A scenic view of a mountain range with snow patches and a valley. The mountains are rugged and grey, with patches of snow scattered across the slopes and in the valleys. The sky is a pale blue with some light clouds.

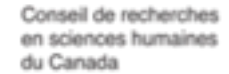
THE FUTURE OF TOURISM WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE KOOTENAY-ROCKIES, BRITISH COLUMBIA (BC), CANADA

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of GUELPH

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Regional Workforce Development Project



- Part of a larger cross-sectoral exploration of workforce development by the Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute/Selkirk College with funding from the Government of Canada's Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) .
- Brings together the region's educators, elected officials, policy makers, economic development practitioners, industry, students, and leading scholars to examine and address rural workforce development.
- Collectively assess comparative workforce development strategies in ways that inform future policy, planning, and action in the region.

Objective

To understand the future workforce needs of the tourism sector in the predominantly rural Kootenay-Rockies region of British Columbia (BC), Canada.

Context





- Home to the Ktunaxa First Nation who occupied the region for thousands of years before European arrival.
- Population of 147,093.
- Older demographic with 53% aged 45 years or older.
- Predominantly rural and covers 58,000 km².
- Primary industries in the region have been resource-based mining and forestry, but tourism has emerged as a significant sector.
- Recognized as a world-class skiing destination, with dramatic mountain ranges, including the Canadian Rockies, glacially fed creeks, rivers and lakes and mineral hot springs. Festivals, arts and cultural activities also attract tourists to the region.
- In 2014, received 2,070,000 overnight visits, generating more than \$654 million in related spending and employed 4,500 people.
- A limited local labour pool: out-migration of youth, aging workforce, declining birthrates.
- A tourism labour shortage equivalent to 440 full-year jobs is expected in the region by 2020

#KOOTROCKS4LIFE



Research Questions

Q.1 How do stakeholders and practitioners conceptualize the cluster?

Q.2 What is the future of the cluster from the perspective of stakeholders and practitioners and how will that future impact the region's workforce?

Q.3 How can we take the experiences from stakeholders and practitioners and use these lessons to collaboratively build the cluster and its workforce in ways that provide competitive advantage for the region?

Study Method

- This research was guided by a five-member advisory group
- Sixteen semi-structured interviews conducted during the Fall of 2017:

CATEGORY	INTERVIEWEES
public bodies and government agencies	2
education and training providers	2
civil society and community organizations	2
managers/owners/staff	10 (4 represented accommodation and food/beverage establishments; 6 represented attractions/activities such as skiing, golf, adventure and cultural tourism).

- There were efforts to ensure businesses of various sizes and structures were included from small family enterprises, to corporate businesses employing hundreds of employees, to First Nations owned and operated.
- Jurisdiction and experience within the sector ranged.

Limitations

- Entry-level workers proved challenging to contact and are underrepresented.
- Interviews did not include the general community perspective of non industry voices.
- This research represents a snapshot of tourism workforce development at a particular time and place. Labour markets are highly influenced by regional variations. The contextual nature of the region impacts the broad usability of research results, although regions with similar characteristics may find some results applicable. Furthermore, there were variations even within the region, so findings should not to be interpreted as generalizations about the entire region.

FINDINGS

“We need people and we’re running out of people.”

(interviewee, tourism business)

While multiple topics arose in the interviews and there were nuances in different communities within the region, it was obvious that workforce development is a critically important topic for the tourism sector in the Kootenay-Rockies.

Q.1 How do stakeholders and practitioners conceptualize the cluster?



Conceptualizations of Tourism

“It’s a good time to be working in tourism.”

(interviewee, tourism organization)

- Tourism is an important growing industry that makes significant economic contributions and employs a large workforce.
- The tourism workforce includes overlapping macro, meso and micro levels.
- The tourism industry culture has traditionally focused on destination marketing and capital projects, and less on workforce development concerns like the recruitment and retention of staff.
- Government policy and priorities have major implications for the tourism industry.
- **Tourism makes social contributions to sustainable rural development and workforce development.**
- **Some participants lacked interest and/or knowledge of tourism policy, but the majority thought understanding the overall tourism sector was important and sought ways to learn more (e.g. sit on committees).**

Q.2 What is the future of the cluster from the perspective of stakeholders and practitioners and how will that future impact the region's workforce?



Technology

“The pace of change is just increasing and increasing. Which makes it very exciting but also a little bit scary.”

(interviewee, tourism organization)

- Technological changes have a significant impact on expectations, service, staffing levels and the nature of the work performed.
- The tourism industry was viewed by participants as a leader in the implementation of new technology, particularly social media.
- Technology will not solve all labour pressures since tourism is essentially an industry based on human interaction.
- The tourism workforce needs to be increasingly technologically literate and needs to be able to react and adapt more quickly.

Attraction and Retention

“The number one issue is always housing.”

(interviewee, tourism business)

- Recruitment and retention in rural, seasonal settings presents extreme challenges.
- Access to affordable housing and the high cost of living is particularly acute in peak seasons where more tourism workers are required, but affordable housing is increasingly limited. Related policy or lack thereof was an issue.
- Tourism operators are progressively recognizing the importance of human resources practices that focus on leadership development and building attractive brand cultures to meet employee values.
- Employers have overcome some challenges relating to working conditions by creating a friendly and pleasant work environment, making training available to employees, various perks, enriching career prospects, enhancing financial packages, and providing challenging and creative jobs for their employees.
- Perceptions of limited salary and advancement opportunities were identified by participants as detrimental to tourism workforce development.
- As demographics shift, there is a need to explore different labour pools. Immigrants and temporary foreign workers were considered. There were policy related concerns.
- Employers will need to use different strategies to attract and keep workers depending on what labour pool they are using.

Education and Training

“I think the biggest problem is that disconnect between theory and practical skills.”

(interviewee, tourism business)

- Education and industry need to be aligned through industry participation in advisory committees and work experience programs for education to be effective. Experiential learning is critical.
- Industry professionalism is reinforced through training and education programs.
- Encourage and support employees' access to flexible online skill-based industry certifications and encourage on-the-job experiential learning.
- The majority of the employees within tourism and hospitality do not pursue post-secondary education.
- Online learning and flexible delivery of modules are important for small businesses in rural communities where access to programs may be challenging.
- A forward thinking, constantly learning orientation is more important than the acquisition of specific skills because of fast-paced nature of technological change.

Q.3 How can we take the experiences from stakeholders and practitioners and use these lessons to collaboratively build the cluster and its workforce in ways that provide competitive advantage for the region?



Recommendations

The advisory group guided the formation of a series of recommendations based on the findings; participants were invited to provide feedback.

The findings and recommendations will be disseminated through a community/industry report.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Education about tourism careers and career trajectories should begin in the K-12 system and continue through post-secondary.

Training should be developed and delivered in partnership with industry, be experiential and be provided through diverse and innovative means that suit the diversity of participant needs. There is a need for life-long learning particularly related to technology, social/creative skills, and understanding policy and industry structure.

TECHNOLOGY

Long-range planning needs to utilize technology strategically for brand development and workforce attraction and retention.

Pro-actively address the potential effects of automation on tourism workforce development.

ATTRACTION AND RETENTION

Tourism employers should consider potential labour pools broadly (Aboriginal youth, retirees, persons with disabilities, international students, etc.) and can improve the attraction and retention of target labour pools by adjusting human resource and leadership practices to suit different motivations.

Stakeholders need to recognize tourism's social contributions to rural development and societal workforce development.

Stakeholders need to openly discuss and explore strategies to address low wages/compensation and other workplace conditions.

COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

Tourism workforce development needs to be studied as a whole, with consideration given to social, cultural, economic and environmental sustainability.

Stakeholders include operators, employees, First Nations, government, educational institutions and the local community.

Collaboration is needed to develop innovative strategies to address the challenges of tourism employment, such as seasonality, affordable housing, and wages/cost of living.


Professional tourism associations should use the strength of their collective voice to communicate tourism's economic and social contributions and continue to advocate for policies that help address the labour challenges faced by the industry.

NEW WAYS OF THINKING & DOING – Part I

The historical mindset was described as **“Don’t share because somebody else might take your idea and then you’re hooped and you're out of it”** whereas the present mindset was described as being centred on questions like, **“How do we collaborate? How do we partner? How do we build off each other? How can we link events or initiatives together to benefit the broader community and ultimately in [our] own businesses as well?”** (*interviewee, tourism organization*).

Tourism was described **“as a vehicle to foster better quality of life and better economic viability for rural areas”** (*interviewee, tourism organization*).



A scenic mountain landscape with a hiker on a rocky trail and a yellow larch tree in the foreground. The hiker is wearing a red jacket and a backpack, walking across large grey rocks. The yellow larch tree is in the middle ground, and the background shows steep, rocky mountains with patches of snow under a clear sky. The foreground features a calm body of water reflecting the scene.

“Growth always has a cap. I think that we’re getting to a point now in tourism that we have to be recognized in sustainability and environmental impacts...I think it is becoming a more responsible industry“

(interviewee, tourism organization).

"It’s not just about developing business or hiring people, it’s about making sure that we do it in a way that is going to be here for our children and our grandchildren”

(interviewee, tourism organization)

NEW WAYS OF THINKING & DOING – Part II

"The regional scale, in particular the regional network of practitioners, is emerging as a vital asset for distilling learning-based competitive advantage. A movement to a more holistic understanding of rural development is also required, where innovation and learning occur in communities and the economy is embedded within a larger socio-economic-ecological system. Innovation, learning, and knowledge flows have become critical to economic outcomes."

(Workforce Project Summary)



In conclusion

Despite the present challenges, and the impossibility of accurately predicting future ones in a rapidly changing world, participants were optimistic about the regional tourism cluster and tourism workforce development.

“People are starting to realize all the pieces of the puzzle that need to come together finally and have a more holistic approach to how we develop tourism.”

(interviewee, tourism organization)

Thank you. Questions?

References

Available in the full paper.

Project funding generously provided by:

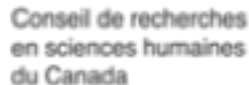


Photo Credits

Title Slide

Title: SPECTACULAR TERRAIN

Description: Get off the beaten track.

Photographer(s): Kevin Landry

Location(s): Golden

Canada Map

www.geology.com/world/canada-satellite-image.shtml
BC and Kootenay-Rockies map

www.comeexplorecanada.com/british_columbia/

Findings Slide

Title: SAPPHERE LAKES

Description: In Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park.

Photographer(s): Kari Medig

Location(s): Nelson

Q1 slide (left to right)

Title: POTTERY

Description: Nelson offers numerous artisan studios.

Photographer(s): Kari Medig

Location(s): Nelson

Title: Downhill Skiing

Description: Kicking Horse Mountain Resort.

Photographer(s):

Location(s): Golden

Title: Fishing

Description: Susan Lake.

Photographer(s): Dave Best

Location(s): Golden

Title: RAFTING

Description: Kicking Horse River in Yoho National Park.

Photographer(s): Ryan Creary

Location(s): Golden

Q2 slide (top to bottom)

Title: St. Eugene Golf Resort Casino

Description: Ktunaxa elder in regalia next to a teepee at St. Eugene Resort.

Photographer(s): Kari Medig

Location(s): Cranbrook

Title: SAPPHERE LAKES

Description: In Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park.

Photographer(s): Kari Medig

Location(s): Nelson

Title: A Magical Setting

Description: Fernie Alpine Resort

Photographer(s): Henry Georgi

Location(s): Fernie

Q3 slide (top to bottom)

Title: NELSON

Description: Performers at Nelson's summer Farmers Market.

Photographer(s): Phil Best

Location(s): Nelson

Title: HISTORIC NELSON

Description: A casual day.

Photographer(s): Steve Ogle

Location(s): Nelson

<http://www.hellobc.com/est-media/301efdac-3a78-48cc-bc9f-ff8698941827/a-3243-Nelson-Fall-Colours.jpg.aspx>

New Ways #2 slide

Title: NATIONAL PARKS

Description: Rockwall Trail in Kootenay National Park.

Photographer(s): Kari Medig

Location(s): National Parks