadership (Haven-Tang & Jones, 2012), the environment (Ferrari, Mondéjar-Jiménez, & Vargas-Vargas, 2010) and perhaps most relevant to this research, economic and entrepreneurial impacts (McGehee & Kline, 2008; Stevens & Partridge, 2011). When framed in a critical perspective, this means that researchers are looking to expose issues of power differentials, oppression, and inequalities (Tribe, 2006) in order to develop an understanding of alternate world views and political perspectives (Bramwell & Lane, 2014), while enhancing the opportunities for emancipation and economic security (McGehee, 2012). In utilizing a critical perspective, this work contributes to a growing body of tourism research that began with Urry's (1990) classic examination of the 'tourist gaze'. Recent studies in this area have focused on the power relationships amongst tourists, locals, and other members of the tourism system (Cheong & Miller, 2000; Wearing, Wearing, & McDonald, 2010), the manifestation of power through a destination's image (Feighery, 2009; Jenkins, 2003; Soguk, 2003), and amongst the various players in volunteer tourism (Lyons & Wearing, 2008; McGehee, 2012; Wearing, 2001; Wearing & Wearing, 2006). Like many prior studies, this work operates from Foucault's (1977) perspective that power produces realities and knowledge which may lead to oppression. In the geographic region targeted for this study, Western North Carolina, the hegemonic view of economic development emphasizes the value of extractive industries such as forestry and mining that exploit local residents in order to serve the urbanized and powerful places. This has contributed to unsustainable development in the region, impacted the health and well-being of residents, and resulted in high levels of unemployment and environmental destruction (Appalachian State University Center for Economic Research & Policy Analysis, 2013). The contribution of this work is to illustrate how a non-profit organization, HandMade in America, utilizes a process similar to that of social movements to introduce new knowledge about economic development opportunities to this region. In this scenario, it may be observed that such knowledge contributes to the emancipation suggested by Foucault (1977) as a potential result of power. Therefore, by utilizing a critical perspective, this study advances the examination of tourism as a force for progressive change and emancipation (Bramwell & Lane, 2014; Wilson, Harris, & Small, 2008).

A social movement framework was applied to illustrate how this new emancipatory knowledge has been implemented by HandMade in America in Western North Carolina. At the simplest level, modern social movements are "an organized effort by a significant number of people to change (or resist change in) some major aspects of society" (Marshall, 1994, p. 489). Generally, social movements take place outside the mainstream political system. They often consist of people who either choose to be or are excluded from routine institutionalized channels of participation. Examples include the civil rights movements in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s, the more modern, early 21st century examples of the Arab Spring, or efforts to eliminate genetically modified produce from European markets (Goodwin & Asper, 2009). While some may consider the Occupy Wall Street Campaign a social movement (Crane & Ashutosh, 2013; Gleason, 2013), many have countered that it was not in actuality a social movement as it did not have a formalized structure or obvious goals and objectives (Calhoun, 2013; Gitlin, 2013). Social movements may result in collective action anywhere from the supranational level to the local level (Della Porta, Kriesi, & Rucht, 2009). The challenge of applying this theory to rural tourism development lies in identifying organizations that may exhibit the components of a social movement, and contribute to communities similarly, but most likely do not envision themselves as such. This study sets out to examine one potential organization known as HandMade in America as a potential case study of one such organization that contributes to tourism.

Handmade in America

HandMade in America (HandMade) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to "grow handmade economies through craft, cultural heritage and community assets" (HandMade in America, n.d.). The organization got its start in the early 1990s when it received a development grant from the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, which had roots in much of the social justice/war on poverty efforts of the 1960's and 1970's, as did the organization's founder, Becky Anderson. HandMade focused on establishing Western North Carolina as the center of handmade crafts in the United States. To accomplish its mission, HandMade developed the Small Towns Program (STP), a more inclusive version of the U.S. National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Program, which uses a "four point

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