

A Rural Community Pauses to Gauge Attitudes on the Road to an Alternative Economic Strategy

TERESA TRUMBLY LAMSAM

University of Nebraska at Omaha

DIANE MONTGOMERY

Oklahoma State University

Recommended Citation Style:

Lamsam, Teresa Trumbly and Diane Montgomery. "A Rural Community Pauses to Gauge Attitudes on the Road to an Alternative Economic Strategy." *The Online Journal of Rural Research and Policy* 5.3 (2010): 1-18.

Key words: Rural, Community development, Tourism, Attitudinal research, Q Methodology, Strategic planning, Participatory research, Community-based research, Rural community tourism

This is a peer-reviewed article.

Abstract

This community-based research uses Q methodology to examine perceptions of tourism and downtown development in a lower Midwest town that has experienced continual economic downturn and decreasing population. With memories of the thriving ranching and oil heyday, some community members are approaching tourism as the new black gold. At the same time, there is a perception of a fractious community characterized by a heritage of racism, cultural tension, and an aging, burned-out volunteer base. One of the goals of this study was to help community planners make sense out of what they perceived as a jumble of viewpoints. The results of a Q study can help planners determine in a systematic way the significant, persistent attitudes surrounding the issue of tourism development from a broad community perspective. The Chamber of Commerce board members, community leaders, and volunteers used this study as a building block for their strategic plan in tourism.

Introduction

From the rolling green hills of the East through the farmlands of the Midwest to the great expanse of the West, small towns in the United States tend to have the same economic landscape, one that is gradually and continually eroding. Geographic isolation only tends to speed the decline. Many of these communities have given up on attracting traditional industry and instead have turned to alternatives such as tourism and recreation.

Likewise, the rural community whose residents participated in this study found itself turning to tourism as an alternative development strategy. It is like most of its counterparts across the country, economically depressed with a declining population. Part of what makes this rural town (hereafter referred to as "Bison Plains"¹) unique is a history rooted in cowboys, Native Americans, and oilmen. What makes it one of a kind is its position as the seat of three governments: city, county, and tribal. The town's Chamber of Commerce and other tourism

entrepreneurs see a potential in the three uniting in an alternative to the black gold that once made this town and its Native American nation wealthy. Namely, tourism could be the path to economic stimulus. But thus far, tourism facilitators find it difficult to get past the roadblocks, particularly the historical tension between tribal and non-tribal residents that has proven enduring. Even so, the non-Indian residents face rifts rooted in their own history. Beyond that, facilitators say an aging volunteer base, general apathy, and lack of direction make the tourism drive even more difficult. Those who promote tourism want community-wide support and participation in the development. They have already sensed what scholars and community development practitioners have found to be true: a broad grassroots foundation is needed for successful tourism development (Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier, and van Es, 2001²; Woods, 2000³).

Problem and Purpose

Researchers caution against forging ahead with tourism development before residents' opinions have been gauged (Woods, 2000⁴), and they note that the literature is not clear about the correlation between a positive attitude toward tourism and support for the actual development (Andereck and Vogt, 2000⁵). By using Q Methodology, the researchers could help map a perceptual landscape for tourism facilitators, thus setting a framework for grassroots participation, a strategy tourism scholars have found as a necessary precursor of successful, long-term tourism development (2000⁶).

Also, by using Q Methodology, the researchers could determine "ways of thinking" about particular topics or issues (Brown, 1988⁷; McKeown and Thomas, 1988⁸). City and business leaders in Bison Plains understood that the various attitudes were complex and worthy of rigorous and academic analysis. They were attracted to the idea of an in-depth look at the different attitudinal camps surrounding tourism. Unlike traditional surveys, Q surveys yield aggregate results rather than per person data revealing individual differences. The advantages for the community are apparent. Most groups do not have the time or is it in their best interest to deal with an issue or topic on an individual basis. Essentially, individual opinions would demand trying to please everyone before moving forward with a project. Instead, Q Method offers planners a definitive description of the key attitudes surrounding the topic and the areas of consensus and disagreement. It could illuminate the paths to development that will be more easily walked.

The purpose of this study was to assist the Bison Plains Chamber of Commerce personnel and other key publics in Bison Plains identify the perspectives related to tourism and economic development and their processes in this community. The Chamber assisted in the sampling of people who contributed to the results of this study by assuring representation from a diversity of community leaders, volunteers and other members of the community. Representation of various viewpoints is the most appropriate person-sampling strategy in Q methodology (Brown, 1980⁹).

Literature Background

Tourism and travel is a \$1.6 trillion industry in the United States (U.S. Travel Association, 2008a¹⁰). On their website, The National Assembly of State Arts Agencies (NASAA, 2003¹¹)

reports that tourism is America's largest service export, one of the nation's largest employers, and the third largest retail sales industry. The group also reports that by 2020 tourism will be the world's largest industry. The United Nation's World Tourism Organization projects that the Americas will capture a 20 percent share of that market (2006¹²).

Researchers, government officials, and community development practitioners believe rural tourism is just as feasible for rural communities as it is for urban centers touting the large attractions known to most tourists. In writing about the hub of tourism in America's heartland, Edgell and Harbaugh (1993¹³) note the growing trend among domestic and international tourists to branch out from the traditional centers of tourism to see rural America. "Tourism is a highly viable option because its implementation relies on cultural, historic, ethnic, geographic, and natural uniqueness of an area" (1993, p. 17¹⁴). NASAA reports on their website that "travelers are choosing more rural and out-of-the-way destinations, focusing in part on cultural, historic and natural resources" (NASAA, 2003¹⁵). According to the U.S. Travel Association (2008b¹⁶), 81 percent of adult travelers who travel at least 50 miles have included an historic or cultural activity while traveling. A recent travel survey found that nearly two-thirds of Americans reported taking a trip to rural destinations in the last three years (Brown, 2008¹⁷).

Rural tourism has proved less costly than other economic developments that require large initial capital outlays, extensive training, and outside assistance (Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier and van Es, 2001¹⁸). From their review of rural tourism literature, Andereck and Vogt (2000¹⁹) concluded that residents from communities across the country are generally in favor of tourism development, while also acknowledging negative aspects. In their comparative study of several Arizona communities, including three with Native American populations, they found that residents overall tend to support tourism as a community development strategy. The most acceptable tourism options were parks with outdoor recreation, historic and cultural attractions, special events, and museums. This study found that when residents had negative perceptions of tourism impact, they continued to support this as an alternative development strategy.

But not all rural tourism is created equal. In a review of literature, Brown (2008²⁰) found that rural communities that have run out of options tend to see tourism as a cure-all. Other researchers have found that tourism's impact on rural communities varies greatly across the nation depending on various factors, including workforce (Bontron and Lasnier, 1997²¹). The one equalizer among those factors seems to be community buy-in and involvement. Taking a snapshot of community attitudes is one of the main steps advocated by community tourism facilitators (Brass, 1996²²). "It is the baseline from which to build a broad network of support for and participation. ...It will provide you with information to help direct any tourism development into projects that are acceptable to residents and identify the role that residents see for tourism in the community" (1996, Section 3²³).

The literature on rural community tourism led to the intense involvement of community leaders as the nexus of the research plans. Furthermore, as consultants to the actual issues facing Bison Plains, the researchers suggested that community use of the study be a priority over academic goals. In that vein, researchers agreed as a matter of principle to help the Chamber of Commerce and community groups use the results before seeking academic publication. The study spanned two years from the first conversation about community needs to the presentation of research

results to various community groups. In consultation with community planners, the following research goals were determined:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of tourism and downtown development in Bison Plains?

- **RQ1a:** What is the best way for Bison Plains to move forward in its efforts to develop tourism and downtown areas?
- **RQ1b:** What are the areas of consensus for Bison Plains tourism and downtown development?
- **RQ1c:** What are the obstacles, in terms of entrenched attitudes, for Bison Plains tourism and downtown development?

RQ2: In what ways do attitudes about Bison Plains tourism and downtown development fall into categories of well-defined segments of the population? For example, do ranchers all tend to fall into one attitudinal camp, tribal members into another, Chamber members into one, and so forth?

- **RQ2a:** If so, what are the areas of difference and consensus?
- **RQ2b:** If not, can the attitudinal camps be explained by other demographic data?

RQ 3: In what ways might relationships be an important consideration in tourism attitudes?

Methodology

Q Methodology

Although there are subtle variations in the techniques and procedures used in Q method, the philosophy and approach are explicitly defined (Brown, 1980²⁴; McKeown and Thomas, 1988²⁵). Q method has been promoted as “a method that offers particular opportunities and synergies for rural social science research” (Previte, Pini, and McKenzie, 2007²⁶). The method includes several stages of development in order to expose the opinions, views, perspectives, or beliefs about a certain topic. The focus of the research is the topic, as defined by the persons who would hold an opinion about the topic. As such, the statistical technicalities are transposed from more traditionally factor analytic studies. The study begins with the definition of a concourse, or all possible opinions or reactions to the topic. From there, a Q sample is derived, which is representative of the concourse. Then, the participants whose opinions are relevant are chosen to sort the statements according to a condition of instruction directing the thinking about the sorting of the statements. Finally the data are analyzed statistically (correlation, factor analysis, z-score calculations) revealing how the sorts were alike and different and the results are verified with sorters who were statistically representative of the factor or perspective. Thus, views about rural community development and the idiosyncratic issues relevant to Bison Plains were studied here.

The Q Concourse

Researchers in this study developed a Q concourse by using both the theoretical literature and in-depth interviews. The literature surveyed consisted of community development and rural tourism development. Approximately 25 Bison Plains’ residents participated in interviews during which extensive field notes were taken. The field notes and literature were used to guide the formation and selection of the 45 Q statements used as an instrument in the study.

Participants

The director and staff of Bison Plains's Chamber of Commerce invited 61 participants, including some respondents from the interviews to participate. The chamber director purposefully chose participants based on a variety of factors recommended by researchers. She selected a broad representation of Bison Plains's 3,500 residents. Considerations in selection included: age, income, education, gender, occupation, community leadership, volunteer base, business ownership, agriculture, oil and ranching sectors, tribal governance, and tribal membership.

Following recommendations for the optimal numbers of sorts to yield differences (Thomas and Watson, 2002²⁷), we recommended a minimum of 40 and a maximum of 60 participants. All 61 invitees participated in the Q sort, which was conducted in Bison Plains's Community Center over the course of two days. Participants came in groups of five to 10 during a convenient time, slotted for two hours, though less time would be needed to complete the sorting. This time was designed for informal socializing before and after the research procedures. The research procedures included a briefing on the study and method, informed consent, and the completion of a demographic questionnaire and the sorting activity, during which they could ask for technical assistance. Participants were encouraged to ask questions, and plans for the use of the results were made explicit. Q sorting took participants approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. The Q sorts remained confidential in that each participant wrote a code name on both the questionnaire and the Q sort form. After results were reported, participants were free to give the researcher their code name so that they could discover their own type preferences.

Interpretation of Data

Sixty one participants sorted 45 statements. A centroid factor analysis was conducted using software available from www.qmethod.org (PQMethod, Schmolck, 2002²⁸), followed by Varimax rotation. This initial analysis produced three factors, which were defined by 21, 13, and 16 Q sorts of respondents, respectively. Eleven respondents were not accounted for in the analysis of the three types; however, they largely did not define one factor because they shared high correlations of other factors as well. Although the defining Q sorts were not considered in this analysis, those respondents were considered and reported to Bison Plains's Chamber of Commerce as sharing perspectives with those who defined factors with greater clarity in this analysis. Additionally, there are a few Q sorts that did not load on a factor and this was reported as other unique views of respondents as they are still important to this town.

Types 1, 2, and 3 were named *Let's Roll*, *Band-wagoneers*, and *Riding Shotgun*, respectively. These perspectives were initially interpreted using information from the z-score distributions of the statements for each factor array. Further, individual comments are attributed to each factor using broad, demographic characteristics in some cases so as to not reveal identities. Respondents were told that they would in no way be identified and in revealing any single role, high profile position, such as the mayor, physician, state legislator and tribal officers, confidence would be broken.

Analysis of Types

Type 1: *Let's Roll*

Type demographics.

The majority of mostly middle-aged respondents in Type 1 have lived in Bison Plains for at least 20 to 49 years. The type is dominated by active community residents who regularly volunteer and are members of community groups. They either volunteer for tourism-related activities or their job is related to tourism. Most of the respondents – 67 percent of whom are males – work outside the home, with many owning their own businesses for decades. Six out of the 21 respondents in Type 1 are Native Americans; of those six, four are a member of the nation whose headquarters are located in Bison Plains. All in this type have a high school education with just less than half having a college education. Four have graduate degrees. Occupations, which range from ranching to public safety and health, did not assist with the identification of this type. In total, the 21 people defining *Let's Roll* have 51 children and 30 grandchildren, most of whom are not living in Bison Plains.

Analysis.

Move it. Move it. Move it. That's the message *Let's Roll* wants to send. Use it or lose it folks. It's now or never. Forget about those petty disagreements, historical tensions, and cultural rifts, says *Let's Roll*. Sure, Bison Plains needs people who want to move forward with tourism, and we have them, but what we don't need is to put off tourism action while we drive the bandwagon up and down the streets hoping for a consensus. The action starts downtown, Bison Plains's cultural and historical heart. Tourism's pendulum swings from here.

Preservation is the driving passion. In the traditional sense, *Let's Roll* sees preservation as revitalizing Bison Plains's downtown area, which in itself is an attraction, ($z = 1.481$) and as complement to tourism development; therefore the two goals – preservation and tourism – should be approached as concurrent projects ($z = 1.188$). But Type 1's perception of preservation is more complex than building restoration. *Let's Roll* most strongly agrees that tourism will preserve the unique character of Bison Plains as well as diversify the economy ($z = 1.659$). Tourism is the answer to sustainable economic development for Bison Plains ($z = -1.425$), and the community can not afford to load up the bandwagon before moving forward on tourism ($z = 1.128, -1.457, -1.4, -1.324, -1.279, -1.118$).

Not moving represents no effort, which leads to no improvement, no change, eliminating interests, dwarfing tourism possibilities. Everybody operates on different levels of interest, attitude, etc. Do not hinder progress waiting for 100 percent approval. This is not realistic. I do feel the people should be informed and given opportunities to support and incentives. – Respondent in Type 1

Let's Roll may not need the bandwagon, but it does concede to getting outside help. In addition to the people resources in Bison Plains, the community needs to seek outside support and guidance for tourism ($z = 1.286$). The local people resources include Bison Plains merchants who have significant responsibility in developing tourism, according to Type 1's attitude ($z = 1.312$). Partnerships with neighboring communities are acceptable as a way to pool resources to develop and market combined tourism assets ($z = 1.099$), but *Let's Roll* doesn't seem to include these

relationships as part of the outside support and guidance that they strongly recommend. ([See Table 1](#) for partial array of statements.)

Table 1: Partial Array for Type 1

No.	Statements	Z-scores
6	Tourism helps preserve our unique character and diversify the economy.	1.659
8	In developing tourism for this community, the prevailing attitude should be to feel positive and curious about differing opinions, rather than automatically rejecting them.	1.508
16	Revitalization of the downtown area is a tourist attraction on its own.	1.481
18	Bison Plains merchants have a significant responsibility in tourism development.	1.312
27	We should not only rely on our people resources here; we should also seek outside support and guidance.	1.286
28	The ties that we have with individuals and organizations outside our community could play a key role in tourism and downtown development.	1.269
14	Tourism development and downtown development should be concurrent, complementary goals.	1.188
22	If we waited for all community groups and people to get on board the tourism bandwagon, then we'd be waiting a long time and never make significant progress.	1.128
5	Partnerships with neighboring communities within the region would help us pool resources to develop and market our combined tourism assets.	1.099
29	Given that we have such a small community, we need to be able to trust and respect one another so that we can collaborate on tourism projects.	1.006
37	If city, county, and tribal institutions would mutually reinforce one another, our economic hard times would be ended.	-1.118
44	Community leaders are too interested in protecting the special interests of a small group of people.	-1.129
34	There is an "us vs. them" mentality with the Tribal Nation that significantly hinders progress in tourism.	-1.134
25	Preserving the [historic] Building is offensive, and it needs to come down.	-1.154
40	We cannot promote a cowboy, oil and Indian theme without the cooperation of the tribe.	-1.279
24	We really cannot move forward in developing tourism or our downtown without the Tribal Nation as a partner.	-1.324
23	We should find money for tourism development before we go forward with any plans.	-1.400
12	Tourism is not the answer to sustainable economic development of this community.	-1.425
7	Decision by consensus – not moving on until we could all agree to do so – is the most desirable option for tourism projects.	-1.457
11	Our community struggles with a history of painful or tense relations among people and this hinders tourism development.	-1.541

Let's Roll will not accept negative perceptions of Bison Plains or its tourism efforts to thwart the forward momentum toward tourism. *Let's Roll* strongly agrees that the prevailing attitude should be to feel positive and curious about differing opinions, rather than automatically rejecting them ($z = 1.508$). But the diversity of opinions cannot become an obstacle to development. The attitude of Type 1 stands firm against community tensions, including historical, cultural, and ethnic. *Let's Roll* strongly disagrees that Bison Plains struggles with a history of painful or tense relations among the people ($z = -1.541$). There is not an "us vs. them" mentality with the Native American nation – on whose reservation Bison Plains is located -- that would hinder tourism development ($z = -1.134$). Bison Plains doesn't need consensus to move on with tourism nor does the community need to find money first ($z = -1.457, -1.400$). "Without a vision, people perish. Our community has to have a vision for tourism to move forward with or without funds – ways to make the money can come later," wrote one respondent who is active in the community and tourism efforts. The attitude of Type 1 does not indicate the need to partner with the Tribal Nation. Tourism will move forward without the tribe ($z = -1.324$). "We cannot wait on the tribe. There are a number of [tribal members] who are willing to progress. Don't wait on tribal government," wrote a Native American respondent. Another tribal member said that Bison Plains has always wanted "to use" the Indian tribe.

Type 2: Band – Wagoneers

Type demographics.

Thirteen out of 61 respondents in the study make up Type 2. They are not distinguished by age, years lived in Bison Plains, or gender. Most of the respondents are married and in total they have 33 children and 19 grandchildren. Unlike Type 1, more than half of their children live in Bison Plains and nearly half of their grandchildren do also. Nearly half of the respondents were Native Americans – all but one a member of the local nation – and three work for the Indian nation. Type 2 is split between volunteering in tourism and working in tourism-related jobs. In the community, they tend to volunteer when needed and more than half consider themselves an active member of at least one community group. All but four work outside the home. Five of the participants own or co-own their own business. Length of time in current or previous business varies from 3 months to 32 years. All respondents have a high school education. Six have college degrees, and two of those have graduate degrees. They represent varied occupations.

Analysis.

Type 2 begins and ends with strong levels of agreement about whether statements are most like or most unlike their opinions. Fewer statements determine the attitude of this type than for Type 1: *Let's Roll*, but their statements strongly set this type apart from the other two ([See Table 2: Partial Array Type 2](#)). On the Most Like end, z scores begin with 1.895 but quickly drop off in just five statements to below 1. The Most Unlike My Opinion statements held in strength from -1.867 to -1.206, covering nine statements. Out of 15 statements in the array, most representative of attitude agreement for this type, only three were items of consensus: Statement Nos. 6, 14, and 7.

Like *Let's Roll*, Type 2 can agree – but with less strength – that tourism preserves the unique character of Bison Plains and diversifies the economy ($z = 1.269$) and that tourism and downtown development go hand-in-hand ($z = 1.231$). They also strongly agree that their opinion

is most unlike the statement “Decision by consensus – not moving on until we could all agree to do so – is the most desirable option for tourism projects ($z = -1.584$).” But, they take a different approach to that statement even though their agreement makes it a consensus item with other types. Type 2 is not quick to dismiss the need for broad community support and ownership of tourism ($z = 1.695$).

Table 2: Partial Array for Type 2

No.	Statements	z-scores
8	In developing tourism for this community, the prevailing attitude should be to feel positive and curious about differing opinions, rather than automatically rejecting them.	1.895
29	Given that we have such a small community, we need to be able to trust and respect one another so that we can collaborate on tourism projects.	1.695
6	Tourism helps preserve our unique character and diversify the economy.	1.269
14	Tourism development and downtown development should be concurrent, complementary goals.	1.231
33	We should have some mechanism or policy in place to make sure to spread out the authority and participation in tourism development.	1.139
2	In tourism development, community participation should be broad and ownership of tourism projects should be equally as broad.	0.999
41	In Bison Plains, the pump is primed for tourism. We do not need to waste time getting people on board the tourism bandwagon.	-1.206
19	Our aging volunteer base could be an obstacle to tourism development.	-1.230
15	Tourism and downtown development may overlap, but the two should be kept as separate goals.	-1.437
7	Decision by consensus – not moving on until we could all agree to do so – is the most desirable option for tourism projects.	-1.584
10	There’s little danger of tourism projects being dominated by certain groups of people.	-1.607
23	We should find money for tourism development before we go forward with any plans.	-1.758
25	Preserving the [historic] Building is offensive, and it needs to come down.	-1.767
12	Tourism is not the answer to sustainable economic development of this community.	-1.845
35	Our isolated location is a significant drawback to tourism development.	-1.867

Several of their written comments were indicative of the idea, including:

- The general population must feel the positive effects of tourism development and realize the source.
- Trust and cooperation.
- Many organizations are trying to do what is best. We need to work together instead of against each other.
- More unity and diversity among groups in Bison Plains could only enhance tourism.

- It must be a total county concept.
- Us vs. Them. We're all one community.

Rev up the engines on those bandwagons because Type 2 offers Bison Plains a willing set of drivers. Getting Bison Plains residents on board the tourism bandwagon is not a waste of time ($z = -1.230$). The first stop is to be open to diverse community viewpoints. *Band-wagoneers* had their strongest level agreement with the statement that “being positive and curious about differing opinions should be the prevailing attitude in developing tourism for Bison Plains ($z = 1.895$).” In a small community, that openness can build trust and respect, which makes it easier to collaborate on community-wide issues, such as tourism ($z = 1.695$). Community support is so important that Bison Plains needs a formal mechanism or policy to ensure that the authority and participation in tourism development is spread out ($z = .999$). An aging volunteer base is no road block for the *Band-wagoneers*; they want those experienced residents on board too ($z = -1.230$). As one respondent noted, “Older people are an overlooked, underused GREAT resource.”

But what could be an obstacle on the tourism path is domination of projects by small groups of people ($z = -1.607$). In reference to the American Indian nation, one respondent, a tribal member, said, “The door should always be open to the tribe. But if they choose to stay disengaged, the community should move forward.” Others applied the idea of controlling interests to the broader community. “Some people are making a nice living for themselves and growth would cause competition,” wrote one middle-aged respondent. Another respondent left no room for confusion: “I believe there to be a “controlling group” that hinders development.”

Building trust and relationships are not the only distinguishing characteristics of Type 2 attitudes. They may be willing to drive the bandwagon, but these drivers don't intend to slow down for every speed bump. *Band-wagoneers* won't wait on money before moving forward with tourism plans (-1.767). Neither will they consider that tourism is not the answer to sustainable economic development for Bison Plains ($z = -1.845$). In this attitude, two respondents were adamant in their comments. “Tourism is essential to the life of Bison Plains people or businesses,” wrote one. Another person said, “Tourism is the key to rebuilding Bison Plains, and we do have a good group of very knowledgeable people.” Then there's the potential obstacle that Bison Plains's isolated location will be a drawback. *Band-wagoneers* cruise right past that consideration, strongly disagreeing ($z = -1.867$).

Type 3: Riding Shotgun

Type demographics.

The majority of the 16 respondents in Type 3 grouped in the age categories of middle-aged and above and have lived in Bison Plains 20 years or more. More than half of their total number of children and grandchildren, 56 in all, live in the Bison Plains area. Type 2 seems to be distinguished by gender -- nearly 70 percent in this group are females -- as opposed to the male-dominated Type 1. Most are married. Like Type 1, these residents are active in community organizations and tend to volunteer whether needed or not. They also consider themselves as volunteers in tourism. They work outside the home, with one exception, and those who own their own business have done so for a long time. There were members of the Indian nations represented but fewer than in the other two types. Occupation did seem to a better identifier for

this group, with most falling in the professional, office and business categories. Unlike the other types, no one in this group holds a graduate degree. However, half have college degrees or at least some college.

Table 3: Partial Array for Type 3

No.	Statements	Z-scores
16	Revitalization of the downtown area is a tourist attraction on its own.	1.690
32	Our community newspaper should be a partner in tourism and downtown development.	1.563
6	Tourism helps preserve our unique character and diversify the economy.	1.502
1	Our community will not derive direct financial benefits from tourist attractions in the area unless tourists are encouraged to visit businesses in Bison Plains.	1.439
26	We have the people in Bison Plains to pull off tourism development. We just need to take advantage of their skills and talent.	1.228
8	In developing tourism for this community, the prevailing attitude should be to feel positive and curious about differing opinions, rather than automatically rejecting them.	1.179
40	We cannot promote a cowboy, oil and Indian theme without the cooperation of the tribe.	1.168
18	Bison Plains merchants have a significant responsibility in tourism development.	1.162
41	In Bison Plains, the pump is primed for tourism. We do not need to waste time getting people on board the tourism bandwagon.	-1.095
20	Groups of people dominate community development, and they in some way deter others from participating.	-1.188
44	Community leaders are too interested in protecting the special interests of a small group of people.	-1.191
12	Tourism is not the answer to sustainable economic development of this community.	-1.201
7	Decision by consensus – not moving on until we could all agree to do so – is the most desirable option for tourism projects.	-1.310
11	Our community struggles with a history of painful or tense relations among people and this hinders tourism development.	-1.320
19	Our aging volunteer base could be an obstacle to tourism development.	-1.509
25	Preserving the [historic] Building is offensive, and it needs to come down.	-1.589
36	The small circles of trust in this community hinder progressive development.	-1.695
43	Most of our community members or leaders possess neither the skills nor the know-how to operate successful tourism establishments.	-1.782
35	Our isolated location is a significant drawback to tourism development.	-1.800

Out of 19 statements that Riding Shotgun strongly identified with, only two were consensus items among the three types: No. 6 – Tourism helps preserve our unique character and diversify the economy and No. 7 – Decision by consensus – not moving on until we could all agree to do so – is the most desirable option for tourism projects. Six of the statements (Nos. 32, 1, 40, 20, 36, 43) strongly represent and set apart this type. Z scores were similar for Types 2 and 3 on

Statement No. 35, which both types designated as their Most Unlike My Opinion Statement ($z = -1.867$ and -1.800 , respectively). ([See Table 3.](#))

Relationship development does not appear to rank high for Riding Shotgun, whose focus is economic in nature and clearly on tourism development with downtown development being the center attraction. This type's strongest Most Like My Opinion statement ($z = 1.690$) recognized downtown area development as a tourist attraction on its own. Important partners in this development are the downtown merchants ($z = 1.162$). "Our retail merchants must realize increased business for [Bison Plains] to benefit – sales tax, additional employment, businesses, etc," wrote one active community member. One business owner said the community can't benefit from tourism if tourists do not spend money at downtown businesses.

Riding Shotgun's focus may be economic, but they do indicate some room for partnerships in tourism development. This was the only type to place any value on the community newspaper. Statement No. 32 – Our community newspaper should be a partner in tourism and downtown development – ranked high (second position) as an opinion statement for Type 3 ($z = 1.563$). Even though they may not be the bandwagon type, Riding Shotgun want to keep the tourism issue upbeat and allow room for diverse viewpoints (1.179), and the cooperation of the tribe is important if Bison Plains wants to promote their unique heritage: cowboys, oil, and Native Americans ($z = 1.168$). Type 2 could also find some support in Riding Shotgun for its bandwagon drive ($z = -1.095$).

This type may not focus on the relationship-aspect of development, but Type 3 respondents wrote more comments about the relationship between the tribe and town than any other type. All but one of those comments came from non-Indian residents. The following statements were included:

- We need to form a marriage (close working relationship) with the ... tribe. – Tribal member.
- I view the ... tribe's involvement as a very important part, but not as "it can't happen without them. However, I believe they would like to be a partner, provided they are not feeling "used."
- The tribe is not our problem.

On the other end of the spectrum, they joined Type 2 in trouncing on Statement No. 35 ($z = -1.800$) for suggesting that location might be a drawback to tourism development. Riding Shotgun moderately disagree with the statement "Tourism is not the answer to sustainable economic development" ($z = -1.201$), suggesting some openness to other forms of development. As one respondent commented, "There is always hope for industry. We just need to be open for change. We are in need of employment opportunities." Another in this type, who specified she did not want to be involved with tourism, was more specific about other avenues, when she wrote "I don't think tourism is the answer to Bison Plains's economic problems. We need to look for new innovative sources to advance Bison Plains." Other local industries, such as oil and cattle, were noted by one participant. One person made sure to dissociate gambling ventures – Indian gaming – from tourism.

Bison Plains residents and community leaders are skilled and knowledgeable resources for tourism development ($z = 1.228$). Riding Shotgun thought it was important to point out that Bison Plains leaders are not interested in protecting special interests of the few ($z = -1.191$). They also disagreed that groups of people dominate community development and bar others from participating ($z = -1.188$). As well, there is no painful historical tension that interferes with current community relationships or hinders development ($z = -1.320$). Trust isn't a problem; at least it's not something that stops the progression of development ($z = -1.695$), as Type 3 strongly emphasizes. Type 3 does not see the aging volunteer base as a hindrance to tourism ($z = -1.509$).

Attitudes toward Historic Building

The fate of a historical building in the center of Bison Plains stirs passion in residents, and the respondents in this survey voiced some of those attitudes. However, the building was not a pivotal item for the types, even though the statement ranked high in z scores among the types. In other words, the Building did not determine and define factors. For the analysis, we have separated this one item for a brief discussion.

Type 1, *Let's Roll*, included respondents at both attitudinal ends of the Building issue. *Let's Roll* had a moderate level of disagreement with the statement: Preserving the Building is offensive, and it needs to come down ($z = -1.154$). Several participants chose to comment on the issue, even though it did not represent significant statements in their sorts. Those comments include the following:

- The Building is important to our identity.
- The Building would be perfect for tourism.
- I think if the Building were gone, it would open up the town.
- The Building is past its useful life.
- First, the recent controversy surround the Building was very disturbing. ... Just the fact that it was being considered to have it torn down sends a statement to the rest of the world that [Bison Plains] doesn't really care about its history.

Band-wagoneers strongly opposed the idea of demolishing the Building ($z = -1.758$) and the statement was a rallying point for this type's attitude. Even so, only one comment – the Building's value as a focal point for Bison Plains – was made about the Building. Type 2 is more concentrated on building community support than focusing on divisive issues. Riding Shotgun, whose focus is on economic aspects of tourism, found moderate disagreement with the opinion to bring down the Building (-1.589). Comments from individual respondents in Riding Shotgun about the Building, three in all, were strong to moderate. One respondent likened the loss of the Building to the loss of Bison Plains's integrity. Another noted that the Building is part of the town's history. An older, non-Indian resident wrote "Time to forget the "us. vs. them" mentality and all rejoice in our strong points. The Building is not the identity of the town. Would like it to be restored but feel that other things may have priority."

The authors of this study suggested that the Building be "divorced" from tourism strategy meetings that were to follow the results of the Q study.

Discussion

Results were presented to a cross-section of Bison Plains' residents at a town meeting advertised in advance and open to all interested. In addition, calls were made to invite specific people who represented various organizations and sub populations. These residents represented the medical, business, tribal, government, religious, social services, and volunteer sectors of the town. The researchers presented a lesson on Q methodology and the results (The 3-Type Analysis) of the Bison Plains study on tourism attitudes. Then, community members, the chamber director, and researchers discussed the results and brainstormed ways to present to the larger community. They decided that they would each present the results at local club and organizational meetings within the next few months. To facilitate these efforts, the researchers created a multimedia presentation for use by the community at these local meetings. Residents noted that looking at attitudes by camps or in the case of these Q results, 3 hypothetical "persons," was a much easier proposition than the overwhelming person-by-person approach they had been taking using cumbersome survey results. Based on the analysis of types, these grassroots attendees identified clearly with their type description, verifying the interpretation of the data conducted by the researchers. Residents concluded that the strategic plan for tourism must stress the importance of broad community support, but the town should not be reluctant about moving head without a community consensus.

After the presentation of results, the researchers stepped away from the project and turned over the power point presentation and aggregate results to the Chamber director. The director and other volunteers presented the results at various meetings of community service organizations as a precursor to the formal strategic planning for tourism. The researchers remained available for consultation. Three months later, the lead researcher was asked to facilitate a strategic planning session for the town. The results of that session led community leaders and organization representatives to incorporate the following in order to achieve a united, broad-based approach to tourism development:

- Recognize the importance of volunteers of all ages.
- Recognize the importance and role of downtown merchants and make sure that tourism economically benefited those businesses.
- Focus on downtown development.
- Create tourism related projects that could be spread out across the community so that a tourism power base is not perceived.
- Market and pool tourism resources through partnerships, which would include regional partners, the town newspaper, and the tribe.
- Separate talks about the fate of the historical building from tourism.
- Move on from historical community rifts without invalidating that they still exist for some.

Lessons Learned for Researchers

- Although the time span of the study was lengthy for academics who needed publications, the momentum of community support gained during the process outweighed the potential for academic profit. In hindsight, the time between trips to the town gave community

leaders and volunteers an opportunity to not only build support but to create a desire to get this study rolling. Community members who were initially reluctant to participate in interviews became eager to conduct the study. The lead researcher received calls and emails urging her to set a date for the Q sort.

- It is worth noting that this research was not funded. The Chamber of Commerce provided coffee and tea for the interviews and then during the Q sorts, the Chamber provided refreshments, such as cookies and bagels, depending on the time of the day. Although researchers incurred their own travel costs, the nature of this study needed to match the volunteer spirit of the community.
- During Q sorts at the Community Center, participants indicated how much fun they had getting together to complete the Q sorting. Although they each sorted their statements at individual tables, a person would often call out a funny quip or laugh out loud. After Q sorts were completed for each group, participants stayed to talk to researchers and other residents. The atmosphere for the Q sort remained informal and positive for the two days, and most participants commented on how much they had already gained from the study even though results were not yet known. Initially, researchers and the chamber director were going to have individuals come in one-by-one and complete the Q sort in a small conference room. After consulting with other residents, we decided a more community, group-oriented approach was more appropriate to the energetic and hopeful attitude residents had toward the study.
- At multiple stages of research, residents were reminded what the results would and would not show. They were encouraged to recognize the limitations of the Q study. For example, in terms of scientific research, the results cannot be generalized. However, as an initial step toward gaining the explicit identification of the views across the community, the study will offer great benefit. Even so, after the results were presented, community members decided to use the study as a kicking off point for their strategic plan on tourism. No doubt the positive energy created during the study was worth something on its own.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicated three diverse and potentially controversial perspectives represented among the grassroots foundation in the community. More important, the community members and the researchers collaborated in an authentic manner to bring to life the consensus in the community about how to approach rural development. Q methodology demonstrated the steps needed for the strategic plan to garner full acceptance among community members. Providing a concrete example for how Q methodology is “another approach to research that ... could be of benefit in rural research” (Previte, et al, 2007, p. 135²⁹), we recommend its utility in rural research. The method revealed first steps in strategic planning for broad-based community participation. Additionally, we acknowledge the depth of the collaboration between the community leaders and the researchers. The mutual trust and understanding that grew throughout this research process was integral to its success.

End Notes: Lamsam, Teresa Trumbly and Diane Montgomery. "A Rural Community Pauses to Gauge Attitudes on the Road to an Alternative Economic Strategy." *Online Journal of Rural Research & Policy* (5.3, 2010).

1. The researchers and community members involved in this study agreed to shield the name of the town in all publications and presentations rather than strict anonymity of the town's name. We chose a name reflective of the area instead. [\[back\]](#)
2. Wilson, S., D.R. Fesenmaier, J. Fesenmaier, and J. C. van Es. "Factors for success in rural tourism development." *Journal of Travel Research*, 40 (2001): 132-138. [\[back\]](#)
3. Woods, M. "Diversifying the rural community: Tourism development." *The Rural South: Preparing for the Challenges of the 21st Century*, 10 (2000, June): 1-10. [\[back\]](#)
4. Woods, M. "Diversifying the rural community: Tourism development." *The Rural South: Preparing for the Challenges of the 21st Century*, 10 (2000, June): 1-10. [\[back\]](#)
5. Andereck, K. L., and C.A. Vogt. "The relationship between residents' attitudes toward tourism and tourism development options." *Journal of Travel Research*, 39 (2000): 27-36. [\[back\]](#)
6. Andereck, K. L., and C.A. Vogt. "The relationship between residents' attitudes toward tourism and tourism development options." *Journal of Travel Research*, 39 (2000): 27-36. [\[back\]](#)
7. Brown, D. M. *Rural Tourism: An Annotated Bibliography*. Report published on the Web site of the Rural Information Center, National Agricultural Library, (2008, July) 1-50. Retrieved from http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/rural_tourism.html. [\[back\]](#)
8. McKeown, B., and Thomas, D. (1988). *Q methodology*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage. [\[back\]](#)
9. Brown, S. R. *Political subjectivity: Applications of Q methodology in political science*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980). [\[back\]](#)
10. U.S. Travel Association. *Travel Industry Fun Facts* (2008a). Retrieved from http://www.tia.org/pressmedia/fun_facts.html. [\[back\]](#)
11. National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. *Tourism industry profile* (2003). Retrieved from <http://www.nasaa-arts.org/artworks/profile.shtml>. [\[back\]](#)
12. World Tourism Organization. *Facts and Figures: Tourism 2020 Vision* (2006). United Nations. <http://www.world-tourism.org/facts/menu.html>. [\[back\]](#)
13. Edgell, D.L., and L. Harbaugh. Tourism development: An economic stimulus in the hear of America. *Business America*, 114(2) (1993): 16. [\[back\]](#)
14. Edgell, D.L., and L. Harbaugh. Tourism development: An economic stimulus in the hear of America. *Business America*, 114(2) (1993): 16. [\[back\]](#)
15. National Assembly of State Arts Agencies. *Tourism industry profile* (2003). Retrieved from <http://www.nasaa-arts.org/artworks/profile.shtml>. [\[back\]](#)
16. U.S. Travel Association. *Executive Summaries -The Historic/Cultural Traveler, 2003 Edition*. Research and Publications (2008b). Retrieved from http://www.tia.org/researchpubs/executive_summaries_historic_cultural.html. [\[back\]](#)

17. Brown, D. M. *Rural Tourism: An Annotated Bibliography*. Report published on the Web site of the Rural Information Center, National Agricultural Library, (2008, July) 1-50. Retrieved from <http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/rural_tourism.html>. [[back](#)]
18. Wilson, S., D.R. Fesenmaier, J. Fesenmaier, and J. C. van Es. "Factors for success in rural tourism development." *Journal of Travel Research*, 40 (2001): 132-138. [[back](#)]
19. Andereck, K. L., and C.A. Vogt. "The relationship between residents' attitudes toward tourism and tourism development options." *Journal of Travel Research*, 39 (2000): 27-36. [[back](#)]
20. Brown, D. M. *Rural Tourism: An Annotated Bibliography*. Report published on the Web site of the Rural Information Center, National Agricultural Library, (2008, July) 1-50. Retrieved from <http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/rural_tourism.html>. [[back](#)]
21. Bontron, J. C., and N. Lasnier. "Tourism: A potential source of rural employment." In *Rural Employment: An International Perspective*. Ray D. Bollman and John M. Bryden, (Eds.). (New York: CAB International, 1997): 427-446. [[back](#)]
22. Brass, J. L. "Community Tourism Assessment Handbook." (Corvallis, Oregon: Western Rural Development Center, Oregon State University, 1996). Retrieved from <http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/pub_5885350.pdf> . [[back](#)]
23. Brass, J. L. "Community Tourism Assessment Handbook." (Corvallis, Oregon: Western Rural Development Center, Oregon State University, 1996). Retrieved from <http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/pub_5885350.pdf> . [[back](#)]
24. Brown, S. R. *Political subjectivity: Applications of Q methodology in political science*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980). [[back](#)]
25. McKeown, B., and D. Thomas. *Q methodology*. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988). [[back](#)]
26. Previte, J., B. Pini and F. Haslam-McKenzie. "Q methodology and rural research." *European Society for Rural Sociology Sociologia Ruralis*, 47(2) (2007): 135-147. [[back](#)]
27. Thomas, D. M., and R.T. Watson. "Q sorting and MIS research: A primer." *Communications of the Association of Information Systems*, 8(9) (2002): 141-156. [[back](#)]
28. Schmolck, P. *PQMethod 2.11*. (2002). Available from <<http://www.qmethod.org/Tutorials/pqmethod.htm>>. [[back](#)]
29. Previte, J., B. Pini, and F. Haslam-McKenzie. "Q methodology and rural research." *European Society for Rural Sociology Sociologia Ruralis*, 47(2) (2007): 135-147. [[back](#)]

Author Information

Teresa Trumbly Lamsam ([back to top](#))

Teresa Trumbly Lamsam, an enrolled member of the Osage Nation, is an associate professor in the School of Journalism at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She received her Ph.D. from the Missouri School of Journalism. Her research areas include American Indian tribal media and development communication. She has worked as a reporter and editor in mainstream newspapers and has served as editor of the Osage Nation News. In the 2010-2011 academic year, she will be a visiting professor in the William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications at Kansas University.



Diane Montgomery ([back to top](#))

Diane Montgomery is Professor of Educational Psychology at Oklahoma State University in the College of Education where she coordinates graduate programs in talent development. Her areas of expertise and research include Q methodology, creativity, transpersonal psychology, Native American Indian education, gifted and talented education, and teacher development. She has held positions on several editorial boards and boards of directors of national professional organizations, including The Association for the Gifted, a division of the Council for Exceptional Children and American Council on Rural Special Education.

