

A photograph of a large iceberg floating in the ocean. The iceberg is white and has a jagged, irregular shape. The water is a deep blue-grey color. The background shows a rocky coastline with some vegetation. The text is overlaid on the image.

Economic and Socio-economic Planning Processes:

Beyond the Document

Twillingate Islands Tourism Association (TITA)

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Twillingate Islands Tourism Association (TITA)

Prepared By

Shamarukh Aziz Bhuiyan & Ryan Roberts
Geography 3350

Prepared For

Dr. Kelly Vodden
Assistant Professor
Department of Geography, MUN

&

Gander New-Wes-Valley
Community-based Research Project Steering Committee

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Introduction

On the northeast corner of the Island of Newfoundland, one will find the Gander – New-Wes-Valley region of the Rural Secretariat, which is a “unique and innovative provincial government entity that strives to advance the sustainability of rural Newfoundland and Labrador communities and regions”¹. As shown in figure 1, the area reaches from Terra Nova Park in the southeast to the town Lewisporte in the west and includes hundreds of communities and several sub regions. One such region is known as the Twillingate - New World Island Area. This region consists of a series of small islands with over 30 relatively small communities and villages scattered throughout, with the town Twillingate being the largest population wise (2,090 residents in 2006).² The vast majority of this region was employed by the fishery for most of the area’s history. However, since the major decline of North Atlantic cod fishery, this has and continues to change at an ever faster rate, leaving the area looking for other ways of living.³

Today, one of the major employers of the area is the tourism industry. This is especially true for the two Twillingate Islands: North and South. This area will be the main focus of this paper, though as we will discuss, what is happening here is also affecting several surrounding communities. A group known as the Twillingate Islands Tourism Association (TITA) has recognized that the area has always had great potential for being one of Newfoundland’s strongest pulls for tourists to the island, however much of this

¹ <http://www.exec.gov.nl.ca/rural/index.html>

² Government of NL, *Community Accounts*. www.communityaccounts.ca.

³ "Town of Twillingate". <http://www.townoftwillingate.ca>.

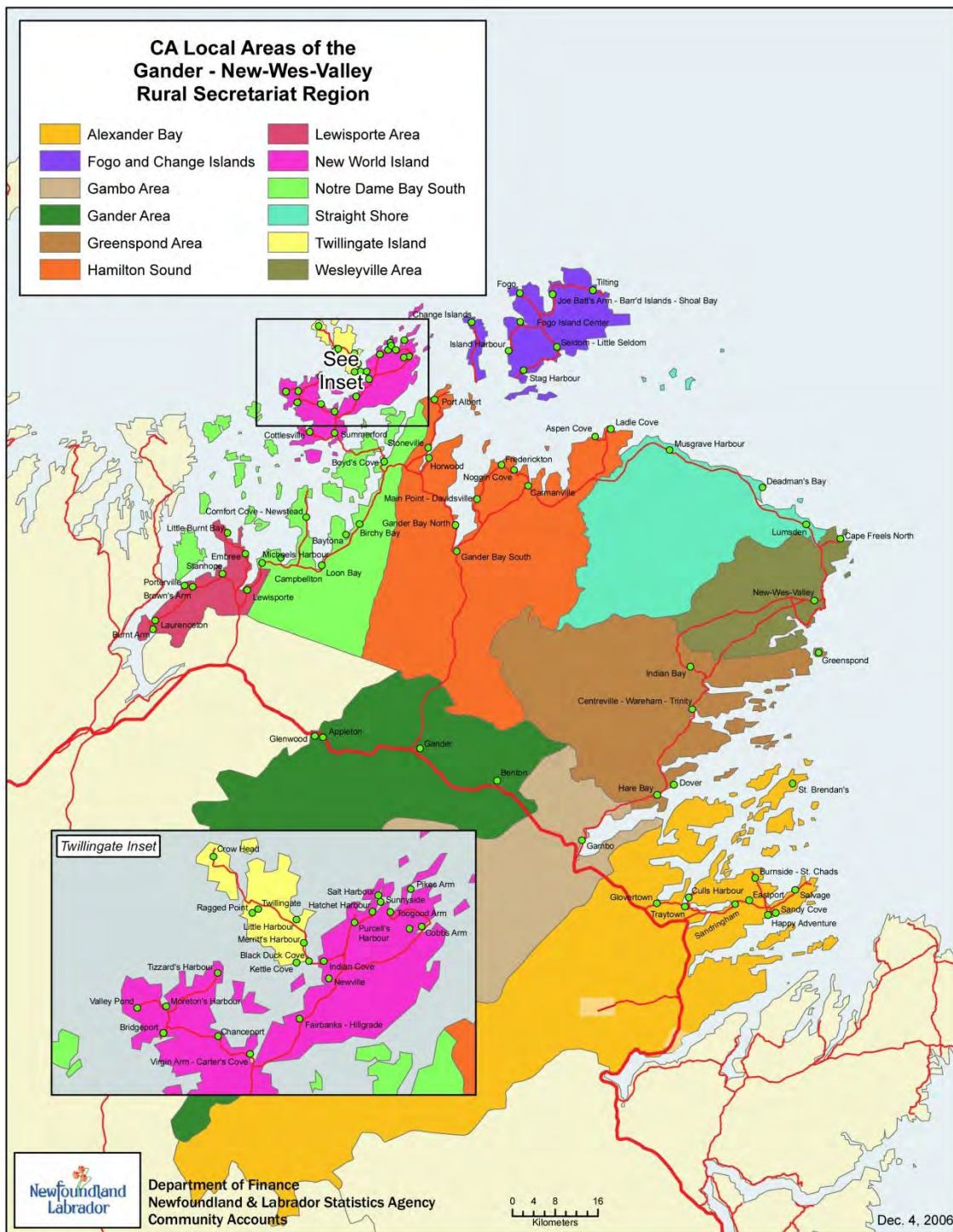


Figure 1: Gander - New-Wes-Valley Region with Twillingate Inset
 Source: Community Accounts

potential still remains underdeveloped. In this paper, we will look at TITA's work to develop the tourism industry in the Twillingate area, including the development of the

two volumes, “Twillingate Island Tourism Master Plan” which lays out exactly what TITA wishes to do for the area. We will also discuss, based on interviews and other research, areas where parts of this plan were not followed as was intended, which lead to major delays in tourism development and major tension for all involved. Following this, we will discuss how TITA and the other affiliated groups, with perseverance and team work have since been trying and, in many ways, succeeding in getting the plan back on track. We will break our discussion into six major headings, which are as follows:

- Description of the way the plan process started and was conducted
- Moving from planning to implementation
- Outcomes to date from the planning process
- Key factors that have contributed to the implementation success (or lack of success)
- Removing challenges and barriers

Methodology

The present study is part of a class research project investigating experiencing with socio-economic planning and plan implementation in the Gander-New-Wes-Valley Rural Secretariat Region. The following report is based on interviews, literature review, and browsing of specific, related web sites. Interviews were conducted with five people: two representatives of TITA, one federal and one provincial representative and one representative of AMEC - the consulting firm that developed the Master Plan. The interviews were conducted by telephone and face to face. The face to face interviews

took place at a project session in Gander, using a structured questionnaire. The two volumes of the “Twillingate Island Tourism Master Plan,” have been thoroughly studied for the purpose of this paper. In addition many websites (e.g. Community Accounts, Statistics Canada, Town of Twillingate, etc.) have been visited and data and information have been retrieved as needed.

Twillingate Islands Tourism Association (TITA)

The Twillingate Islands Tourism Association Inc. (TITA) is a non-profit organization specializing in the development of the tourism industry of Twillingate through its membership. The organization’s mandate is to promote Twillingate islands as “one of the best tourism destinations in Newfoundland and Labrador”.⁴ The services of TITA include marketing the island, community awareness, business support tourism, consulting, preservation of historic sites and hiking trails, and maintenance of viewing sites.⁵

Description of the way the planning process started and was conducted

Twillingate has always been an area of interest for tourists from both Newfoundland and beyond. “The area’s scenic rugged beauty; numerous natural harbours, coves and islands, stately historic homes and merchant premises, and friendly people have long attracted visitors”.⁶ And as part of the Kittiwake Coast, the islands have been considered in past strategic plans which attempted to develop tourism in the region as a whole, including a tourism plan for the island of Newfoundland’s northeast coast prepared by Randolph

⁴ <http://www.twillingatetourism.ca/>

⁵ <http://www.twillingatetourism.ca/>

⁶ *Twillingate Island Tourism Master Plan Vol 1, 2, p.i*

Group in 1991.⁷ There have also been more localised studies designed to assess the feasibility of developing the Twillingate area as a major tourism destination. But due to lack of government funding in one case, and a lack of a solid plan in another, no real development had occurred up to the early 2000s.⁸

It wasn't until the late 1990's when a group of individuals in the Twillingate Islands area began to realize that if they didn't push to have the tourism in their region developed, it would probably never happen. They recognized that they had the beginnings of a major tourism attraction in the already famous Long Point Lighthouse (seen in figure 2) and they wished to see it properly developed with a proper viewing platform, binoculars, and proper landscaping of the area.⁹ However, when they started seeking funding for the



Figure 2: Long Point Lighthouse
Source: Canada – Photos.com

upgrades and additions to the site, it was also realized by potential funders, such as Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), that much more could be done. They saw that, even beyond the lighthouse, there was a product to be

developed in the area and that there was already a market in place for this product; the area warranted more investment and further development. It is also important to note that

⁷ *Northeast Coast Regional Tourism Strategy, Randolph Group, 1991*

⁸ *Twillingate Island Tourism Master Plan Vol 1, 2-3.*

⁹ Interview respondents, *Oct./Nov. 2009*

at the same time, other private sector and not-for-profit groups were also trying to obtain funding for various tourism projects in the Twillingate area.

The group of local citizens that has become known as TITA were missing one thing; without a well laid out, comprehensive plan, which included many of the other projects being put forward by others. The problem, from a funding agency point of view, was that there were too many groups from various towns in the area all looking for funding for various, separate projects. ACOA wanted all these ideas organized into one, all inclusive plan. Other groups such as Innovation, Trade and Rural Development (INTRD) and TITA themselves, through the failure to implement previous plans for the area, also saw the need for a new planning process. This need led to the development of the “Twillingate Island Tourism Master Plan”, a two volume document developed for TITA by AMEC Earth and Environmental Limited in association with Economic Planning Group of Canada. The document gives great detail on what the Twillingate area has to offer, what needs to be addressed, and how they proposed to achieve the goals put forward in the plan.

The ideas in the plan were not conceived of by a group of people from one community from the area. In fact, there were representatives from each community present during all of the preliminary planning meetings. This was done to involve as many people from the area as possible. Each community has unique things to offer a visiting tourist and to make sure each community was properly represented, individual community members, local businesses, and town councils from each town on the Twillingate Islands were invited to take part (though some chose not to attend). It is also interesting to note that people

outside the area, including representatives from Lewisporte, a community considerably south of the region affected by the plan were also invited to participate. As one representative stated, these communities which lay between Twillingate and the Trans-Canada-Highway would also see benefits from increased tourist traffic. For this reason they were invited to attend the meetings. With all these groups and individuals involved, a more comprehensive and all inclusive plan was developed over time. To do this, based on research, TITA provided a baseline of what needed to be done to the public and asked for feedback, including what ideas were priorities. From this feedback, a draft plan was produced, which was then again presented to the public for further feedback. Following this, the plan was made more concrete.¹⁰

Information about TITA's work was put forward in multiple ways in case people were unable to make it to public meetings. These methods included focus group meetings (by invitation), telephone interviews, community meetings, advertisements on local community channels and newspaper ads. However, when dealing with the public, there are always challenges to be faced. In this case, there were those that disagreed with many things put forward for the plan. For example, the Historic Fishery Village Group had other views of what should be done, including the idea of creating a historically accurate fishing village that people could visit. To them it was important to preserve an 'authentic experience' for the tourists. But they wanted to locate this village outside of any existing community, a direction some TITA members disagreed with.

¹⁰Interview respondent, *Oct.2009*

Once these issues were negotiated and they had collected all the pertinent information on what they wanted to achieve in the plan, this information was given to Susan Sherk of AMEC Earth and Environmental Limited to actually write the plan which would become



Figure 3: Randy Hann sketch of Lighthouse
Source: www.randyhann.com/drawings/index.html

the “Twillingate Island Tourism Master Plan”.

The creation of this document was a coordinated effort between TITA members, AMEC (including Sherk and John Hull, AMEC associate), and the Economic Planning Group (based in Nova Scotia). The creation of this plan cost in excess of \$80,000, and was paid for in part by both the governments of Newfoundland and Canada, the latter through ACOA. TITA

itself is a non-profit organization. In order to raise money, TITA collects money from the

binoculars located at Long Point Lighthouse (there is a fee to use the binoculars), and also through the sales of sketches by the local artist Randy Hann, one of which is a drawing of the lighthouse itself shown above in figure 3.

In 2003, the Master Plan was completed. Among other things it outlined what were to be the first four priorities to be focused on. They were: 1) further development of the Long Point Lighthouse; 2) upgrades to the harbour front in Twillingate (the Harbour Experience); 3) creation of a central information and services center (The Experience Center), which would be a focal point for tourists during their visit to the area; and 4) further development of demonstration sites. These would include boat building, fishing,

wine making, arts and crafts. However, as stated by one individual interviewed for the project, things did not happen as planned.

Moving from planning to implementation

According to one government representative, the top four priorities were not provided in any particular order. TITA members state, however, that TITA's first priority was the development of the Long Point Lighthouse. This area would become the anchor attraction for the area. It was hoped that once completed, this historic site would bring in more people early in the implementation stage of the plan, and therefore, bring more monies into the community early on. However this was not to happen. During the initial stages of the plan's implementation, it was the view of some respondents that one particular individual at ACOA was taking control of the project away from TITA and the people of Twillingate Islands. Funding was approved for several developments in the area, but the main issue, the lighthouse, was being neglected. Possibly linked to a change of ACOA personnel after five years, funding for the lighthouse renewal has been approved. ACOA awarded over \$29,000 to TITA in July 2008 to undertake a comprehensive development and design plan for the Long Point Lighthouse¹¹ and major construction is planned for the summer of 2010. It is hoped that the site will be finished and opened the following summer, in 2011.

While the lighthouse development was held back, there were several other tourism-related developments going forward on the islands. Many of the area's hiking trails have been partially upgraded and information kiosks have been set up. Upgrades to the harbour

¹¹ www.acoa-apeca.gc.ca/e/media/press/press.shtml?4180

were completed through the Town of Twillingate in 2005 and the visitor's information centre on nearby New World Island was upgraded in 2003 through the local development association. ACOA had invested close to \$1 million in the area during this period, but until the funding came through for the organization's top priority projects, particularly lighthouse development, the time lines in the plan remained behind.

The funding that has come to TITA and that which is expected in the future comes from ACOA and INTRD, with a small portion generated by TITA itself. Once this funding has been received, it will be up to TITA to put it to its proper use and undertake implementation (e.g. upgrading of the waterfront, creating washrooms, telephone booths, etc.), as outlined in the plan and approved funding proposals. There were differing views among respondents as to whether members of INTRD and ACOA meet regularly with TITA to evaluate their progress.

Outcomes to date from the planning process

As has previously been stated, TITA's ability to access funding has been a major implementation barrier. It has caused major priorities, like the Long Point Lighthouse, to be neglected. Even with smaller advancements such as trail development, without a major anchor attraction trails are not going to be enough to bring in the wanted number of tourists to the area.¹²

There have been some other unforeseen benefits to the whole process, though only some of the people interviewed seemed to recognize them. For one, the whole planning

¹²Interview respondent, Oct.2009

experience has been a learning experience for all those involved. There has also been some collaboration between towns and also between various local groups and businesses. And because all the communities in the area, and even a few from outside such as Lewisporte, were involved in the planning process, the development of tourism has become a more focused effort with mostly everyone working toward a common goal.

There has also been some progress made on certain aspects of the plan that have happened outside the TITA umbrella. For example, a group in the private sector has created a “Living History Museum” which was something mentioned in the TITA Master Plan. While there has been a mixed response to this development this sort of private sector investment was viewed as constructive by some, as it contributes to the completion of the plan and development of the area’s tourism attractions.

Key factors that have contributed to implementation success or lack of success

It seems that in the case of TITA for the most part failure to implement the plan as expected is due to lack of funding. It is not due to lack of determination on the part of the TITA membership. TITA members have never wavered in their determination to see their plans through, especially when it comes to the development of the Long Point Lighthouse site, which has been their main goal since the start.

During the research process, it was interesting to view, however, that there are two sides of the funding issue. TITA was expecting to receive one large amount of funding after the

presentation of the Master Plan which would cover the costs for most, if not all of the major projects put forth in the plan. According to one respondent this was unrealistic and practically impossible. ACOA provides funding for specific individual projects within a plan that can be accommodated by the individuals involved, in this case the limited number of volunteers actually involved with TITA. TITA can only do so much, even with the proper funding. “There is a lot to be done and only so many people to do it”.¹³ Paper work (administrative) and delegation skills are also required. Thus, volunteer resources are another important issue and one possible reason why funding for more of the projects was not given at one time.

Another issue put forward by one interview respondent is that TITA has really only been looking to one main source (ACOA) for funding. It is suggested that additional funding for certain sites, such as various heritage buildings in the area, could be acquired from groups such as the Heritage Foundation of Newfoundland & Labrador.

Removing Challenges and Barriers

Because of differing views of the issue of funding, there have been times when many on both sides of the argument have become very frustrated. One representative suggests that it would have been a good idea to “flesh out” each of the projects to be tackled; including giving relatively accurate cost estimates for each project. According to another respondent, success will be determined by TITA’s ability to “focus less on the negative and more on the positive”. They also need to attract more volunteers with the proper

¹³Interview respondent, Nov.2009

skills to deal with the implementation of such an elaborate plan as the Twillingate Island Tourism Master Plan.

Once TITA receives the funding it has requested, other challenges and barriers to development and plan implementation may present them. But for now, the lack of funding is the main issue; although this problem is being addressed as funding for the Lighthouse project is now on track. As one respondent pointed out, the perseverance and patience of TITA is probably what will finally see the projects through.

Concluding Remarks

There are many of untapped resources all across Newfoundland with respect to the tourism industry. The Twillingate Island Tourism Association has realized that the Twillingate Islands has many attributes that makes it one of these resources. But to make tourism really work in the area, major development is needed. This is not a new idea and development has been attempted, or at least planned, in the past. Plans such as the one drawn up by the Randolph Group in 1991 have included many good ideas but, ultimately failed to produce the desired results. It was the Twillingate Island Tourism Association, TITA, which finally, with cooperation from several other private and public groups, saw the development of a very comprehensive plan for tourism in the area. The problem is that moving beyond the planning process has been fraught with difficulties. TITA sees the problem as one of only receiving limited amounts of funding which are insufficient for the completion of many of the major high priority projects laid out by the plan (TITA representative). But on the other hand, others view TITA's demands for funds to cover

the entire plan all at one time as unrealistic. It is estimated that to complete all the major projects laid out in the plan would require approximately 6 million dollars. This area has been one that has caused great amounts of tension and frustration among the stakeholders. As researchers, witnessing some of these tensions through the research process has been interesting and rather unexpected (at least to this degree).

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