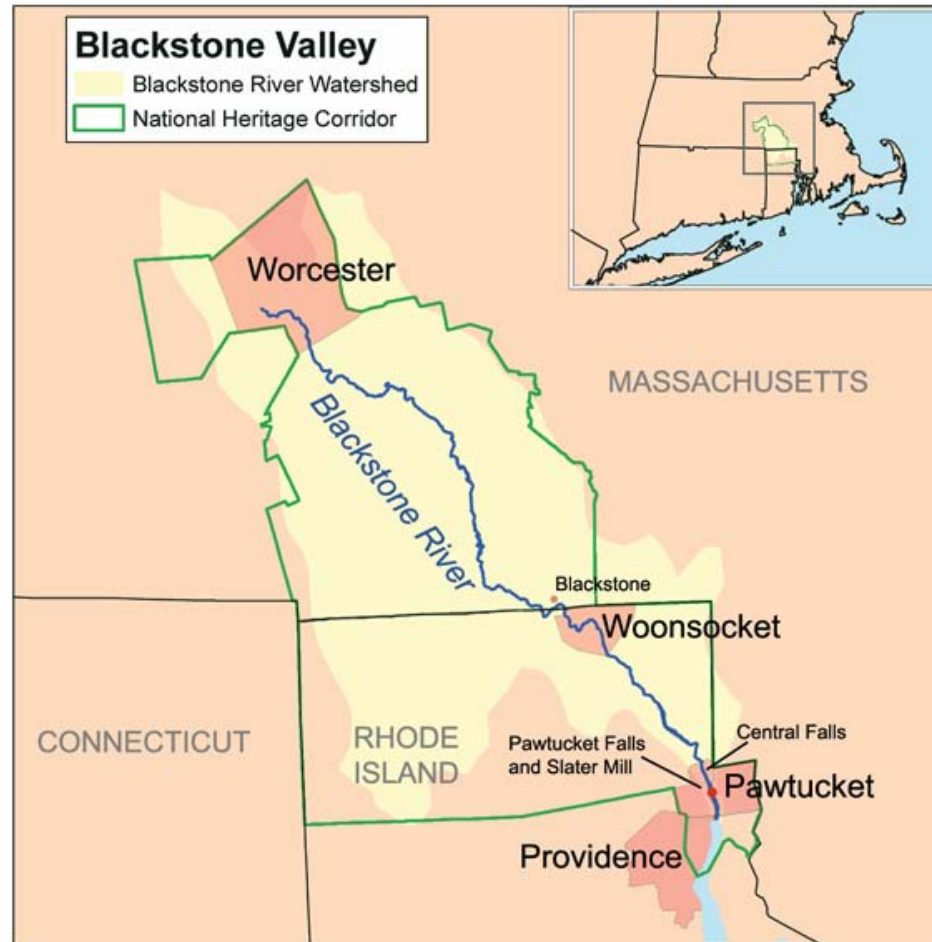


***TOURISM AND THE LOCAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY
IN SMALL CITIES AND TOWNS:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF
THE BLACKSTONE VALLEY, RHODE ISLAND***

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Source: Karl Musser (2008)

Perceptions

The interviews unveiled several themes, which have been grouped into the following perceptions:

- 1) The Blackstone Valley Region
- 2) Tourism
- 3) The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council
- 4) State and local government
- 5) Business development

Perceptions (cont.)

1) The Blackstone Valley Region

- **rejuvenation**

reuse of old buildings were beneficial to community, but sense of disconnection possibly associated with the lack of opportunity by some locals to directly engage in the utilization or redevelopment

- **economic sustainability**

question whether the changes are sufficiently sustainable to elevate the local economy to the next level

- **social stability**

issues on security and safety have been a key issue of discussion in the tourism industry due to incidents as 9/11, the SARS epidemic, and natural disasters

Perceptions (cont.)

2) Tourism

- **Visibility**
not the strongest economic sector
- **Economic role**
has potential, remain the same
- **High competition**
from Providence, Newport and South County; assets 'less', overlooked and under marketed
- **Underdeveloped**
insufficient activities and places for locals and tourists
- **Comprehension**
local businesses not fully aware of correlation between economic and tourism development, and not recognize their potential role in it
- **Tourism investment**
foresee business opportunities

Perceptions (cont.)

Changes to current tourism model:

- More support and funding from State government
- Enhance and/or change marketing and promotional strategies
- Communication transparency
- Enhance and/or develop transportation system in the region
- Further develop present attractions, and increase number
- Retain the John H. Chafee Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission
- Change American lawsuit culture which hinders rapid economic development

Perceptions (cont.)

3) The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council

- **acknowledgment**
recognize efforts to rebuild regional economy and image, through tourism advocacy and promotional activities
- **partnerships**
 - partnering with the BVTC has led several businesses to establish 'sub-partnerships'
 - local businesses sense the limitations of BVTC's operational capabilities regardless their outstanding marketing efforts
- **area of focus**
BVTC should concentrate on 'higher' or 'macro' level activities

Perceptions (cont.)

4) State and local government

- **lack of funding and support**

Federal and State funnel funding and support to major tourist destinations such as Providence and Newport; very little tourism dollars or taxes return to the Valley; acknowledge local government efforts

- **lack of communication**

cannot clearly define any government initiative or programs which support the tourism industry in the region, only hotel tax and arts initiative programs

Perceptions (cont.)

5) Business development

- **opportunities present**
recently opened new business or enhanced business operations.
- **existing barriers**
 - insufficient funding for business not involved in the arts, farming or other government-led initiative
 - not many options readily available to encourage small-scale business development
 - size and limited resources prevented small local businesses from further seizing new business opportunities

Conclusion

- Issues mainly perceived outside BVTC's work sphere, concentrating around regional infrastructure
- Geotourism adequate model to revitalize and develop 'initial' infrastructure, but once achieved, strong integration of local businesses and community is needed to sustain development

Research suggests:

- to further examine present SME support system
- the BVTC to position itself in a more innovative and strategic role developing and managing tourism assets to further this success, including strengthening partnerships, licensing its servicemark, developing communication strategies and framework, and enhancing entrepreneurship skills via educational programs