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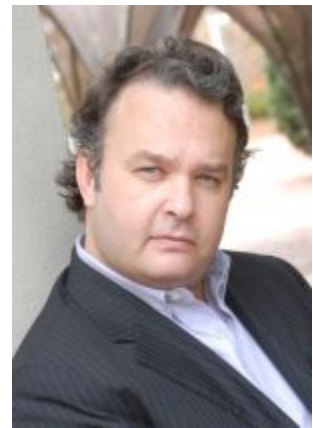
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Homegrown Tourism Research: Economic Development in the Making

Most people know that tourism is important to South Carolina; it brings revenues to the state—about \$9.9 billion in 2008. Linked to that, tourism means jobs for South Carolinians—about 114,000 residents are employed in sectors ranging from lodging, to retail to food and beverage, and it earned more than \$2 billion in payroll 2008.

However, many people may not know that tourism can be an effective catalyst for other types of high-value economic development, such as technology, health care, energy, and real estate. High-tech entrepreneurs and investors seek quality environments rich with cultural amenities—the same kinds of places appealing to tourists. USC's Innovista will be such a place, combining technology with arts, entertainment, and learning.



Many of us know someone who came to South Carolina to play, then ended up living and working here. Some of these folks are baby boomers, seeking reasonable real estate, good weather, and cost-effective health care.

At the University of South Carolina's College of Hospitality, Retail, and Sport Management (HRSM), our homegrown tourism research focuses on confirming these trends and explores new ideas and practical solutions that may benefit the state's economic future.

For example, in 2006, the college completed a strategic tourism plan for Kershaw County which confirming the county's nationally recognized brand. People visit Kershaw for horses and history, so rather than invent new attractions, emphasize what's already there and successful. Numerous classic communities in South Carolina attract to visitors and residents alike. The study identified several counties nationally with travelers who could conceivably make Kershaw their home.

In 2007, HRSM conducted a study of visitor loyalty to South Carolina as a vacation destination. Led by Dr. Robert Li, the study confirmed many of those things we associate with South Carolina tourism: pleasant climate, personal safety, good value, cleanliness, friendly people, relaxing atmosphere, good customer service, and suitable accommodations.

These same visitors considered Florida to be our primary tourism competitor. The study revealed that

South Carolina enjoys a better quality rating than Virginia and Georgia.

Economic developers know that relocation and investment decisions among competing states are driven by many variables, the foremost of which are quality service and good value.

And, in 2008, the college released a strategic tourism plan for South Carolina's Salkehatchie region, which includes Allendale, Colleton, Bamberg, Barnwell, and Hampton counties. The study confirmed that hunting is and will be big business in the area, but that nature-based tourism could be a lucrative future market.

As important, the study showed that tourism in this rural area could be worth as much as \$48.3 million with proper investment, proving that the state's rural areas have the same qualities that attract visitors and residents to the mountains and beaches.

A 2009 study of the Riverbanks Zoo and Garden, led by Dr. Ercan Turk and Dr. Muzaffer Uysal, found that the zoo annually generates 723 jobs, \$60.8 million in business sales, and \$18.3 million in employee salaries and benefits. Again, the point cannot be understated—research proves that tourism fosters economic development in South Carolina.

The new dean of HRSM, Dr. Brian Mihalik, arrived in 2009. Dr. Mihalik has a thorough understanding of tourism's role in state economic development and has even crafted a new mission statement for the college: "The College of HRSM prepares leaders and scholars who drive the economic engine of South Carolina, the nation, and the world."

In 2010, HRSM added one of the world's top tourism experts—Dr. Simon Hudson. Dr. Hudson was recruited through the state's Centers of Economic Excellence (CoEE) program. He will lead the Center of Economic Excellence in Tourism and Economic Development, which is housed in HRSM and affiliated with Coastal Carolina University.

Finally, in 2010 the college completed an economic impact study on the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor. The study found that the return on investment for the South Corridor is impressive. Visitors to the 14-county region annually generate \$624 million in direct economic impact. In addition, 9,389,120 tourists visited these counties in 2009, and visitors spent an average of \$45.83 per day and stayed in the corridor an average of 1.45 days. The Corridor's economic impact is even more remarkable: \$1 billion in total output; \$375 million earnings; \$91.4 million indirect taxes; and 17,867 jobs.

Traditional industries such as textiles and manufacturing also benefit from quality of life. The innovation required to survive fierce global competition must be supported through scientific breakthroughs and new technologies. Again, arts and culture—often by-products of hospitality and tourism—should be emphasized to attract innovators in science, engineering, and business.

In sum, quality of life doesn't serendipitously happen—it must be carefully considered and implemented, requiring a synergy of people and resources. And it must also be cultivated and protected. The University of South Carolina is dedicated to conducting applied tourism research in its own backyard that will reap benefits in the form of jobs, revenues, and a better quality of life for all South Carolinians.

Dr. Rich Harrill, a South Carolina native, is Director of USC's International Tourism Research Institute and Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Travel & Tourism Industry Center. Please contact Dr. Harrill regarding these studies and reports.

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