An Exercise by Ben Winchester

Does the narrative about your community read, “There’s nothing to do here”?

Does this narrative lead to an inferiority complex among residents? Do potential newcomers hear it and think twice about relocating to your community?

**Think Regionally**
Ben Winchester, from the University of Minnesota Extension, encourages community leaders to think regionally. That’s because people don’t live in a single town *exclusively*. They live in a region. In fact, they live, work, and play in a fairly large region with a lot of everything. This is true for people who live in cities, too.

To help people understand the "regionality" of their lives, Winchester has developed an activity to help residents recognize that living in a region actually means that they live in the *middle of everywhere*.

**The Process**

- Host a community meeting and introduce this activity.
- Share some context with the group. For instance, "*We love our community, but the reality is we wouldn’t love it nearly as much if we had to stay in town all the time. We live our lives regionally. That’s a big part of why we love our towns. If we are going to get better recruiting newcomers and encouraging them to stay, we have to better understand how we live our lives.*" Use whatever context makes sense for your situation.

- Provide a handout with a map in the center (see page 3) and ask the following questions:
  - Age - ask people to tell you their age by decades (20s, 30s, 40s, etc.).
  - Mark where you live (★). Mark where you work (X).
  - Think of where you shop and eat. Draw an irregular circle around that region. (Note - People may want to identify the places with small dots before drawing.)
  - Think of “play.” Draw a circle around the region where you go for fun and entertainment.
  - List 3-5 of your favorite assets in the region. These should be real places, events, etc. Not nebulous things like "hardworking people."
Debrief after people are done

☐ Spread the maps out on tables based on age groups.
☐ Have people discuss what they notice. Some potential questions to ask include:
  ☐ What's one thing that catches your attention as you look at these maps?
  ☐ What do you see that you expected to see? What surprises you?
  ☐ What assets are most important to the people in our community?
     ☐ How might these assets compliment each other?
     ☐ How might we leverage these assets to help our community thrive?
  ☐ What questions are emerging for you?
  ☐ What can we do with this information? How do we use it? What might change about
     the way we promote our community? If we are a region, how can we work with other
     communities around us?
     ☐ Now that we have this information, what are our next steps? (Capture
       next steps on a whiteboard with who's responsible, what needs to be done, and
       when it needs to be done.)

Additional Information

Ben uses this activity in a number of places and in different ways. For instance, it could be used:

- With a presentation at an annual meeting.
- With a group developing a newcomer attraction strategy.
- With a group developing a newcomer welcoming strategy.
- With a tourism marketing committee.

The information obtained is often better when this activity can be done with multiple groups at multiple meetings. For instance, go the Chamber of Commerce one week. Go to the City Council and Economic Development Corporation the next. Then, share the results.

The most important part of this exercise is that people recognize their community won't thrive if neighboring communities don't thrive. That's regionality!

When community leaders develop plans to recruit people, businesses, or visitors, they

What people often noticed

☐ Boundaries and assets differ greatly by age group.
☐ People work within 30-45 minutes of home.
☐ Eat & shop 45-60 min.
☐ Travel to play 2+ hours.
Exercise: Live, Work, Play

Directions:

1. Share your age in generalities to the right.
2. Mark where you live with a ☆; Mark where you work with an X.
3. Draw an irregular circle around where you travel to shop and eat.
4. In a different color, draw a irregular circle around where you travel for entertainment
5. List 3-5 assets in the region.

List 3-5 Assets

1. ____________
2. ____________
3. ____________
4. ____________
5. ____________
1. Hand out Blank Map

2. Star = Live; X = Work

3. Shop & Eat – in one color

4. Play & Recreate – different color

5. List 3–5 Assets

Assets:
1. ____________
2. ____________
3. ____________
4. ____________
5. ____________

This page shows how the maps will look after each step.