



Rocking the Boat Gently: Nurturing
Tourism Development Along the Illinois
River

 UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS
EXTENSION
College of Agriculture, Consumer and Environmental Sciences

Rocking the Boat Gently: Nurturing Tourism Development Along the Illinois River

**National Extension
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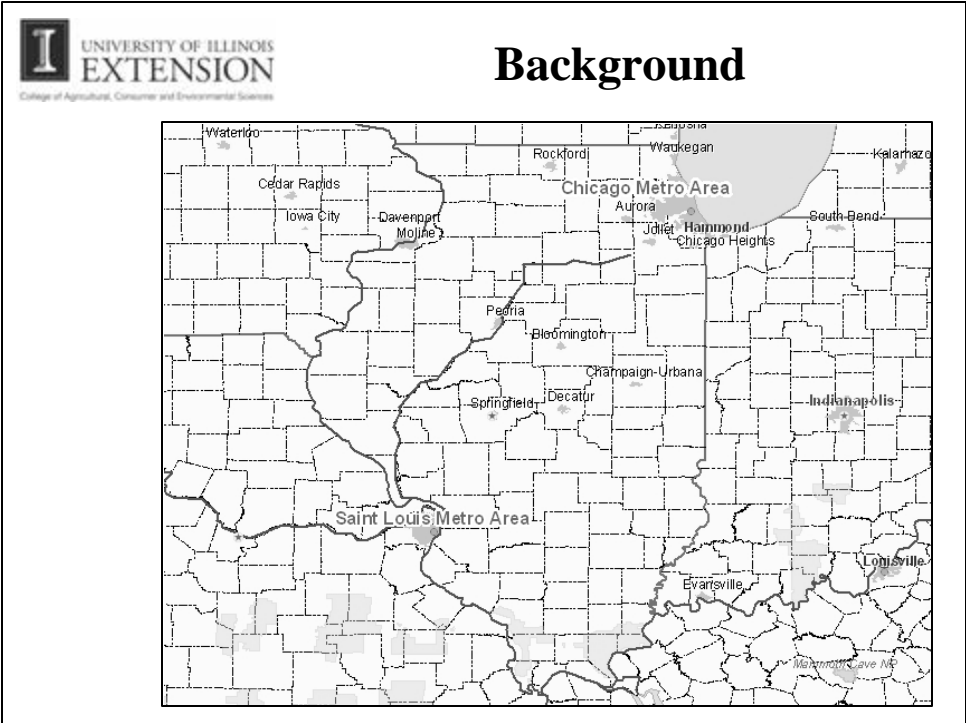
First, a bit of a disclaimer: I've shared parts of this presentation, under a similar title, in a concurrent session at the National Great Rivers Symposium in Godfrey, IL, in April 2005. The topic of the symposium was "A Confluence of Interests: Nature and Tourism In River Cities and Rural Areas."

I've suffered the conceit that it's worth sharing this updated version with Extension colleagues, largely because of my own amazement at just how much of this work seems to lie in helping the people we serve find ways to work together to get things done. At some point earlier in my career I might've thought it was more an issue of good ideas, specific educational content, credible theories, or coefficients of something or other discovered through applied research.

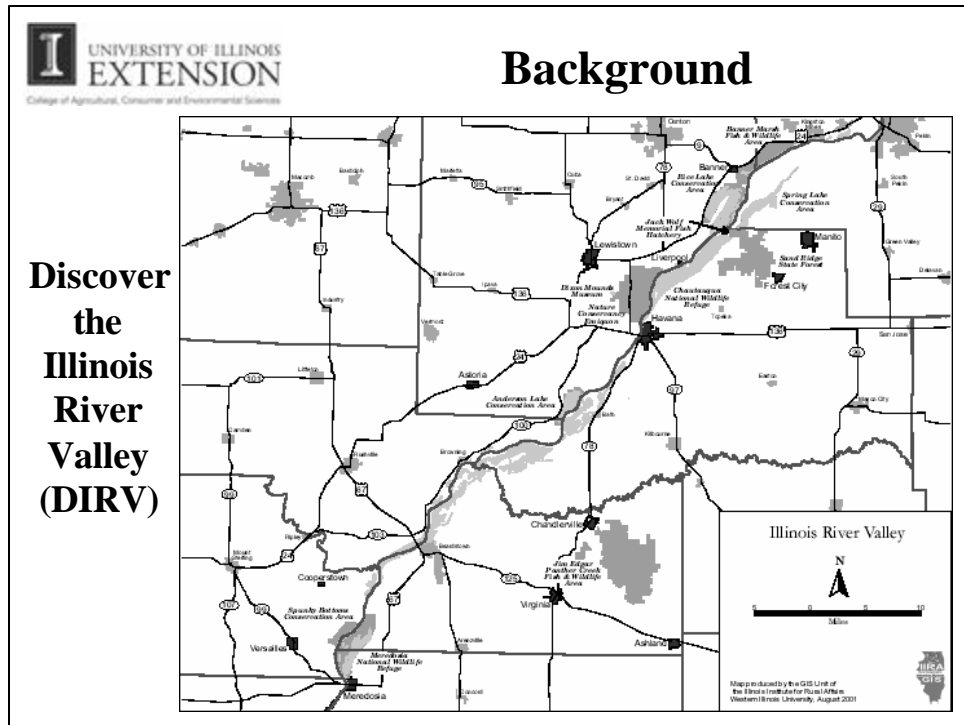
At any rate, this presentation chronicles what is, under the surface, a tourism development planning and implementation process and my efforts to provide education and capacity building therein.

I'll start with some background, describe the process, ongoing implementation, and what seems to lie ahead.

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DIRV--“Discover the Illinois River Valley” (DIRV)


- Initiated by Extension and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), with leadership centered in Fulton County
- Based on the perception that this is an amenity rich area with attractive potential but little economic impact to show for it
- Series of local meetings, recruiting local participation, Aimed at building relationships and development efforts between and among communities and the various conservation and outdoor recreation sites

Culminated in U of I Extension’s Fulton County Unit hiring Visiting Unit Educator in Community & Economic Development, in part to pick up this

It's worth highlighting the catalyst role played by TNC, their project at their Emiquon Preserve, and the efforts of their staff:

- Emiquon land purchase--just under 7,000 acres, PILT to local taxing bodies in Fulton County
- Biodiversity mission plus an expressed interest and staffing in compatible community and economic development
- Advocacy for Extension Community & Economic Development Education programming & staffing
- Brought in nature-tourism expert--Ted Eubanks (Fermata, Inc.) who raised awareness and got some key opinion leaders excited about the potential

Need to inject a little commentary about what colleagues and I have come to call the "Field of Dreams Fallacy“

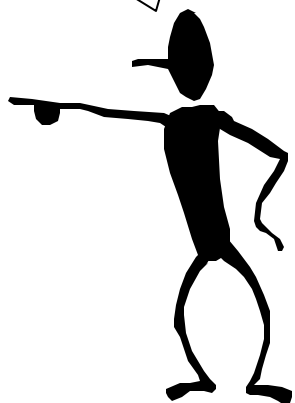


Local Development

“Field of Dreams” Fallacy

- Evidence that it doesn’t work that way
- Area’s conservation sites would have already produced prosperity
- Lingering Challenge: If you do build and they do come, how do you get them to leave their money with you

If you build it, they will come.



You remember in the Movie “Field of Dreams,” the endless line of cars arriving at Kevin Kostner’s rural Iowa farm to see what he built, right?

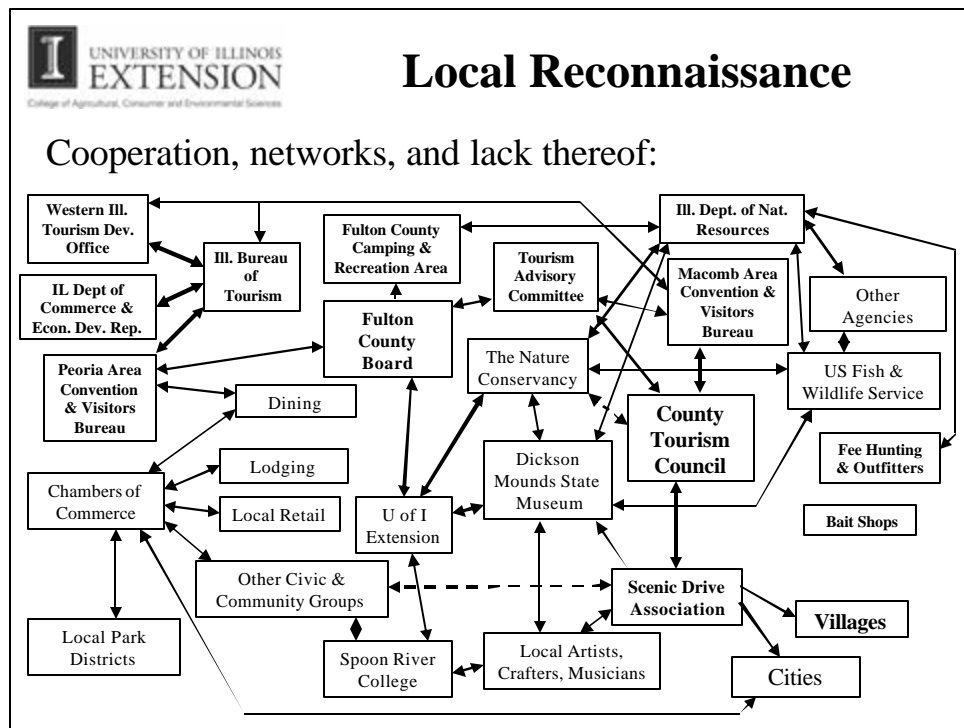
If all of those folks had to drive back to Des Moines or Iowa City for food, lodging, souvenirs, and whatever else they might’ve needed, then the economic benefits are going to accrue back there, not there at his farm. ‘Course that wasn’t particularly about economic development, but . . . It’s worth recognizing that the mere presence of visitors doeth not prosperity make.

Many people are regarding a development such as TNC’s Emiquon Preserve as an unqualified economic benefit, one without any need on our parts for local development or follow-through, one that doesn’t need any more thoughtful of a strategy than “If you build it, they will come.”

People need to hear the whole of Ted’s message about, as he calls it, “The Business of Nature.” The idea of business and economic development around Nature-based and outdoor recreation tourism has to fall on fertile ground, soil that’s ready to receive it.

One of the tasks that falls to those of us working on the local level to help the communities we serve to realize that potential for increased prosperity from Nature-based and outdoor recreation tourism, . . . One of the tasks is fostering both receptiveness to the idea and capacity for implementation at the local level.

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So what about the “soil” in the county I serve? What about local tourism development capacity in Fulton County? Was it ready? Fertile ground to respond to opportunity?

This diagram attempts to capture some of the impressions that I gathered as I worked to get to know the tourism landscape in Fulton County. Briefly, I found:

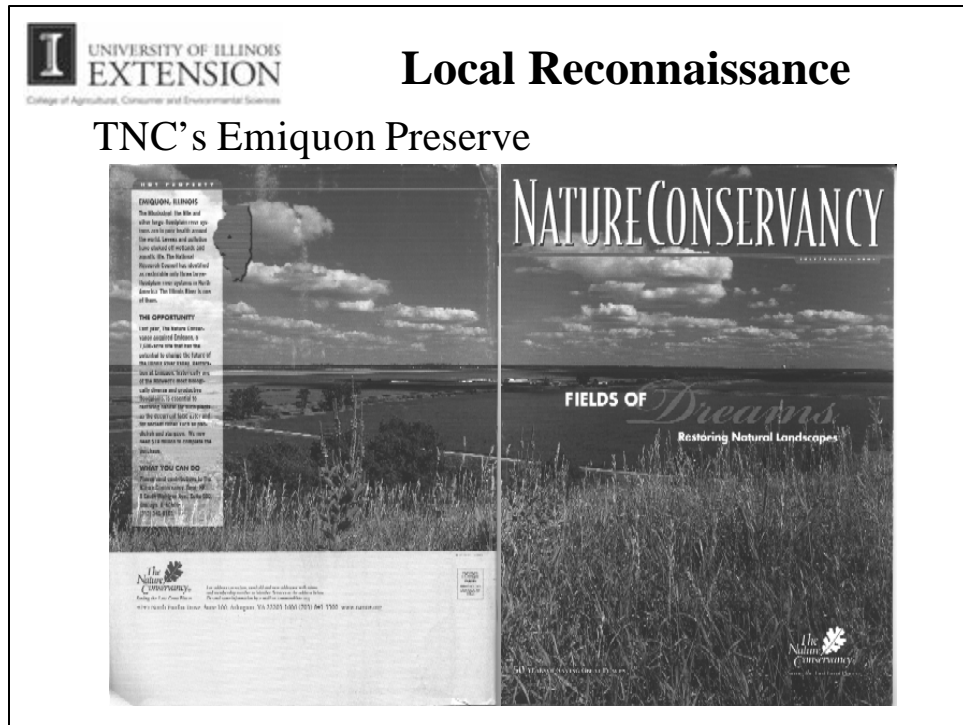
- Strong and close existing ties/linkages in some areas, between some groups.
- Some relationships fractured and characterized by conflict and animosity, a willingness to nurse old wounds and past hurts
- Linkages and ties that maybe should have been in place were absent, neglected, or maybe just invisible to my “naked” eye.

Obviously, my diagram is not exhaustive, but it would be exhausting for all of us if I tried to elaborate on all of what’s embedded here.

The diagram also doesn’t convey much about the capacity, vision, and change resistance of the organizations involved.

I’d like to share one anecdote and a few related observations that I think help convey some of the complexity and difficulty in fully realizing the potential of our tourism assets.

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To set the stage, we go back to The Nature Conservancy's Emiquon project:

- Just under 7,000 acres in Fulton County, PILT to local taxing bodies, an expressed interest and and staffing in compatible community and economic development

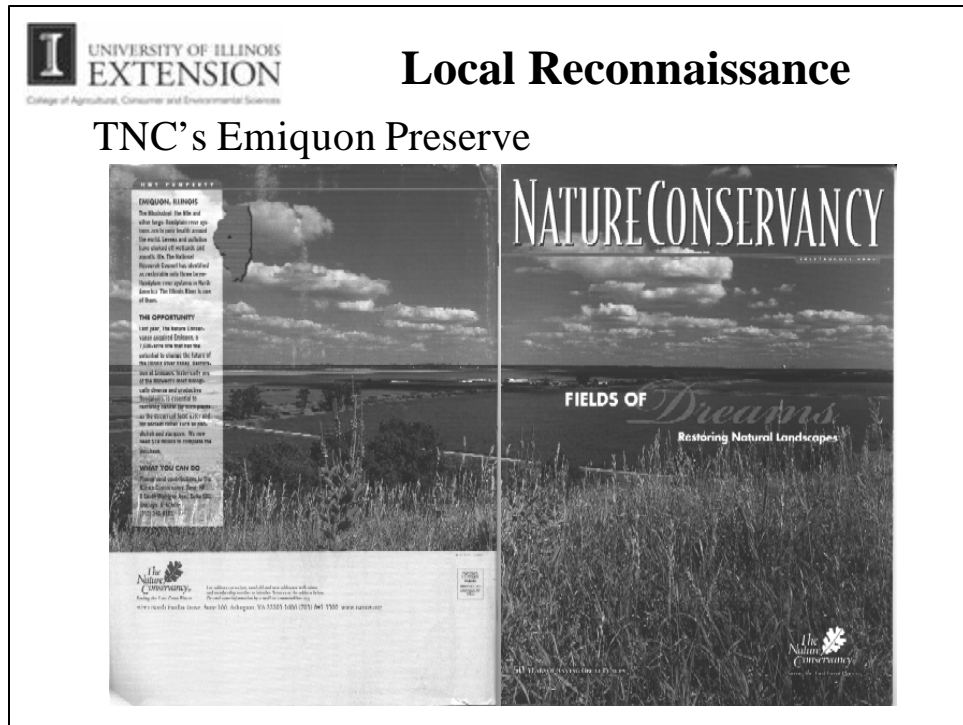
And a couple important things about the kind of attention this project in Fulton County had gotten:

- Circulation of Nature Conservancy's July/August 2001 Magazine, 38,000 in Illinois, roughly 1 million nationwide.
- Related project downstream on Nature Valley Granola box

So, how did the local organization that occupies the “institutional space” called County Tourism Council respond?

When TNC's representative attended one of their meetings (after even paying them membership dues), they turned her away, saying something like “Our organization is for Fulton County Businesses!”

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As I've gotten to know the people involved, I've had to conclude that this reaction represents a clash that was part in "cultural" and in part personality driven.

It was a latte-swilling, high-energy, professional in her 40s with a laptop, a cell phone, a PDA, lots of new ideas, and a "Let's get things done!" attitude bumping into the "old guard," 20-30 years her seniors, who started the scenic drive decades ago, put out this little brochure, and are working on a website—thank you very much!

What would it mean personally and organizationally to have to share the turf they'd held for decades with someone like that?!

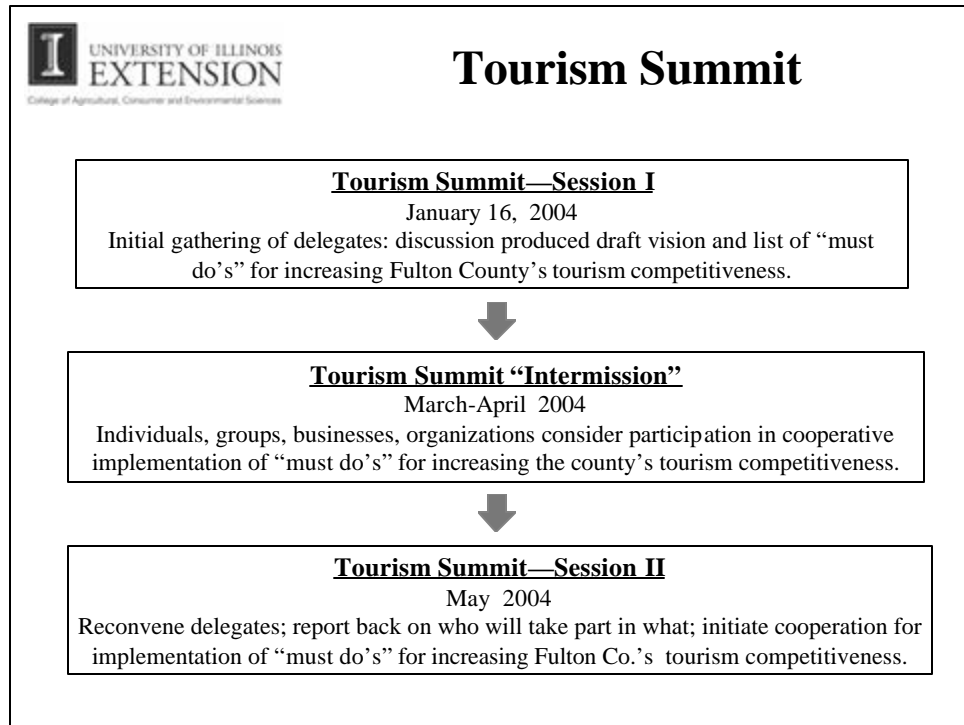
So, I think, it was just simply easier just to ask the TNC rep. to leave and tighten down the blinders, getting back to the modest annual projects they'd been doing for years.

What did this evidence of capacity suggest about whether there was "fertile soil" for innovative asset-based tourism development efforts to germinate and take root?

There was subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle, sort of "Type A" pressure from key opinion leaders who saw the potential, leaders with whom the Nature-based tourism messages had taken root, to well, . . . Essentially do an "end-run" around those that hadn't yet "seen the light."

What I did instead was to facilitate a process that I called the Fulton County Tourism Summit.

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The goal was to create a forum in which a broader set of development ideas could be recognized, legitimized, and addressed.

Existing organizations could then choose to come along or not, but, no longer the “only game in town,” would not be able to so limit the discourse and define tourism so narrowly.

Quick overview of the Tourism Summit process:

- Labor intensive reconnaissance and program development phase, building the program with input from stakeholders as well as building support for and investment in the process.
- Session I in January 2004 convened the delegates for the first time (46 delegates from at least 44 organizations)—discussed elements of vision, actions, etc.
- Intermission- “organizational soul-searching”—delegates and their organizations consider their role in such new cooperative efforts.
- Session II, May of 2004, reconvening to put those pieces together, validate and “ratify” output of Session I.

“Preaching to the Choir” metaphor, but it was really more like “engaging the choir.”

- Could we even get “the Choir” together under one roof?
- Could we agree on one “hymnal?” An agreed-upon set of “songs to be singing?”
- Could we find a way to “sing” them together?



Agreed-upon Initiatives

“Things we should be doing”

- 1) Developing and maintaining effective **Organization/Cooperation/Leadership**
- 2) Developing a **Shared Vision** for Tourism Development in Fulton County
- 3) **Inventory** tourism attractions, opportunities, and resources
- 4) Acquiring **funding** to support tourism development projects
- 5) Providing **training** for tourism businesses and employees
- 6) **Monitoring and evaluating** the success of our efforts
- 7) **Educating and raising awareness** regarding tourism assets, value, and Importance
- 8) **Development** of tourism attractions and opportunities
- 9) **Promotion/Marketing**

Critical piece of output was the set of nine “Agreed-upon Initiatives” that I derived—through a sort of content analysis process—from participant comments shared and processed together in Session I discussions and “ratified” in Session II.



Corroborating Research

Factors for Tourism Success:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A complete tourism package	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coordination and cooperation among rural tourism entrepreneurs
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good leadership	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Information and technical assistance for tourism development and promotion
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Support and participation of local government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good convention and visitors bureaus
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Sufficient funds for tourism development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Widespread community support for tourism
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strategic planning	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Coordination and cooperation between business persons and local leadership	

Wilson, Suzanne, Fesenmaier, Daniel, Fesenmaier, Julie, and van Es, John. (2001). "Factors for Success in Rural Tourism Development." *Journal of Travel Research*, 40(2):132-138

I was able to show participants that this set of nine “Agreed-upon Initiatives” and their efforts to date through the Summit Process had squared-up roughly with the factors for success discovered in University of Illinois research from 2001 by Wilson & Fesenmaier.

[Wilson, Suzanne, Fesenmaier, Daniel, Fesenmaier, Julie, and van Es, John. (2001). “Factors for Success in Rural Tourism Development.” *Journal of Travel Research*, 40(2):132-138]



Organizational Strategy

“Things we should be doing”

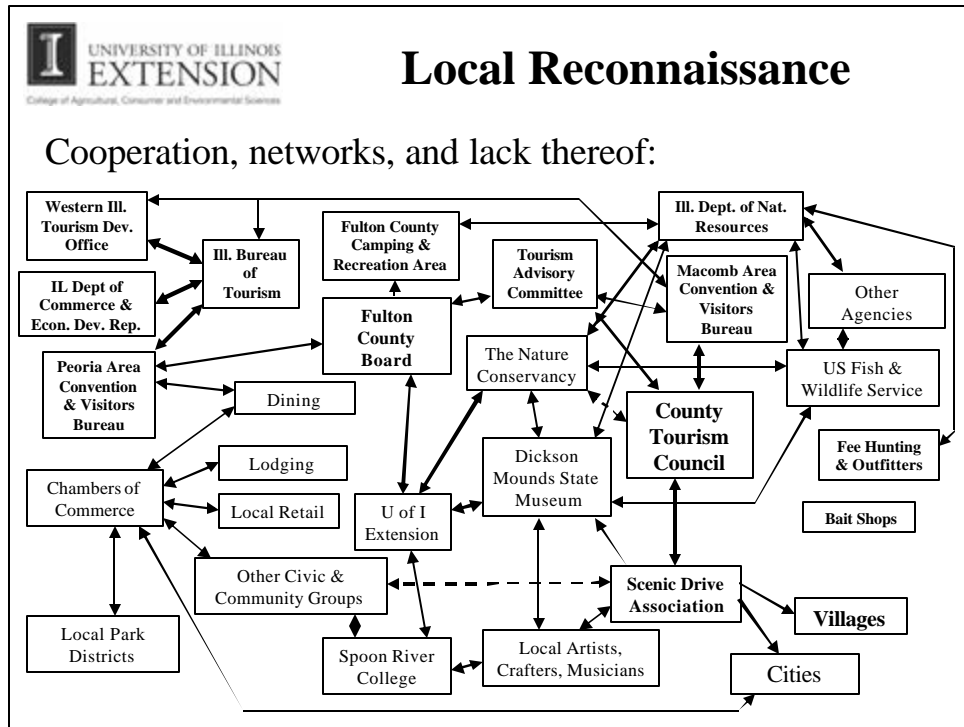
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The first step in tackling the nine “Agreed-upon Initiatives,” that constituted the “things we should be doing” was addressing the organizational challenge, which was both explicit in the initiatives themselves and . . .


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. . . evident to me from my reconnaissance.

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How could we get from a troubling lack of working relationships and effective networks to something more functional, some organization that would actually facilitate the implementation of the agreed-upon initiatives?

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Organizational Strategy

Guidance from Management “Guru” Peter Drucker:

- Symphony Orchestra team model
- Players have their positions, their roles
- However, members work as a team
- Requires coordination by a “conductor” or “coach”
- Requires a “score”
- Great flexibility and speed, if the score is clear

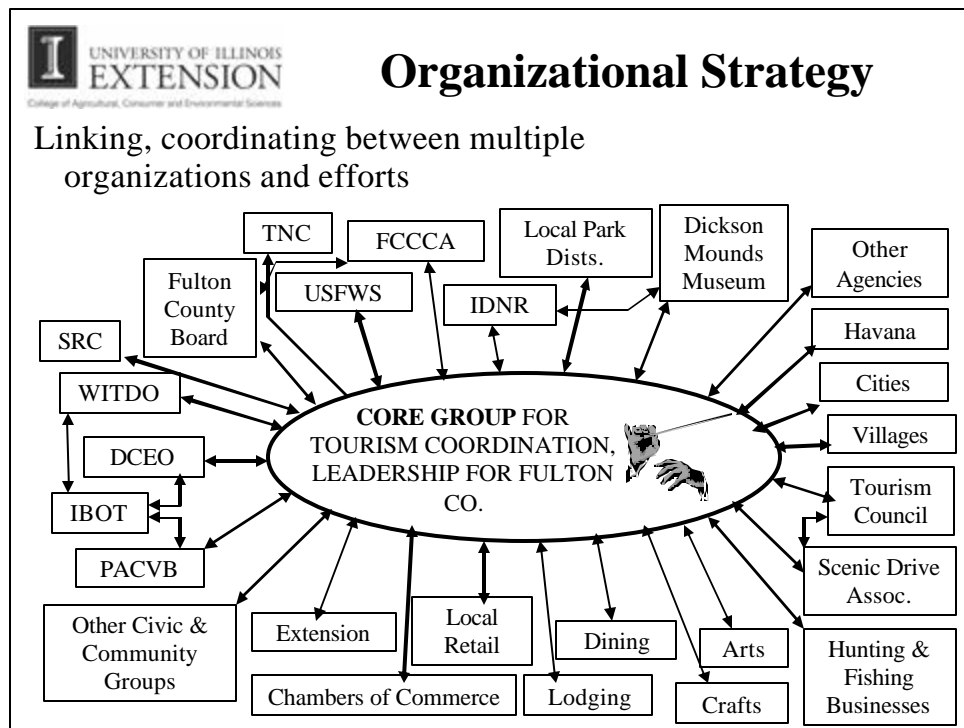


Drucker, Peter *Post Capitalist Society*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1993.

I stumbled upon some guidance about types of teams and their suitability in reading Peter Drucker.

Symphony orchestra as a model that might fit our needs.

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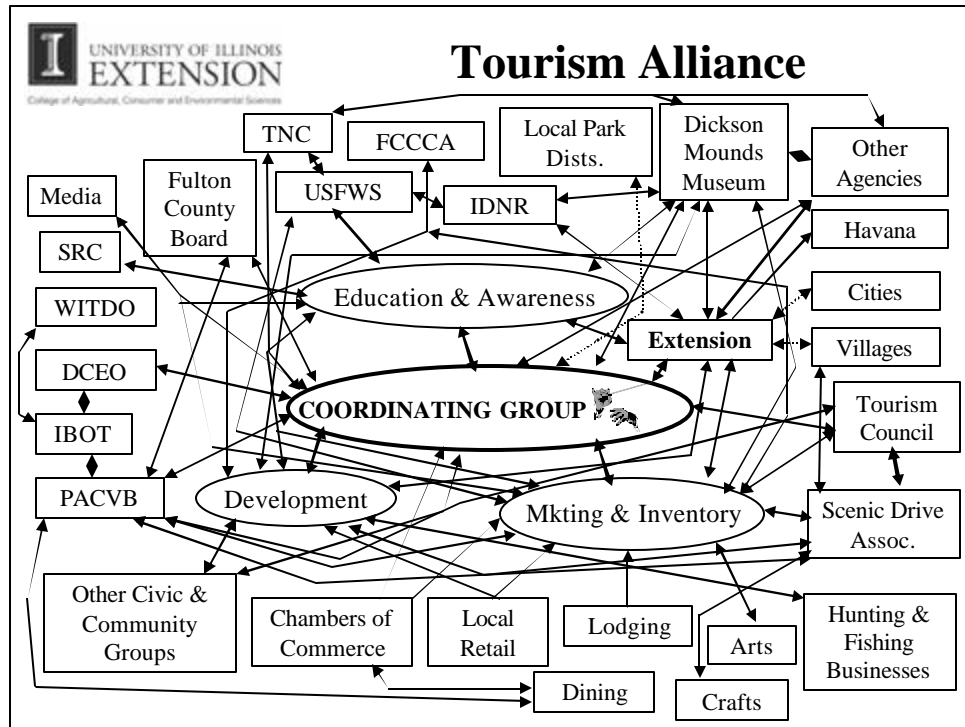


Organizational development strategy proposed to the Tourism Summit delegates, Session II. They and a subsequent “subcommittee” agreed we ask a core group of well-suited people to take responsibility for filling the “orchestra conductor” role for us.

Certain assurances offered about the way such a core group would work:

- Guided by a mission derived from shared vision
- WILL NOT direct, dictate, or command and will have no authority to do so
- WILL coordinate, collaborate, orchestrate, convene, invite, negotiate, educate, explore, and cooperate toward the implementation of agreed-upon initiatives
- Member Recruitment:
 - Mission Match--Own or organization’s with tourism development
 - Skills and resources, not merely availability
 - “Big picture” thinking
 - Team play abilities required
- Core group membership probably should tilt toward those who can make tourism development a part of their “day-job”
- Core group should employ teamwork and meeting “best practices” to get work done

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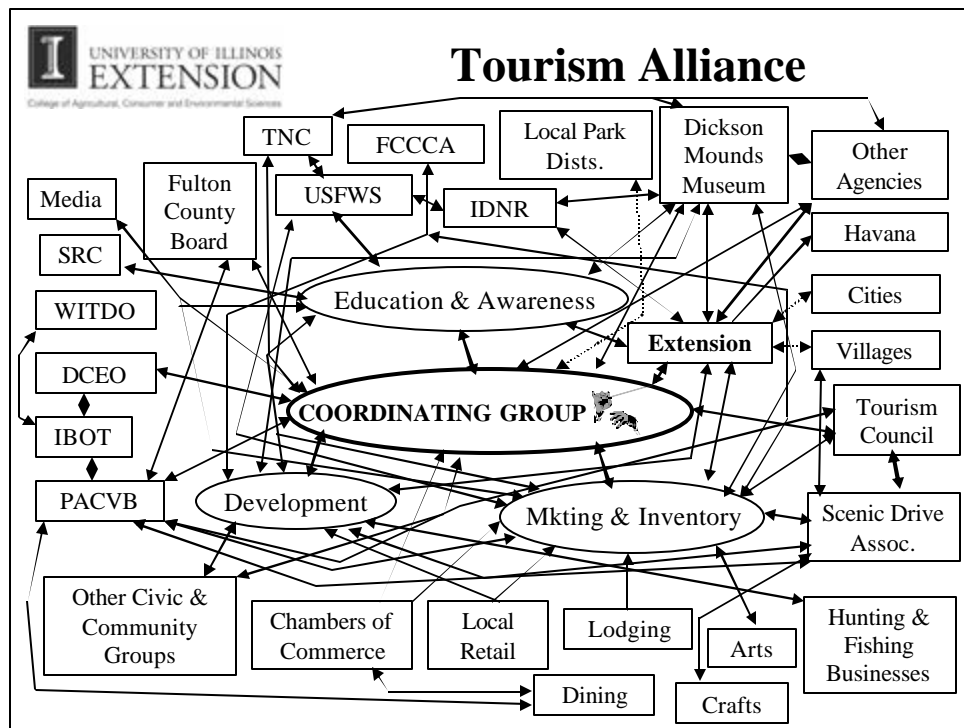
A “snapshot” of this fledgling Tourism organization as it might have appeared last summer—operating under the name “Fulton County Tourism Alliance—shows a still messy set of networks. However, in terms of “preparing the soil”.

...

Increased capacity for cooperation, connection, convening, responding, seeing and envisioning, coordinating, and spanning boundaries.

This sounded pretty good, but it has been in the continued implementation that things have faltered.

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The Education & Awareness-raising group was really the first to falter. Took on the design of a rather massive customer service education and training campaign and essentially collapsed under the weight of it.

The Coordinating Group was next. First a move to meeting every other month. Then . . .

Marketing & Inventory group has dwindled, but a core group has continued to move compelling projects forward.

The Development Group has remained most vital, continuing to use monthly meetings as a networking and troubleshooting “hub” for members involved in the County’s Greenways & Trails Planning Process.

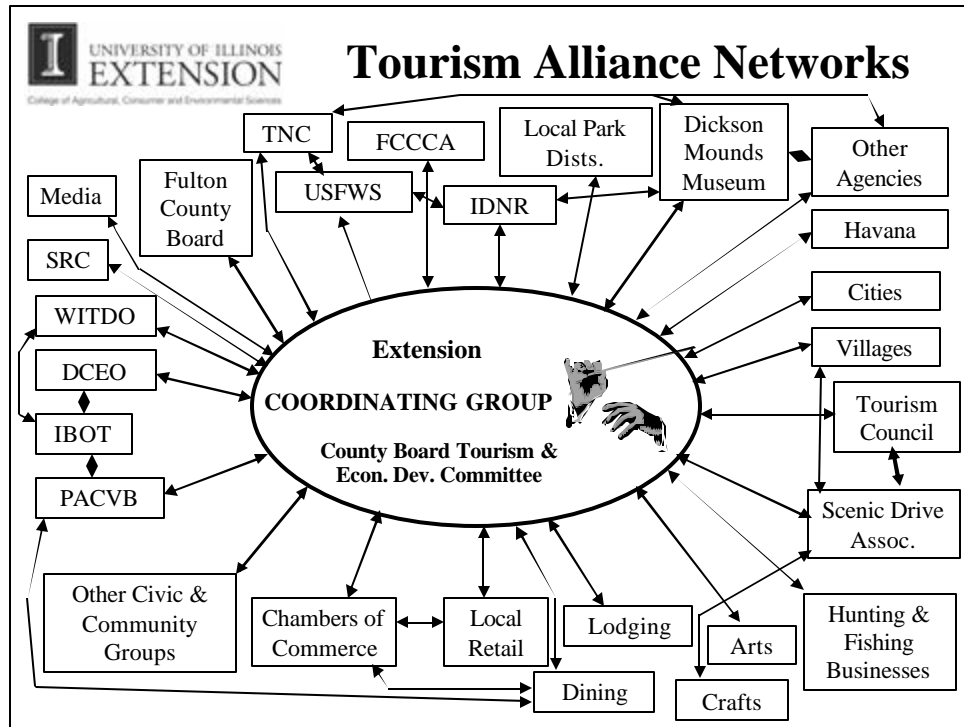
We’ve fallen prey to our own regimen of monthly meetings. When we started this, it seemed like a logical default. Pick a regular day to meet each month and everybody put it on their calendars, saving the hidden and often enormous overhead of trying to find a meeting day and time that works for 15 people on a more “ad hoc” basis

Too busy, stretched too thin . . .

The perennial paradox . . .

But it’s not too late, we may have caught it in time.

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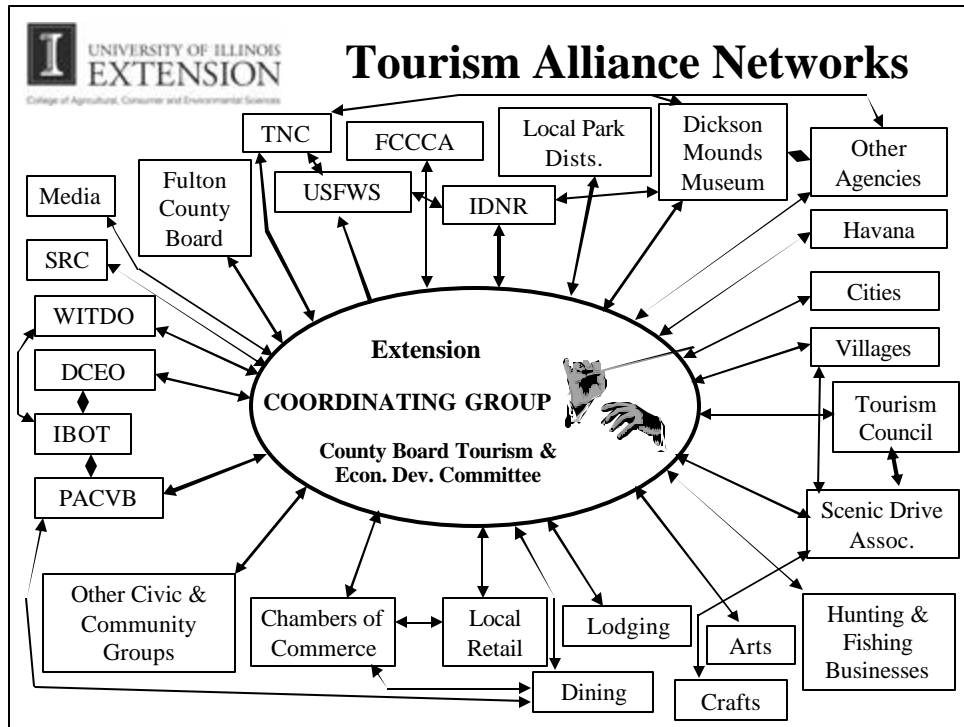


Here's what were going to try . . .

Revitalized coordinating group with a couple of new and, we hope, compelling things on their plate

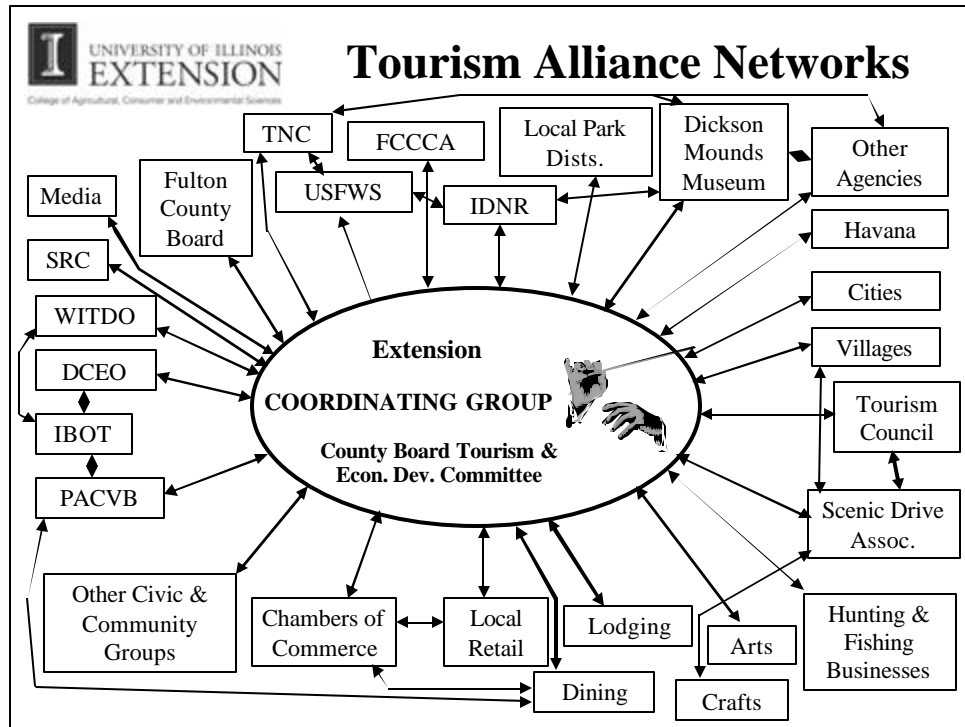
Disbanding the other working groups, moving from groups and monthly meetings toward an approach that treats the groups as "networks" to be mobilized around specific projects

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For example, in order to continue to build on a local piece of a regional Nature Tourism project, we might activate these parts of the network in order to mobilize a specific team of partner organizations, people, and their skills and knowledge.

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We might activate these connections to work on developing and marketing “packages” around an upcoming theater performance.

This is the stage things are at as I appear before you today.

Clearly there’s lots of work to do to make this transition to a kind of “virtual organization” that can respond to opportunities and mobilize skills and resources while still remaining inclusive and broadly participatory.

I’ve found a valuable resource to help guide my thinking about this path ahead in a book . . .

[Click]



Tourism Alliance Networks

The Hidden Power of Social Networks: Understanding How Work Really Gets Done In Organizations.

--Rob Cross, Andrew Parker, Harvard Business
School Press, 2004.

- Social Network Analysis
- Research findings:
 - Characteristics of networks
 - Roles and characteristics of network members
 - Creating and maintaining energy in networks
 - Managing and troubleshooting networks

The Hidden Power of Social Networks: understanding how work really gets done in organizations.

--Rob Cross, Andrew Parker, Harvard Business School Press,
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Social Network Analysis

Research findings:

Characteristics of networks

Roles and characteristics of network members

Creating and maintaining energy in networks

Managing and troubleshooting networks



Nurturing Development

- **Questions?**
- **Comments?**
- **Suggestions?**