Prospects for Adventure Tourism in Elkhorn City, KY
Based on Interviews with Area Residents

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Background

Elkhorn City is a small community situated in a unique corridor of the Eastern Appalachian Mountains. In the midst of this natural beauty, Elkhorn City’s economy has relied heavily on its coal mining economy. Like many Appalachian coal communities, Elkhorn City’s decline in coal production has had luring consequences on the local economy, natural landscape and its people. However, despite these challenges, within the past decade, local residents, community leaders and other stakeholders have expressed their concern and have begun to work towards promoting adventure tourism as an economic alternative.

Methods

Collected field interviews from Elkhorn City --- across a two year period between 2012-2014 years.

- September through the earlier months of 2012 I invested most of my time in exploratory research by attending meetings virtually and in person through, phone conferences and field visits that involved discussions between city official, the Elkhorn City Heritage Council, EKU, UK and other major stakeholders. During the 2013 year.

- Collected 6 out of the 22 interviews conducted by EKU and UK faculty and university students.
- Transcribed the interviews for direct responses to the interview questions.

Transcript Analysis

- Coded and analyzed the transcripts for themes regarding the local infrastructure.
- Coded and analyzed the transcripts for themes on community consciousness and communication.
- Coded and analyzed the transcripts for themes regarding degraded environments and the politics, economy and ecology of coal.

The Response

Infrastructure:

“...I think there’s a huge drive for civic activity. A lot of people like to stay involved, but they kind of stay distant for lack of development”

“We need motels. If I had the money to build the motel with, it would be difficult to find a property to put it”

“People from all over the US come here to see the grand canyon of the South. Horsethief riding, we have the waterpark up there for kids, we have trail systems, climbing up there, mountain biking... but it’s a matter of getting a lot of other residents interested, more interested, in developing their town,” but not exploiting it”

“we have been blessed geographically in our location, and that location puts us way ahead of the curve on most Eastern Kentucky, or this regionstown...I think that’s where we need to go.”

Communication:

Pg. “We have got some class six rapids on the river that’s amazing...if we could get more coverage of stuff like that, let people know we have this stuff out here...we talked to people in town and they don’t even know that stuff is out there”

“Other than getting more people involved and interested and petitioning our local, state and federal governments for grant money...displaying an interest in this community...letting our government and agencies know what we have to offer. Come look at us, talk to us.”

Political Ecology:

“I think that sometimes outsiders come to our area and their somewhat a takin back...by just some of the disregard for nature that they see here.”

“I think the look of our town is a hindrance... just needs more personal pride and attention from the people who live here and I think that is going to be a big problem is overcoming the resistance to, to do things like that... and small things could make a huge difference but... I think that a big challenge is bringing those people on board with the ideas.”

“There are a lot of people who understand that we need to replace the coal mining industry and that we have this great asset here and their trying to make the most of and I think education will be a big part of that, is just showing people what can be accomplished and then, working with them so they don’t feel alienated, so that they feel like part of the solution.”

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As a researcher for this project it was my initial responsibility to capture the thoughts and opinions of residents, community leaders and tourists about the community’s rich natural assets and the potential for adventure tourism in Elkhorn City, Kentucky.