EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
& Key Points

Tourism & Community Sustainability in the Hudson River Valley, New York:

Resident & Visitor Engagement in Three Communities

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Project

This project, funded by New York Sea Grant, was designed to understand what makes Hudson River Valley (HRV) communities desirable places to live and visit. The goal was to provide HRV communities with information for tourism planning that enhances sustainability by maintaining the unique social, cultural, and environmental attributes of each community. We conducted written surveys of a random sample of visitors (892 completed visitor surveys) to three HRV communities: Beacon, Cold Spring and Kingston, from June to August 2007. The survey was adapted and sent by mail to a random sample of residents in November 2007 (642 completed resident surveys). The survey questions asked about participation in activities, community image, attachment to the communities, and future intentions with regard to visiting and recommending each community.

This research was intended to provide information to communities that can be used to facilitate sustainable community and tourism management. Providing detailed recommendations for applying the results was not in the scope of this project.

Findings

We found that visitors have a positive image of the communities. The majority of visitors are either *likely* or *very likely* to return within two years and to recommend the communities to others. Fifty percent of visitors are day visitors traveling no more than 50 miles from home to reach the destination, and others are passing through and visiting HRV communities as a secondary destination in a longer trip. While many visitors are drawn to the HRV for nature-based activities and water recreation opportunities, on average, cultural activities are most frequently participated in by visitors. Visitors clearly link the unique natural setting of the HRV with cultural activities, as exhibited by responses to image questions, where River viewing and access received high scores.

Residents' images of their communities are also positive. Residents engage in cultural activities more often than nature-based activities or water recreation activities. Increased participation in cultural activities leads to a more positive image of both cultural and nature offerings, suggesting that local natural resources are important to residents, regardless of whether they engage in outdoor recreation activities. A higher percentage of residents than tourists reports receiving information about local activities and events from a range of sources. Participation in cultural activities and length of residency contribute to a stronger place identity among residents.

Key Points

Visitors
- One third of visitors were first-time visitors to the community.
    - Cold Spring had the highest percentage of repeat visitors (77%).
    - Beacon had the highest percentage of new visitors (45%).
- Half traveled 50 miles or less.
- Half were groups of two people.
- HRV communities were not visitors' primary destination for most trips.

Participation: Residents
- Cultural activities were more popular than nature-based and water recreation activities for all groups.
- Cold Spring residents were more likely to have visited the waterfront, hiked, and attended theater events.
- Kingston residents were more likely to have taken a boat tour or cruise.
- Beacon residents were more likely to have visited art galleries.

Participation: Visitors
- Almost all visitors to the three communities dined and shopped.
- Beacon visitors were less likely to visit the waterfront, but more likely to go to historical sites/museums, art events, and galleries.
- Kingston visitors more often took boat tours or cruises, went motor boating, and attended festivals.
- Cold Spring visitors predominantly visited the waterfront, shopped, and dined.

General Information Sources
- A higher percentage of residents received information from external sources than did visitors.
- Word-of-mouth, signs along the road, and previous experience were the top three information sources for residents.
- Word-of-mouth and previous experience were the top two information sources for visitors.
- Kingston visitors used brochures and booklets to gather information significantly more than visitors in Beacon and Cold Spring.
- Beacon visitors found information in magazines more often than in other communities.
- A significantly larger number of Cold Spring visitors relied on previous experience as an information source.

Tourism-Related Information Sources
- Local business and government reached more residents than county or state agencies.
- I ♥ NY Program and tourism attractions reached more visitors than other sources.
- Kingston was significantly more effective at disseminating information than Cold Spring or Beacon.

Community Image
- Residents held strong images of their communities in terms of cultural offerings, nature offerings, and river amenities.
- Residents held weaker images of their communities in terms of infrastructure and local character.
- Cold Spring residents consistently had the strongest community image, followed by Beacon residents, and finally Kingston.
- Visitor image was similar to residents; river amenities dominated visitor image.
- While visitors associated nature offerings with all three communities, visitors' image of nature was strongest in Cold Spring and was not significantly different in Beacon and Kingston.
- Visitors had a stronger image of the river amenities in Cold Spring and Kingston compared to Beacon.
- While development of infrastructure was not something that visitors strongly associated with their visit, Beacon's infrastructure image was significantly greater than Cold Spring's and Kingston's.

Place Attachment
- Residents were more dependent upon and identified more with the communities than visitors.
- While residents in all three communities identified with their home, the strength of relationships was significantly different in all three locations. Cold Spring residents were the strongest, followed by Beacon and Kingston.
- Cold Spring residents were significantly more dependent upon their community for specific amenities. Beacon and Kingston residents were dependent to a lesser extent and not significantly different from each other.
- Visitors to Beacon and Kingston did not differ significantly in how strongly they identified with those communities. Visitors to Cold Spring had a significantly stronger sense of identity with the community than visitors in either Beacon or Kingston.

Future Intentions
- Over 70 percent of visitors in each community planned to return within two years.
- Over 80 percent of visitors in each community said they would recommend it to others.
- The majority of Kingston residents would recommend Kingston to visitors. Higher proportions of Beacon and Cold Spring residents would recommend their communities to visitors.

Similar patterns in the relationships among information sources, participation in activities, community image, place attachment, and future intentions emerged in all three communities. The relationships were strongest, however, in Beacon and Kingston. This section highlights only those relationships with r^2 and sr^2 values greater than .300.

- Visitors' use of information sources predicted participation in cultural activities in both communities.
- For visitors in Beacon, experience/community information sources had the strongest influence; number of visits was the individual variable with the strongest influence on participation in cultural activities in Kingston.

- Participation in cultural activities was the best predictor of the image Beacon visitors had of the city's cultural offerings.
- In Kingston, the combined place attachment and community image factors influenced visitors' intentions to recommend Kingston to potential visitors.
- Information sources predicted participation in cultural activities for Beacon and Kingston residents.
- Increased participation in cultural activities in Beacon influenced residents' intention to recommend cultural activities and the image of the city's cultural offerings.
- Participation in cultural activities most strongly influenced both the image of Kingston's cultural offerings and how strongly residents identified with their community.
- Length of residency also influenced Kingston residents' feelings of identifying with the community.
- The combined place attachment and community image factors influenced residents' intentions to recommend Beacon and Kingston to potential visitors.
- Beacon residents' feelings of identifying with the community were the strongest individual variable influencing their intentions to recommend the city to others.