

Stakeholder Involvement, Culture and Accountability in the Blackstone Valley of New England USA: A Work in Progress

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Abstract

Following its historical rise and fall, America's first industrialized polluted landscape garnered federal and local support to remedy its near destruction. Today, the Blackstone Valley is a pragmatic example of translating theory into practice.

The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, since its inception in 1985, has applied leadership, innovation and commitment to its mission and innovative sustainable tourism place-making principles in its work. This dedication to its destination, aligned with principles from the World Tourism Organization (2004), United Nations Environmental Programme & World Tourism Organization (2005),

and the Geotourism principles of the National Geographic Society, Center for Sustainable Destinations (2006), has led the way for the Blackstone Valley to become a sustainable tourism destination.

The Tourism Council has worked to preserve and enhance the Valley's environment, respect the socio-cultural authenticity of the communities, and provide economic growth to all stakeholders. Social responsibility from all sectors of the community have led the Valley to find its direction, follow its vision and share it with others along the way (Billington & Manheim, 2002). The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council continues to fulfill the vision of sustainable tourism through the Sustainable Tourism Planning and Development Laboratory. The Laboratory's purpose is to share the Tourism Council's experience in developing planned sustainable tourism with local, regional, state, provincial and worldwide tourism leaders, and community stakeholders seeking to develop viable and successful destinations.

INTRODUCTION

The Blackstone River Valley is located in New England, the northeast corner of the United States. It is the home of over 500,000 people living in twenty-four cities and towns throughout 454 square-miles of land in the watershed of the Blackstone River Valley. It is the first industrialized river in the nation, where the American Industrial Revolution was born and manufacturing expanded to transform the United States into an industrial world power. Millions of immigrants came to this Valley in search of their American dream. Yet, after

150 years of economic growth, the Blackstone Valley experienced a brutal economic and social downturn bringing high unemployment, empty factory buildings, and a heavily polluted river.

Fortunately, in the 1980's, leadership, social responsibility, commitment, and a clear common vision led to re-employment, a higher quality-of-life, and pride-of-place. Thoughts of sustainable economic change arose. Billington (1999) noted that "a Valley-wide systematic regeneration" (p. 74) surfaced in the 1980's looking for what the Valley once had had: a robust economy and strong community values. Assisting with the turnaround, the US Congress recognized the national significance of the Blackstone Valley by establishing the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission (BRVNHCC) in 1986. This Commission was designed to support, protect and celebrate the Birthplace of America's Industrial Revolution. Likewise, President Clinton declared the Blackstone River an American Heritage River in 1998. Both the National Heritage Corridor program and the American Heritage River program were river-based revitalization initiatives. After almost 40 years of significant economic, environmental, socio-cultural and historical degradation, thoughtful tourism development and a new approach to corporate social responsibility emerged in the Blackstone Valley to transform this landscape into an appealing place.

The Blackstone Valley today is working to become a sustainable tourism destination and a role model in North America (Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, 2006; Billington & Manheim, 2002; Billington, 1999). Here is its story, how leadership and commitment, in local, state, federal governments with

thoughtful corporations transformed the Blackstone River Valley into a laboratory where successful sustainable tourism practices are implemented and can be modeled to shape destinations around the world.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Blackstone River Valley takes a fundamental place in the history of the United States because it is where the American Industrial Revolution started, changing its landscape and transforming life in this nation. The 46-mile long Blackstone River flows north to south, from Worcester, Massachusetts to the top of Narragansett Bay, in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. The importance of the Blackstone River arises in its power and energy produced by the 438 feet drop in elevation and its naturally winding path. The Blackstone attracted over 1,000 working textile factories and resulted in the construction of dams, water power structures, canals and locks (Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, 2006).

The pristine waters of the Blackstone River were home for several species of fish, such as Atlantic salmon, shad, and alewives, coming north from the Narragansett Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. The Nipmuck, Wampanoag and Narragansett Indians migrated along the banks of the Blackstone River. Likewise, European settlers arrived to the Blackstone Valley in 1628, building farms and villages along the Blackstone River and using its waters for fishing, drinking and basic gristmills.

Conversely, this small village scenery altered when Samuel Slater, an

English immigrant brought to the Valley his experience as an apprentice in an English cotton-spinning mill. Because at that point, most of this new country worked in agriculture, and textile goods were produced in the home, Slater's knowledge on waterpower mechanized spinning became an opportunity for him to develop the textile industry in America and to make his fortune. Moses Brown, who was also attracted by the idea of expanding this mechanical technique of manufacturing in the United States, invited Slater to Pawtucket, as he had just arrived in New York Harbor as an immigrant seeking an opportunity for his knowledge. Shortly after going to work for Moses Brown, Slater was able to reproduce the British cotton spinning, roving and carding machines he had used as an apprentice in Belper, England, thereby giving birth to the American Industrial Revolution in 1790.

Simultaneously, Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, eliminating the time-consuming dilemma of handpicking seeds out of cotton. This circumstance, in conjunction with Slater's system of labor and manufacturing being used throughout the nation, generated interest in the cotton industry from the South. Consequently, this initiated the explosion of the textile industry and economic independence in the United States, which was the beginning of another revolution in America.

Providence, capital of the State of Rhode Island, is located a few miles south of Pawtucket, where the first successful cotton-spinning mill in America was constructed. In the late 18th century, Providence businessmen expanded their shipping endeavors to include the China Trade, which had a key role in the

industrialization of the Blackstone Valley. Rhode Island's ports were also part of the Triangle Trade that commercialized rum for molasses, and later, on slaves from Africa.

In 1792, Slater constructed the first dam across the Blackstone River to manage its flow and to power the waterwheels in the spinning machines in the first cotton mill on the banks of the river. Slater developed what was later known as the Rhode Island System of manufacturing: construction of villages for families coming to work in the numerous textile mills built along the Blackstone River. Corporate responsibility, as understood at that time, created a way of living never seen before. Families lived in houses built by the mill owners, attended corporate built churches, make purchases at company-owned stores, and sent children to Sunday school to keep them occupied on their only day off. Private enterprises were growing as vehicles for economic development. The more factories that were built, the more families came to America to work. This pattern of development in the Blackstone Valley sustained itself well through the 1940's. This rapid expansion eventually turned to economic disinvestments and economic depression.

While encouraging industrial growth, the textile industry had severe damaging impacts on the environment and the villages built along the entire length of the Blackstone River. Over the following 150 years, private businesses built forty-five additional dams to power more than 1,000 factories in the Blackstone Valley as they searched for economic growth and disregarded the long-term sustainability of the region. The promise of stability attracted

immigrants coming from different parts of the world looking to work in the growing textile mills. This manufacturing movement expanded from New England to the rest of America, changing its agricultural based economy and imposing the industrial economy. In the 1860's, the need for American men to fight in the Civil War encouraged the textile industry further. There were plenty of opportunities for employment in the Blackstone Valley.

In 1848, the Providence to Worcester Railroad helped both of these cities to be the second and third largest cities in New England. In the 1930's, inexpensive but reliable electrical power and low-cost unorganized labor encouraged factories to leave the Blackstone Valley and move south, as they sought less expensive and less complicated ways to manufacture their products. This mass departure left empty deteriorated mills, a polluted landscape and discouraged communities.

With a polluted river, as a consequence of 150 years of industrial use, and a vanishing textile industry the Blackstone Valley was confronted by increasing unemployment. It had low reputation amongst its neighboring communities and demoralized residents that were ashamed of their river. By the 1950's, the Valley had lost its mission, its identity and its vision (Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, 2006; Billington & Manheim, 2002).

In keeping with traditionally understood business protocol, corporate enterprises do not broadly accept and commit to social and environmental objectives (Henderson, 2005). This self-centered corporate behavior was one of the main contributors to the deterioration of the Blackstone River Valley. As

remedy and in order to achieve sustainable development, through economic dimensions, and socio-cultural and environmental aspects, there was an imperative need for corporations to voluntarily become responsible for all stakeholders involved in their operations (customers, employees, and investors). Moreover, these corporations need to focus on improving the quality of life of local residents and visitors (Dodds & Joppe, 2005; Rodwell, 2006; Fraser, 2005; Henderson; 2005).

REVITALIZATION AND SUSTAINABILITY

The Blackstone Valley was tired, abused and depleted. It needed a way out of high unemployment, abandoned mills, and a deteriorating quality of life. No promotional map developed by either the state of Massachusetts or Rhode Island included the Blackstone Valley as a destination. Public policy makers were indifferent to the difficulties the Valley was enduring. In response, leadership and corporate social responsibility were a priority subsequently emerging from within the ailing community.

Surprisingly, as of the 1970's, thoughts of sustainable development began to emerge. Project ZAP a locally based community initiative, turned out 10,000 residents to begin the clean up of the Blackstone River. In addition, other state and federal environmental initiatives such as Earth Day, the creation of the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the establishment of the US Clean Water Act emerged, to begin the regeneration of the Blackstone River Valley. Following these efforts, public officials representing the state of Rhode Island were asked

to analyze the creation of a linear park along the river's banks in the 1980's. Because the Blackstone River flowed through Massachusetts and Rhode Island, this project required bi-state collaboration: Rhode Island and Massachusetts would have to jointly clean up the river and subsequently consider developing public recreational land along the banks of the Blackstone River to insure its restoration for future generations. In view of this, and in recognition of the historical significance of the area as the "Birthplace of the Industrial Revolution", Congress established the National Heritage Corridor as a unit of the National Park Service to manage the cultural, historical and natural resources available to the Blackstone River Valley in 1986. According to Rypkema (2006), economic development can be shaped in many ways, such as industrial employment, job security and waterfront development. Yet, historic preservation and downtown revitalization are the only two ways to achieve economic and community development concurrently. Therefore, the Blackstone Valley was to be preserved to tell its story to the world.

As the Valley embraced 24 communities in over 400,000 acres of land, where 500,000 residents lived and work, the National Park Service suggested that the Blackstone River Valley should be preserved and interpreted using a unique type of historic and land preservation system to America. It created the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. Through this mechanism, the National Park Service would work collaboratively with both states and their communities but it would not own or manage land or buildings. Therefore, redevelopment and restoration projects would have to be managed by state, city

or private entities, with the National Park Service providing leadership, technical assistance, financial support and distinction to the region.

Provisions of The Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Act, signed by President Regan in 1986, continue today. The vital characteristic of the new Act provides that a top-down management framework from the federal government is prohibited. Instead, the Act is based on two principles: leadership from above and leadership from below. Presently, this principle has more strength than ever (Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, 2006; Billington & Manheim, 2002).

This federal legislative Act was instrumental in helping local leaders of the Blackstone Valley to facilitate preservation and protection of the lands along the banks of the river and to obtain resources to encourage economic development, while maintaining and enhancing the character of the Valley: its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents. These are the principles of the National Geographic Society and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (National Geographic Society, 2006; World Tourism Organization, 2004). This new kind of legislation in the United States assisted two states and 24 cities and towns to work together towards a common planning mechanism, with the technical support, and some financial assistance from the National Park Service.

The US Department of Interior appointed a nineteen-person Commission to supervise and direct this partnership. The Commission's responsibilities are to (1) operate within the community; (2) improve the quality of the river; (3) preserve

the history of the Valley; (4) support the diverse cultures and traditions; (5) develop interpretative programs about the Valley and; (6) integrate and encourage quality economic development. Regeneration was based on the community needing to work together and corporations recognizing and managing their social responsibility (Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, 2006; Billington & Manheim, 2002; Schultz, 2001).

PLACE MAKING: A TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Place making in the Blackstone Valley began with the state of Rhode Island designating the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council to be its regional tourism development agency for the Northern Rhode Island Tourism District in 1986. This non-profit organization was responsible for developing tourism in the communities of Pawtucket, Central Falls, Woonsocket, Cumberland, Lincoln, Smithfield, North Smithfield, Glocester and Burrillville. Large-scale comprehensive planning started in 1988 with the creation of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission to achieve the objectives of the National Heritage Corridor Act created in Congress in 1986. These objectives embraced river revitalization, public education, land-management planning, historic and heritage preservation, environmental protection, and respect for the socio-cultural authenticity of the local communities (Billington, 2004). The Heritage Corridor adopted it in its planning tourism development as a tool to accomplish its objectives efficiently and reinvigorate the Valley's purpose, identity and direction.

The first step towards transforming the Valley to a visitor destination was to create a framework to encourage and promote responsible practices among corporations, visitors and communities. The Corridor Commission encouraged residents and businesses to act responsibly and to prioritize a long-term return-on- investment instead of short-term economic benefits, which could support harmful and wasteful land use. Building a sense of social responsibility among residents was essential in order to regenerate the Valley. The community needed to understand that the Blackstone River could be reborn. America's first contaminated river could be cleaned. Since the 1970's, with the Valley's original clean-up Project ZAP, several local, state and national initiatives have been successful in the regeneration of the Blackstone.

Through the years ten's of thousands of automobile tires have been taken removed from the river and estimates indicate that it will take ten more years to clean up the river to a safe level for human contact. Community cleanup efforts continue to take place today (Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, 2006; Billington & Manheim, 2002; Billington, 2004).

In 1992, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council created a regional comprehensive tourism development plan for Rhode Island's Blackstone Valley, which was consistent with other plans for economic, industrial, and Main Street development through out the Blackstone Valley. This plan promoted synchronized Valley-wide economic development, while preserving its important industrial heritage, factory-rich landscapes, socio-cultural diversity, and enhancing a highly degraded environment (Billington, 2004). According to the

Blackstone Valley Tourism Council (1992), the plan pointed the direction for public and private sectors to take creative actions and to advocate Valley tourism strategists to “think regionally and act locally” (p. 7). This plan was also the basis for tourism planning in the Massachusetts side of the Valley and ultimately, it became the foundation for the development of a joint tourism strategic plan and program. This comprehensive long-term plan was key in the task of place making by engaging the government, sector, the non-profit sector and the commercial sectors in making the Blackstone Valley a viable, sustainable visitor destination.

The 1992 tourism plan for the Blackstone Valley encouraged sustainable tourism principles in which to build visitor destination. Principles such as the recognition and promotion of the Valley’s rich cultural resources based in its many ethnicities; preservation its historic structures, the reclamation of a polluted river and landscape; the telling of the authentic Blackstone Valley story, the selection of appropriate markets; the improvement in visitor satisfaction, robust public involvement in planning and development, using food, music and celebrations as a way to bring visitors to the Blackstone Valley, strong involved community, enhancement of visitor appeal of the Valley. The first Cultural Heritage and Land Use Plan developed by the National Heritage Corridor Commission included a tourism development component. This component linked to the tourism development plan written by the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council.

Both organizations had tourism development as a community redevelopment strategy. These efforts were joined to form the Blackstone Valley

Tourism Collaborative Strategic planning group that also included the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce Tourism Committee.

The Blackstone Valley Tourism Comprehensive was developed with public, professional, commercial, non-profit and government input over a two-year period. Its objectives were to look at landscape, historic preservation, and visitor satisfaction, environmental, recreational, commercial and cultural changes that were necessary to improve the tourism destination for the Blackstone River Valley. Its mission was to make a “whole place” of the tired, industrialized Valley, and to transform it into a great place to live, do business and interesting place to visit.

NEW INVESTMENTS AND NEW WAYS OF THINKING

The federal government, through the National Park Service, assists the Blackstone Valley with approximately \$1,000,000 each year. This investment through the Heritage Corridor to develop programs to clean the river and promote tourism, build heritage museums, restore theatres, construct a bike path, and develop a river-access system, has encouraged regeneration since its inception. These projects attracted at least \$2,000,000 per year in private, city and state funding to accomplish the overall regeneration plan. Artists and small business owners started to find the Blackstone Valley an appealing place to settle (Billington, 2004; Billington & Manheim, 2002). Live/work spaces for artists, created in old textile mills, are continually being added to meet demand. Young designers, artists and entrepreneurs who see their future in this former

industrialized Valley, are purchasing old bank and retail buildings on Main Street, long since used for their original purposes.

Creativity, leadership, engagement and collaboration at all levels of the community are helping the Blackstone Valley. Groups of people are organizing to continue the community redevelopment efforts. Two real estate investment firms, speak publicly regularly, about the place-making work of the Tourism Council and National Heritage Corridor that has drawn them to the Blackstone Valley. Together they have approximately \$1,000,000 in investments in the restoration of historic properties along the Blackstone and Branch Rivers.

Other groups are organizing to purchase and restore essential historic buildings to tell better the national story the Blackstone Valley holds. Private investors are participating with the non-profit and government sectors to restore former textile buildings that have here-to-for were not feasibly restored. The story of the Blackstone Valley is now understood by all sectors of the community and they work together to make the Blackstone Valley a whole-place. Today, four visitor centers are operating along the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor to serve to tell the story of America's Industrial Birthplace and to help visitors, residents and potential new businesses come to learn where their next investment may be.

Samuel Slater's Mill has been preserved and is the centerpiece for Pawtucket riverfront and downtown main street development. It presently operates as a museum offering working exhibits and living history presentations. National Park Rangers traverse the Valley to tell the story of the Birthplace of

America's Industrial Revolution. Currently, there are now 21 species of fish living in the Blackstone River.

The Blackstone Canal, originally dug alongside the river in 1828, has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places and is now a popular location for education, public recreation and passive enjoyment. Many of the working mills and mill villages are being restored and converted into housing or modern office space.

In 1997, the City of Woonsocket led the effort to preserve their history and culture of the Blackstone Valley by developing the Museum of Work and Culture, to give tribute to the ethnic groups and the work they performed to shape the Valley. The Irish-American band *Pendragon* hosts regular performances in a renovated theater they restored from a former Masonic Temple.

Moreover, the cities of Pawtucket and Providence have developed special arts districts. A bicycle way that extends the length of Blackstone River is being constructed. Presently, many cultural attractions and events draw thousands of visitors to the National Heritage Corridor.

Since 1993, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council has carried over 300,000 people on its riverboat *Blackstone Valley Explorer*. In 2000, a British-built canal boat, *The Samuel Slater*, was imported to the Blackstone Valley to operate for river tours and serve as a floating bed and breakfast, and a third riverboat is used to cruise sections of the Blackstone and Providence rivers.

Events like the Rhode Island Chinese Dragon Boat Race and Taiwan Day Festival gather different entities such as, non-profit organizations, the City of

Pawtucket, private developers and local residents, the Rhode Island Chinese American Church, China Air, and the Taipei Office of Culture and Economic Development of Boston, to develop a impressive international riverfront event.

In 2005, a first-time event highlighted the historic, artistic, cultural and environmental attributes of the Blackstone River Valley by providing a weekend to celebrate the Preserve America designations. The Blackstone Valley *Footsteps in History* Preserve America Program was the largest arts, environmental, heritage and cultural event in the National Heritage Corridor's history, encompassing the 24 communities at 150 venues throughout the Valley. This event took place through the collaborative effort of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce, Massachusetts Historical Commission and the Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission, the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, the National Trust for Historic Preservation and several prominent corporations expressing their social responsibility. In 2006, these agencies were awarded a \$240,000 federal matching grant from Preserve America to continue and expand this 150-venue event through 2006 and 2007.

Elderhostel programs, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, several study groups from England, Brazil and different communities through out the United States have been using the Blackstone Valley as a classroom. The Tourism Council currently offers 10 Elderhostel programs annually. These programs are built from the ground-up to create a laboratory-like setting for groups of 30 to 40 people who come to learn and experience the Valley first-

hand.

Last but not least, today, several regional educational institutions, such as Johnson & Wales University, Brown University, and University of Rhode Island include the Blackstone as part of their curriculum (Billington & Manheim, 2002).

These positive changes led corporations to reflect the need to be responsible for all community stakeholders. Local businesses started making decisions on their investments using social and ethical principles and realizing they could be profitable while reducing negative impacts on the community. According to Fraser (2005), Rodwell (2006) and Dodds and Joppe (2005), the definition of corporate social responsibility and sustainable tourism share similar principles and elements, in that both concentrate on identifying and engaging stakeholders and assuring forethought of how their actions impact others. While corporate social responsibility refers to companies' simultaneous obligation to all of its stakeholders and the search for sustainable development, sustainable tourism development requires optimal use of environmental resources, respect for the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, and economic benefits to all stakeholders (World Tourism Organization, 2004).

In addition, there are increasing overall societal and environmental concerns, which increase the demand for more sustainable destinations and travel preferences. This trend is increasing the pressure for destination management policies and corporate responsibility. Because businesses impact lives, finances, health, and safety of their employees, consumers, suppliers and investors, corporations are challenged to be successful while at the same time be

aware of the world where they operate (Henderson, 2005).

Some of the private investments that have taken place in the Valley include the following:

- 1 \$4 million to renovate the American Heritage River Building, Pawtucket, 1999.
- 2 \$4 million to transform the Green & Daniels Mills into condominiums and offices, Pawtucket.
- 3 \$14 million to build the Pawtucket Riverfront Lofts, condominiums and office space, Pawtucket.
- 4 \$25 million to transform a former textile mill into a housing complex adjacent to the Blackstone Bike Path and River, Cumberland.
- 5 \$1 million to develop the former Narragansett Knitting Mills as a housing complex, Woonsocket.
- 6 \$200 million to transform the former Ocean State Steel Company into housing, offices and retail space, East Providence.
- 7 \$45 million to build riverfront condominiums, Sutton, MA.
- 8 \$25 million to develop three river projects, North Smithfield (in early stages).
- 9 \$16 million to construct a Holiday Inn Hotel on the Pawtucket River, pending.
- 10 \$2 million to develop Central Falls Landing, pending.

Private investment in the Blackstone Valley is at least today fifteen times the National Park Service funding (Billington, 2004; Billington & Manheim, 2002).

To continue the Blackstone's work in imbedding sustainable tourism theory into its work, it held Rhode Island's first Sustainable Tourism Summit in November of 2006. It offered presentations from world leaders in sustainable tourism. The Tourism Council brought together its statewide policy makers and shapers to learn and discuss how to adopt sustainable Geotourism practices statewide. The Council hopes that the National Geographic Geotourism Charter will be signed by the state of Rhode Island in 2007.

A TOURISM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT LABORATORY

There is a growing need in communities around the world to design thoughtful tourism planning and development strategies. The concept of effective tourism planning in a community eludes many of today's destination management organizations. In the interest of being socially responsible, The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council is sharing its best practices with the world, by with creating the Sustainable Tourism Planning and Development Laboratory in the Blackstone River Valley.

Tourism may impact a community negatively or positively. To minimize the negative effects, it must be planned considering many interests, including stakeholders' participation. The Laboratory will prepare current and future leaders with the knowledge and skills necessary to build and shape a successful sustainable tourism destination.

The Laboratory's purpose is to introduce the concept of planned sustainable tourism to local, regional, state, provincial and worldwide tourism

organization leaders and their stakeholders.

The Laboratory is an experiential community-based learning opportunity that offers tailor-made solutions to communities seeking to shape a tourism development program with internationally practiced tourism planning strategies. Each initiative is presented over a five-day period and is designed to empower stakeholders in leading enlightened community development.

With 20 years' experience in sustainable tourism planning and development in the Birthplace of America's Industrial Revolution, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council collegially shares its expertise. Led by highly skilled practitioners with extensive experience in the private and public sectors, this program provides a learning experience that prepares, transforms and encourages key decision makers and shapers to contribute effectively to their communities. It is important that businesses evolve along the continuum towards the "sustainable vision" and managers and stakeholders are able to develop strategies to facilitate this progression (Wade, 1999).

The Tourism Council has worked on four continents, exchanging ideas and forming relationships that have nourished economic development. The staff members of the Laboratory come from the United States, Argentina, Australia, Rwanda, Canada, and Colombia.

One of the essential outcomes of the Laboratory experience is the creation of a Tourism Development Plan to guide its sustainable tourism efforts. Participating communities will receive a comprehensive Tourism Development Plan, tailored to their needs, which will lead to a successful destination. The Plan

will be delivered to the community 60 days after completion of the Laboratory sessions and will be a blueprint for the community's future. While participants are encouraged to attend the Tourism Laboratory in the Blackstone Valley to observe and experience a regenerated tourism destination, a team from the Laboratory will travel to the corresponding community if this is not possible.

The Laboratory experience is flexible. It can be held at any time during the calendar year, based on the needs of the community participants. To best maximize the experience, the Laboratory encourages a group of three to eight people from one community to attend. This balance of tourism planning theory and practical application provides decision makers with knowledge and expertise to achieve sustainable and demonstrable results in their communities.

Since the Tourism Laboratory is uniquely tailored to meet the needs of the participating communities, participants are asked to submit in-depth information about their community two months before commencing the Laboratory experience. Only one community at a time will participate in the Laboratory. Moreover, the fees for the Laboratory include tuition, accommodations, meals, and transportation within the Laboratory setting. All travel expenses to and from the Laboratory are arranged for and paid by the participants and/or their respective Administrations.

A typical day at the Laboratory begins with a discussion led by a Subject Matter Expert. Sessions are followed by field-learning experiences, which balance tourism planning theory and practical application. Depending on the topics to be addressed, typical afternoons at the Laboratory will reiterate the

structure of the morning session. At the end of each day, the entire group will have the opportunity to debrief at a dinner meeting, and to converse about ideas and lessons learned. This shared collegiality with the experts provides civic leaders with the necessary knowledge and expertise to achieve sustainable and demonstrable results in their communities. .

The Laboratory is accessible via Amtrak, Logan International Airport Boston, MA (BOS), and TF Green Airport Providence, RI (PVD). Instructional materials are mined from the World Tourism Organization, Business Enterprises for Sustainable Travel and other recognized best-practice tourism planning and development organizations.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines the impact of education, leadership, involvement and social and corporate awareness upon the regeneration of the communities in the Blackstone Valley. Sustainable tourism planning and development has created positive change in the Valley during several decades. Partnerships among the private and public sectors, historic preservation, landscape enhancements, and education have stopped the economic “free-fall” and created awareness “to endure that the Blackstone Valley is not just a place to live but a place worth living” (Billington & Manheim, 2002, p.358). Through the Blackstone Valley’s efforts, business constituencies have begun to recognize the importance of being responsible to the society where they operate, beyond their traditional functions of encouraging wealth and profit (Billington, 2004).

The Blackstone Valley has applied World Tourism Organization (2004) and United Nations Environmental Programme & World Tourism Organization (2005) principles to become a sustainable visitor destination. The Valley has preserved its environment, respected the socio-cultural authenticity of the local communities, and provided economic growth to all stakeholders. Leadership, creativity, collaboration, commitment and social accountability from all parts of the community have lead the Valley to find its direction, follow its vision and share it with others along the way (Billington & Manheim, 2002).

The Sustainable Planning and Development Tourism Laboratory is the next challenge for the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council in its dedication to lead social responsibility to the larger community. According to the Society of American Travel Writers (1995), the Blackstone Valley is the “Phoenix rising”. The Blackstone Valley Tourism Council accepts that commendation with the eagerness to share their success.

Conclusions

From America’s first industrialized and polluted landscape evolves the Sustainable Tourism Planning and Development Laboratory, a learning initiative that prepares, encourages and transforms key decision makers and shapers to effectively design a sustainable vision for their respective communities. One of the essential outcomes of the Laboratory experience is the creation of a Tourism Development Plan to guide its sustainable tourism efforts.

Through the laboratory and other essential outreach projects, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council continues to serve as a catalyst for sustainable tourism supported by community and corporate collective consciousness.

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