Providing communities with improved marketing intelligence

Nicole L. Vaugeois

BC Regional Innovation Chair in Tourism and Sustainable Rural Development
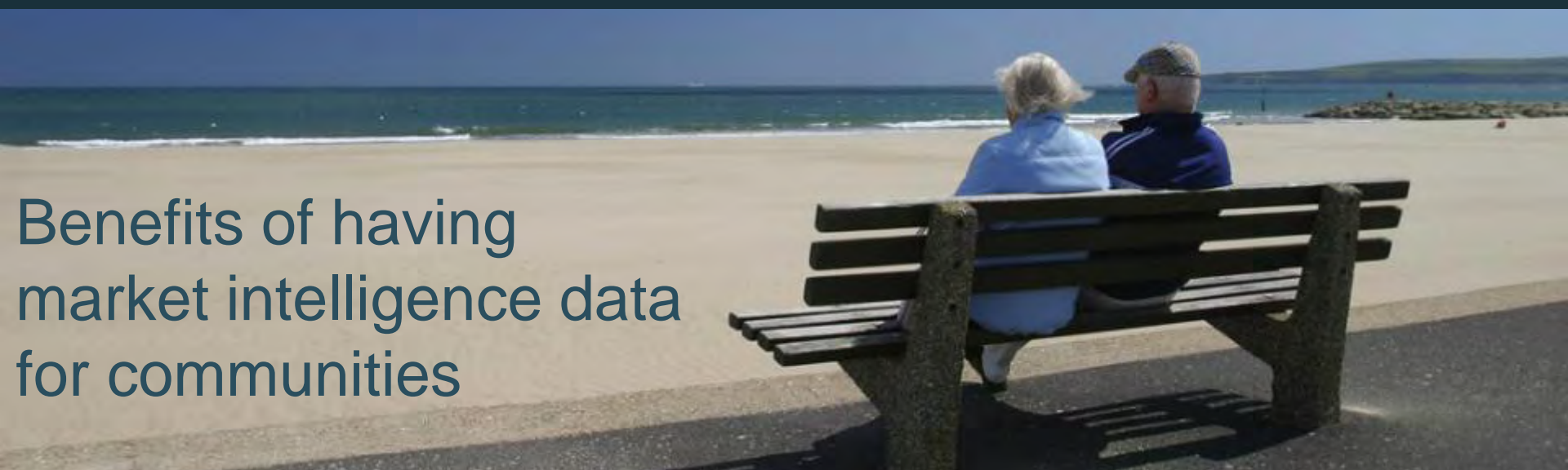
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VANCOUVER ISLAND UNIVERSITY

Communities using tourism as an economic development strategy often have limited funds for marketing. Making decisions based on sound evidence of who their target markets are reduces risky marketing decisions and increases the likelihood of positive return on investment. Most communities however, do not have a system to provide ongoing, locally relevant data on their visitors. Models that enable communities to understand their visiting markets (that are financially viable and accessible) are needed.

The premise

Benefits of having market intelligence data for communities

Having "market intelligence" enables operators and communities to:

- Know the origin of their current markets;

- Know the characteristics of their visits (length of stay, spend, motivations, products used etc.)

- Understand trends in the market and be able to respond;

- Be able to make wise investment decisions in marketing and business planning;

- Forecast the future with more confidence and identify potential markets

Time and scale matter

Scale

- Canada, BC or regional data is helpful to understand the bigger picture BUT
- The more local research is, the more likely it will help to understand visitors

Time

- Visitor volume, origin and characteristics vary by season
- So… need to understand yearly changes yes – but also know more about fluctuations throughout the seasons

The current situation

- While we have better than average macro level data in Canada/BC – understanding of visitors at the local level is sparse.
- Data is not collected consistently by any organization at the regional/sub-regional level

Efforts are needed to enhance current market intelligence at the **local and regional levels** in tourism in order to make wise use of marketing dollars, and to make effective (less risky) decisions about tourism growth and development.

Community based research model-
public – private partnership

The SociableScientists Inc.

Research and facilitation for sustainable communities
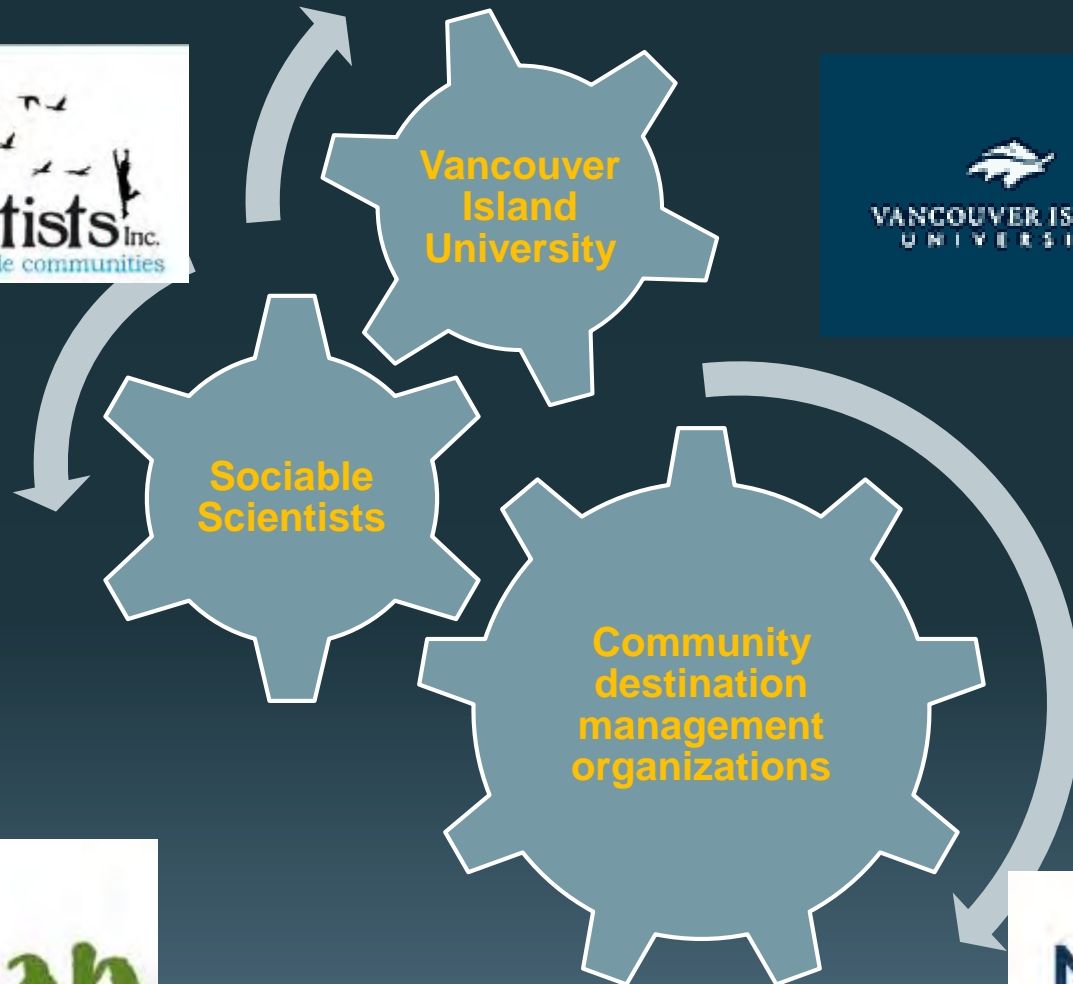
Leisure.

Spans all sectors.

Leisure is the link between public, private, non-profit, community, & volunteer organizations. Leisure blurs the boundaries of our lives & provides a unique perspective to observe & explore social interactions, engagements, relations, phenomena, & ultimately social impacts.

Research.

Is a process.

The research path is one of inquiry & discovery that can help to:

- Troubleshoot
- Problem solve
- Generate ideas and solutions
- Evaluate ideas and challenges
- Gain a new perspective
- Create new knowledge

Innovation.

Stimulates new ideas.

Innovation inspires creative solutions that are simple, accessible, & affordable. Social innovation refers to new ideas that resolve existing social, cultural, economic, & environmental challenges for the benefit of people and the planet. Social innovation fosters change. It changes behaviours, attitudes, perceptions, structures, & systems that previously gave rise to these challenges.

Roles

Community DMO

- Select intercept locations
- Provide response categories on some survey questions
- Determine incentive prizes

Sociable Scientists

- Design survey
- Design and distribute ballot boxes
- Collect ballots
- Send out surveys
- Collect data
- Train operators

University

- Analyse the data
- Prepare the visitor profiles
- Assist in presenting the reports where requested

How the model works

1. Selection of operators to represent areas where visitors would frequent (10-16 locations)
2. Overview with operators and invite to participate
3. Determine incentive prizes
4. Train staff/businesses on their role
5. Set up ballot boxes at businesses (ballots collect visitor email in exchange for incentive prizes)
6. Collect ballots weekly/biweekly for 12 weeks
7. Send visitors an email survey (49-56% response rate)
8. Draw winners of prizes
9. Analyze data and prepare visitor profile report
10. Share data with operators and tourism stakeholders

Visitor Experience Survey Ballot

Name: _____

Date: _____

Email: _____

Thank you for participating!

ucluelet.ca

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The results- shared widely

- Repeat data collection by communities due to perceived value for money and relative ease of their involvement
- Expanded from year one (2 comm's) to year 3 (9 communities)
- Interest from other provinces
- Strong uptake from DMO's on the profiles used to communicate results (on websites, at meetings)
- Used in strategic planning and follow up marketing campaigns

Indicators of success

On the research side

- Intercepts visitors when they return vs. during the trip – getting a complete picture of their experience
- Strong response rates – 49-56% of email invitations complete the survey
  - Likely due to pre-consent and University involvement
- Strong n sizes (ranging from 250 to 1500)
- Survey piloted and fine tuned with communities, showing unique community visitation profiles
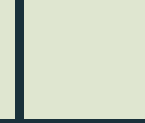
Benefits to DMO's

- Stronger understanding of visitors
- Locally relevant data on their own visitors
- Easy for them to be involved and customize content
- Results indicate their success as marketing organizations and enable broader support for tourism investment
- Value for money is considered high
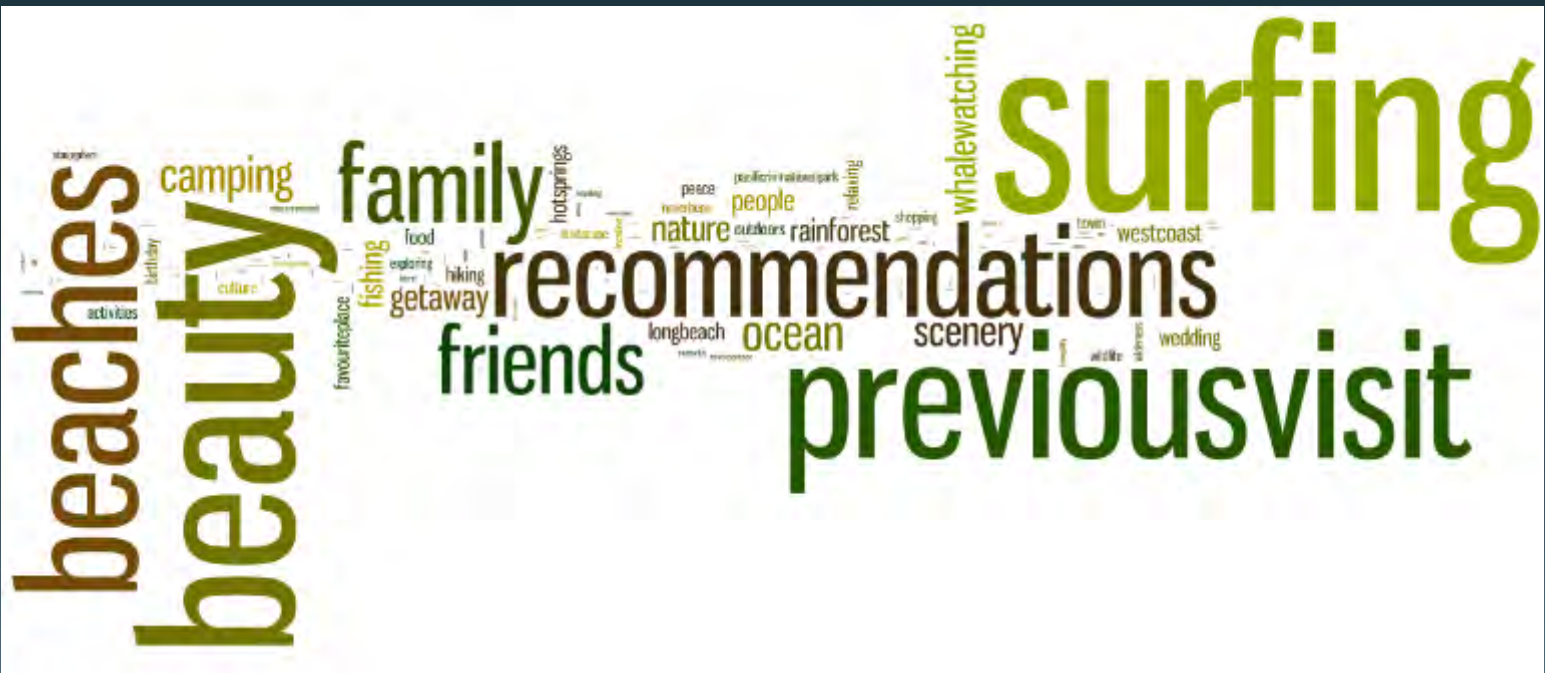- Locally calculated visitor spend figure which can be used for economic impact studies

Inspiration to visit – Nanaimo and Tofino

Benefits to the region

- Better understanding of our unique niche as community destinations
- Better idea of the similarities and differences in visitor profiles, flow, origins, and experiences
- If ongoing, we will be able to track changes at the micro level and provide communities the opportunity to respond
- Businesses could access the profiles to develop more robust business plans – encouraging investment and product development

Expanding the model

- Plans for continued expansion of the model to other communities/regions
- Need to try to find ways to make it more affordable for smaller communities with limited/no market research funds
- Plans to utilize existing data sets for student thesis at VIU and faculty research projects

Questions and discussion

Dr. Nicole Vaugeois

Email: nicole.vaugeois@viu.ca