

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: IDENTIFYING SUCCESS FACTORS
FOR HERITAGE TOURISM PROGRAMS
IN SMALL CITIES AND TOWNS

Degree Candidate: Marian M. Cosmides

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Thesis Directed by: Russell Keune, FAIA
Welch Center for Graduate and Professional Studies,
Goucher College

Heritage tourism has been a rapidly growing segment of the tourist industry since the 1980s – one that contributes to the economic development of communities around the world through the promotion of heritage assets, both tangible (e.g. buildings, cultural sites) and intangible (e.g. customs, music). This thesis identifies the critical success factors necessary to establish viable heritage tourism programs in small cities and towns interested in engaging in this important cultural and economic activity. A comparative analysis was conducted of the research performed in this area by several major organizations and

authors. The symbiotic relationship between historic preservation and heritage tourism is also studied, revealing that heritage tourism has a positive impact on the preservation of historic buildings and the establishment of historic districts, and vice versa. The target audience is comprised of decision makers, and other stakeholders in the public and private sectors, who wish to understand the level of planning, partnerships, promotion, product development, stakeholder involvement, and other criteria necessary to develop sustainable programs.

From the considerable body of work that exists on success factors for heritage tourism programs, seven entities were selected, representing U.S.-based national and state organizations, international governmental agencies, a research institute, and several independent authors. The “core” critical success factors, upon which all of the sources agreed, were identified and numbered nine in total. Three case studies were then conducted (Lancaster County, PA, Deadwood, SD and Georgetown, TX), which already had strong heritage tourism programs, to ascertain whether the nine core success factors were absent or present. Findings revealed that the success factors had contributed greatly, as had other considerations, such as the era when tourism programs were developed, and characteristics unique to each area.