

The importance of location and scale in rural and small town tourism product development: The case of the Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre, Manitoba, Canada

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Key Messages

- A typology of themes in rural tourism development is developed.
- Large-scale tourism attractions and destinations are possible in rural communities.
- Scale and distance matter for tourism attractions and destinations.

This paper begins with a review of the literature on tourism in rural economies, to establish a framework for analyzing large-scale tourism products in rural and small town regions. The review is followed by the development of a typology of large-scale attractions in rural and small town regions, including parks, casinos, events, heritage, and cultural products. The typology leads into the example of the Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre (CFDC) in Manitoba, Canada. Located in an agricultural region of south-central Manitoba, the community of Morden is located 125 km from the provincial capital city, Winnipeg, which had a population of 811,900 in 2016. Morden is also located 35 km north of the border with North Dakota. Thus, while a small town in a traditionally rural region still dependent upon an agricultural economic base, Morden has been recently successful in diversifying its economy, including through manufacturing, services, hospitality, and tourism. In part, this success is due to a south-central Manitoba location; however, it is also the result of innovative local leadership, including the prioritization of hospitality and tourism related to the CFDC. This paper describes the case study as an example of successful tourism development within an already economically and socially diversifying region.

Keywords: rural tourism, authenticity, self-drive tourism, community museum

Importance de l'emplacement et de l'échelle dans le développement de produits touristiques dans les régions rurales et les petites villes : le cas du Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre au Manitoba, Canada

Cet article commence avec une revue de littérature sur le tourisme dans les économies rurales afin d'établir un cadre conceptuel pour analyser les produits touristiques à grande échelle dans les régions rurales et les petites villes. La revue est suivie du développement d'une typologie des attractions à grande échelle dans les régions rurales et les petites villes, y compris les parcs, les casinos, les activités, le patrimoine et les produits culturels. La typologie mène à l'exemple du Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre (CFDC) au Manitoba, Canada.

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Située dans une région agricole du centre-sud du Manitoba, la collectivité de Morden est située à 125 kilomètres de la capitale provinciale, Winnipeg, qui comptait une population de 811 900 habitants en 2016. La ville de Morden est également située à 35 kilomètres au nord de la frontière avec le Dakota du Nord. Ainsi, bien que cette petite ville dans une région traditionnellement rurale dépende encore d'une économie agricole, Morden a réussi récemment à diversifier son économie, y compris par le truchement de la fabrication, des services, de l'hôtellerie et du tourisme. Cette réussite est due en partie à son emplacement dans le centre-sud du Manitoba ; toutefois, elle est également le résultat d'un leadership local innovateur, y compris la priorisation de l'hôtellerie et du tourisme reliés au CFDC. Cet article décrit l'étude de cas comme un exemple de réussite du développement du tourisme au sein d'une région déjà diversifiée sur le plan économique et social.

Mots clés : tourisme rural, authenticité, tourisme autonome, musée communautaire

Introduction

While large-scale, urban, and resort-based tourism continues to dominate research agendas, the potential and limits for tourism development in remote and peripheral regions have seen increased attention throughout the past two decades (e.g., Buhalis 1999a; Pearce 2002; Schmallegger and Carson 2010; Schmallegger et al. 2010; Biddulph 2015; Rockett and Ramsey 2017). Urban regions are often attractions in and of themselves, with a local market and transportation hubs and connections for those travelling from afar. Given the effort and expense of accessing remote regions, the tourism products themselves are the attraction. Schmallegger et al. (2010) focus on types of “peripheral” destinations, arguing that different theoretical approaches are needed to understand distance. In doing so, they relate to the Staples Thesis which has long been adopted by geographers and political economists to understand remote, resourced-based economies in Canada (e.g., Innis 1933; Barnes et al. 2001; Halseth et al. 2014). The reliance on traditional staples economics (e.g., farming, forestry, mining, and fishing) is largely seen as unsustainable in the long term. Diversifying economies away from resources extraction and minimal processing is seen as one way to ensure longer-term, viable development (Halseth et al. 2014). This paper presents a community example, Morden, Manitoba, where existing staples production (agriculture and mining) are still active economies—but with economic diversification taking place simultaneously, and for a number of decades. Thus, while staples are still important in the region, for the community of Morden, their influence on the overall economy has long been diminished.

While some work exists on rural-urban fringe regions (e.g., Weaver and Lawton 2001, 2004, 2008; Timothy 2005; Weaver 2005; Koster et al. 2010), less research exists in the “in-between” regions, that is, non-remote rural (Carson et al. 2014). Often referred to as “self-drive tourism” or “rubber tire traffic” (Hardy 2007, 2), these regions are accessible to automobile-based travellers. Two types of tourism can be identified in such regions: incidental (i.e., tourist stops along the way while travelling to the primary destination such as a park or a city) and purposeful (i.e., tourist attraction is within the non-remote rural area). The purpose of this paper is to explore a large-scale tourist attraction in small town Manitoba, Canada, which benefits from both types.

The Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre (CFDC) is a unique example of a science-based discovery that with care and attention has been developed into a tourist attraction. Dinosaur and ancient reptile fossils have a great power to educate and have become increasingly popular over the past few decades (Stemmler 2006), adding to the pull factor of the CFDC. With a vision to develop a stand-alone facility, the concerns of others related to exploitation (Buhalis 1999a; Biddulph 2015) and creative destruction (Mitchell and Vanderwerf 2010) are recognized. The CFDC is one aspect of an increasingly diversified rural and small town economy that has seen the population of the community increase by more than 20% over the past decade.

The paper begins by reviewing the relevant literature to establish a framework for analyzing large-scale tourism products in rural and small town regions. This review is followed by the development of a typology of tourism-themed research in rural and small town regions, including: parks, casinos, events, heritage, and cultural products. The typology

leads into the example of the CFDC in Manitoba, Canada. Located in an agricultural region of south-central Manitoba, the community of Morden is located approximately 125 km from the provincial capital city, Winnipeg, which had a population of 811,900 in 2016. Morden is also located 35 km north of the border with North Dakota. While a small town in a traditionally rural region once dependent upon agriculture as an economic base, Morden has access to tourism markets and has long been successful in diversifying its economy, including manufacturing, services, hospitality, and tourism. Morden has long been an economic diversification story, beginning with the construction of a Tupperware manufacturing facility in 1978 (Information Services Branch 1978). This paper describes the case study of the CFDC in Morden which continues to be successful in economic diversification, in this case in tourism development and promotion. Further, the CFDC case is one where the very products it displays (fossils) arise from the past and present bentonite mining activities.

Literature review / scholarly context

Rural economies and tourism

The story for many of the rural and remote communities around the world is one of decline and depopulation. Communities that lie farther from major urban centres often experience greater degrees of decline and depopulation. This decline is often led by restructuring or loss of the traditional economic base (Schmallegger and Carson 2010; Schmallegger et al. 2010; Halseth et al. 2014). Regardless of the degree of success in maintaining traditional economies, most are shedding labour. In agricultural regions, while production continues, the number of people farming has been declining for decades. In terms of remoteness, restructuring in island contexts of remoteness has also garnered attention (e.g., Buhalis 1999b; Croes et al. 2013; Montero 2015). In both geographies, isolation impacts the degree of restructuring and limits the responses to it. With traditional rural economies, community growth was determined by the resources in the region (e.g., fish, farmland, forest, minerals, energy), often referred to as a community or region's resource endowment (e.g., Pomfret 2006), and the ability to bring the products to market. New rural

economies have different spatialities. If the new economy is based on information and communications technologies, for example, connectivity determines the level of development. If the new economy is tourism, transportation infrastructure and facility development determine growth—in this case, to bring the people to the product and to serve the people once there. Similarly, tourism attractions and destinations are affected by distance, particularly those beyond the rural-urban fringe (Weaver and Lawton 2001, 2004, 2008). This is quite different than tourism located with rural-urban fringes where distance is less of a factor (Timothy 2005; Koster et al. 2010). Regardless of location, tourism development in rural areas is most often an economic diversification response to the restructuring of traditional economies, and as such, is also often a response to forces of globalization.

Although not without its critics (Schmallegger and Carson 2010), tourism is often seen as the panacea to this socio-economic change; it can, however, be fraught with limits, challenges, and negative impacts, including seasonality, lack of market access, and over-exploitation (Lane 1994b; Buhalis 1999a; Sharpley 2002; Koster and Lemelin 2009; Koster and Baccar 2016). There is also a “fragility” (Bramwell 1994, 2)—including ecological, economic, and cultural components—that can occur in the transition between the lost traditional economy and the new economy. Further, successful tourism within rural areas can result in negative impacts within the community (Lane 1994a). Of particular concern in the literature have been issues related to host-guest conflicts (Kneafsey 2001; Mason and Cheyne 2001), the authenticity of the product to the local culture (Chhabra 2005; Timothy and Boyd 2006), and the commodification of culture (Halpern and Mitchell 2011). As noted by Koster and Baccar (2016, 218): “for many rural communities, however, the capacity for tourism development is limited, which challenges the potential opportunities offered through tourism.” It is relative to this point, that rural and small towns as destinations are examined here—specifically, the notion of the need for rural areas to “bundle” tourism products to create an attraction as expressed by Huang et al. (2016) is explored.

Typology of rural and small town destinations

Typologies of tourism products, destinations, and amenities are not new (e.g., Arnegger et al. 2010;

Bojanic 2011; Hall 2011; Brouder 2014). In fact, Arnegger et al. (2010) include an extensive review of tourism typologies as the foundation for the product-based typology of nature-based tourism they developed. More recently, Petroman (2015) developed a general typology of tourism destinations based on geography (e.g., coastal, urban, rural) and product (e.g., accommodation, culture, nature). While not to be taken as exhaustive of the literature, the typology presented in Table 1 is an attempt to highlight the primary destination/product types that exist in rural and small town areas. In doing so, benchmark works and the more recent literature are described, including the issues addressed in the promotion of rural and small town product development and marketing such as economic diversification, response to rural restructuring, product development and marketing, authenticity, commodification, and sustainability (Slee et al. 1997; Buhalis 1999a; Wanhill and Buhalis 1999; Marco 2015; Koster and Baccar 2016). The typology is then applied to the Morden, Manitoba region generally, and the CFDC specifically.

Park and natural area destination research has two main, yet related, foci: environmental sustainability and visitor management. Environmental

concerns are dominated by management for integrity of park ecosystems in the face of human pressures (Manning 2007; Newsome et al. 2013; Theberge et al. 2016), including tourism. Sustainability was introduced as a construct for analyzing rural tourism development by Lane (1994a), and is exemplified in protected areas tourism research by Slocum and Curtis (2015) and Tan and Law (2016). Visitor management is linked to management for ecological integrity in terms of use intensity (e.g., Beeco et al. 2014; D'Antonio and Monz 2016), and includes social science concepts such as motivations and satisfaction (Manning 2011), behaviour and norms (Manning 2007), crowding (Vaske and Shelby 2008), visitor conflict (Vaske et al. 2007), and specialization (Bryan 1977; Scott and Shafer 2001). These elements can be combined in conceptual models such as Limits of Acceptable Change (McCool 1994; Manning 2007).

Quite different than parks and natural areas, for decades throughout North America there has been a trend towards large-scale casino developments in rural areas and those adjacent to large urban centres. Beyond the obvious concerns about gambling addictions, other concerns have been identified, including commodification of culture as casino development

Table 1
Typology of rural and small town tourism research themes.

Research theme	Issues addressed	Seminal papers
Parks / natural areas	Environmental sustainability; visitor management	Bryan 1977; McCool 1994; Scott and Shafer 2001; Manning 2007, 2011; Vaske et al. 2007; Vaske and Shelby 2008; Newsome et al. 2013; Theberge et al. 2016
Casinos/resorts	Local spinoff; gambling addictions	Carmichael et al. 1996; Gabe et al. 1996; Long 1996; Connor and Taggart 2009; Belanger and Williams 2012
Festivals/events	Cultural preservation; attendance management	Rollins and Delamere 2007; Panyik et al. 2011
Cultural / heritage sites or areas	Authenticity, commodification	Mitchell 1998; MacDonald and Jolliffe 2003; George and Reid 2005; Loulanski and Loulanski 2011; Montero 2015
Townsites	Main street; authenticity; commodification	Ambler 1995; Mitchell et al. 2001; Mitchell and de Waal 2008; Mitchell and Vanderwerf 2010; Rockett and Ramsey 2017
Landscapes	Place marketing; authenticity	Ambler 1995; Graham and Murray 2003; Marco 2015; Stoffelen and Vanneste 2015
Accommodation destinations	Farm vacations; quality assessments	Fennell and Weaver 1997; Marin 2015; Cerutti et al. 2016
Museums / cultural centres	Authenticity; education; visitor expectation and satisfaction	Frochot 2004; Harrison and Shaw 2004; de Rojas and Camarero 2008; Bonn et al. 2010; Johanson and Olsen 2010; Hume 2011; Malcolm and Ramsey 2014
Route-based tourism	Theme-based excursions; common pathways	Kerstetter et al. 2001; Graham and Murray 2003; Ramsey and Everitt 2007; Payne and Hurt 2015
Roadside attractions / murals	Community economic development; authenticity	Dregni 2006; Koster 2010

in non-urban North America is often Indigenous-owned and/or operated (Carmichael et al. 1996; Gabe et al. 1996; Long 1996; Spears and Boger, 2002; Conner and Taggart 2009; Belanger and Williams 2012). The challenge is the sustainability of such development within the broader community, related to gambling (i.e., local gambling addictions versus non-local tourism gambling) (Gonzales 2003).

The festival and event sector has been successful for many rural and small town areas. While managing attendance over time has been one concern (Panyik et al. 2011), more obvious is the fact that festivals and events are short-period events, often spanning a weekend or slightly more. As an economic driver, there are limits to this sector. Cultural and heritage tourism, described in more detail in the following section, is related to festivals and events. The focus in the literature, as highlighted above, is the concern about authenticity and commodification (Mitchell 1998; MacDonald and Jolliffe 2003; George and Reid 2005; Loulanski and Loulanski 2011; Montero 2015) and thus, sustainability of such developments.

Stoffelen and Vanneste (2015) contribute to an emerging theme of landscapes as tourist products and destinations, arguing they hold natural and cultural assets that can be marketed for tourism as what they refer to as “tourismscape,” or a continuum of tourism to landscape. This is similar to Ramsey and Everitt (2007) who, in building on the work of others (e.g., Stanger et al. 1997; Graham and Murray 2003; Lois-Gonzalez and Santos 2015), developed a route-based tourism experience in rural Manitoba that combined cultural and natural amenities. In doing so, cultural variety (e.g., Aboriginal, colonial) emerged within common natural landscapes (e.g., prairie agriculture, river valleys). Such approaches seek to build a series of products that make particular routes or pathways attractive to tourists.

Related to the landscape theme are situations where the attraction or destination includes accommodation as part of the product. In rural contexts, the most relevant accommodation example of this type is farm vacations. Farm vacation research includes experiential (Fennell and Weaver 1997; Marin 2015) and quality assurance (Cerutti et al. 2016) studies. That is, visitors seek the farming experience, including the activity of farming, but also the landscape within which it operates. In sparsely populated agricultural regions with no access to urban hotels, such accommodation-based

destinations may be the only source for overnight travel experiences and physically necessary to draw tourists. Landscape preservation in rural regions is often directly related to the loss or gain in resource industries (e.g., farming, mining, fishing, forestry).

Museums and cultural centres represent a specific example of cultural heritage and natural preservation, and serve an important role in education-oriented tourism, an area that has shown growth on a global scale (Kim et al. 2007; Tarrant et al. 2011; Post 2013). This role, however, can be neglected or superseded by the preservation and research goals of museum operators (McLean 1994; Axelsen 2007), although there are suggestions that this is changing (Boorsma 2006). Perhaps as a result, there has been less emphasis on tourism research with respect to these destinations (Rentschler et al. 2007; Hume 2011). There is research on museums and cultural centres that has focused on visitor expectations and satisfaction; this line of inquiry has provided general satisfaction results and conclusions (e.g., de Rojas and Camarero 2008; Bonn et al. 2010; Vong 2013), but has also touched on elements such as service (Frochot 2004), souvenir purchase (Harrison and Shaw 2004), location (Johanson and Olsen 2010), interpretation (Malcolm and Ramsey 2014), marketing (Hume 2011), and specialization (Malcolm and Ramsey 2014).

Compared to the aforementioned attraction types, less research exists on the notion of route-based tourism—a tourism marketing approach that brings together tourism products of a similar theme within rural areas in an attempt to improve visitation (Graham and Murray 2003; Ramsey and Everitt 2007; Payne and Hurt 2015). Graham and Murray (2003), for example, examine the differing transportation choices in experiencing the pilgrimage route of the Camino de Santiago (e.g., foot, bike, automobile). Building on this work, Ramsey and Everitt (2007) created a route in central Manitoba, bringing together prairie landscape features (e.g., agriculture, topography) and different cultures (e.g., Aboriginal, Ukrainian) along a particular route with historic significance (e.g., Aboriginal, colonial, rail, highways) to the Canadian prairies. As with any tourism development, accessibility is central. The location of the CFDC as an “in-between” region, or even within the fringe if interpreted that way, makes route-based tourism an opportunity to bring people to Morden specifically, and the Pembina Valley region more generally.

The last product highlighted in Table 1 relates to roadside attractions. While little has been written

academically about such attractions (e.g., Dregni 2006; Koster 2010), they nevertheless do exist as sources of community pride, tourism development, and heritage recognition. Such attractions, including monuments marketed as “the world’s biggest,” represent civic pride and an attempt to lure tourists into communities. Together, route-based tourism and roadside attraction initiatives illustrate the difficulties inherent to tourism development and marketing in rural areas. These two themes are considered in the analysis and discussion of the case of the CFDC in Morden, Manitoba as an attraction that has recently been constructed to lure visitors to the CFDC.

Case study methodology

This research adopted a case study methodology modelled on Yin (2014), who has long argued for multi-methods to answer research questions. The methods employed include secondary data, survey analysis, and key informant interviews. Secondary data include population trends from the Canadian Census; visitor data and annual reports obtained from staff at the CFDC; and archival data describing the historical development of Morden, including demographic, economic, and touristic data (1997–2015). Documents, in print and online, provided the historic and contemporary contexts for tourism and, in particular, tourism in the Morden region. Local media was examined to provide details on regional tourism initiatives and to document progress towards the CFDC establishing a stand-alone facility. Provincial policy and marketing campaigns were also reviewed to provide the context for tourism development in rural Manitoba generally, and in Morden specifically.

A visitor survey ($n = 136$) was conducted in the summer of 2012 through an intercept technique (Sheskin 1985). The survey was administered by a research assistant to ensure quality control and maximize response rates. Czaja and Blair (1996) suggest that direct administration of questionnaires to respondents by a single research assistant yields consistent respondent understanding of questions, lower response bias, and the highest response rate of various administration methods (e.g., mail, phone). The questionnaire was designed to collect data in five sections: 1) previous experiences with respect to paleontological education and

museum visits; 2) importance of specific experiential items while at the CFDC; 3) demographics; 4) satisfaction with the same experiential items in section 2; and 5) four open-ended questions that allowed respondents to describe their positive and negative impressions of their experience at the CFDC. Sections 1, 2, and 4 were composed of Likert-type scales (e.g., “not at all important,” “slightly important,” “important,” “essential”) to capture the range of perception data (Jackson 1999; Malcolm and Ramsey 2014). The research assistant handed the questionnaires to visitors upon arrival to the CFDC. The first three sections were answered before visitors began their visit and the last two sections were completed just before departure. The refusal rate was 19%. A participation rate of 81% is relatively high, based on the literature which indicates that a response rate of 60% is representative (Dolsen and Machlis 1991), and one above 70% is very good (Babbie 2007). Visitor specialization, along with expectations and satisfaction of the CFDC experience, are reported in detail elsewhere (Malcolm and Ramsey 2014); key findings are summarized here to provide context for visitors’ satisfaction and perceptions of authenticity of the facility. Responses to open-ended questions were sorted into related expressions using keyword and word repetition techniques (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

Key informant interviews conducted on-site with staff throughout the research period (2012–2017) provided details on the CFDC’s history, access to visitor data for the centre and for the organized fossil digs and paleontological tours, and insights into current issues facing the CFDC, as well as future plans. The information obtained in these interviews is used in this paper to clarify details about CFDC operations and initiatives, to reflect on issues identified in the survey, and to accurately reflect the place of the CFDC in the Morden region. Secondary data include visitor data (e.g., visitation, spending) obtained from the CFDC, regional data from Travel Manitoba, and demographic trends from Statistics Canada.

Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre case study

Regional history

The province of Manitoba is located in the prairie region of Canada. The town of Morden is located in

the Pembina Valley region of Manitoba (Figure 1). Approximately 90 million years ago, during the Cretaceous Period, this region was part of what was known as the Western Interior Seaway. The Seaway began to retreat approximately 65 million years ago, a result of a major change in global temperatures. During the period 65 to 90 million years ago, black clay formed on the Seaway floor, which eventually became a shale base which preserved fossil life of the time. Approximately 18,000 years ago, a further glacial era took place that encompassed most of what is now Canada. During glacial retreat, the shale base and fossil remains of marine species of fish, birds, and reptiles from the original Western Interior Seaway were exposed, particularly in the

region adjacent to the Manitoba Escarpment (Figure 1).

The community of Morden

Morden was founded in 1882 with the establishment of the Canadian Pacific Railway (Morden 2006). In the 2011 Canadian Census, the population of Morden was reported as 7,812. The region is based on an agricultural economy, primarily grains and oilseeds. The community has grown from 1,522 in 1901 to 7,812 in 2011 (Manitoba Historical Society 2017). The only census period between 1901 and 2011 that saw a population decline was between 1901 and 1911. In recent years, the growth

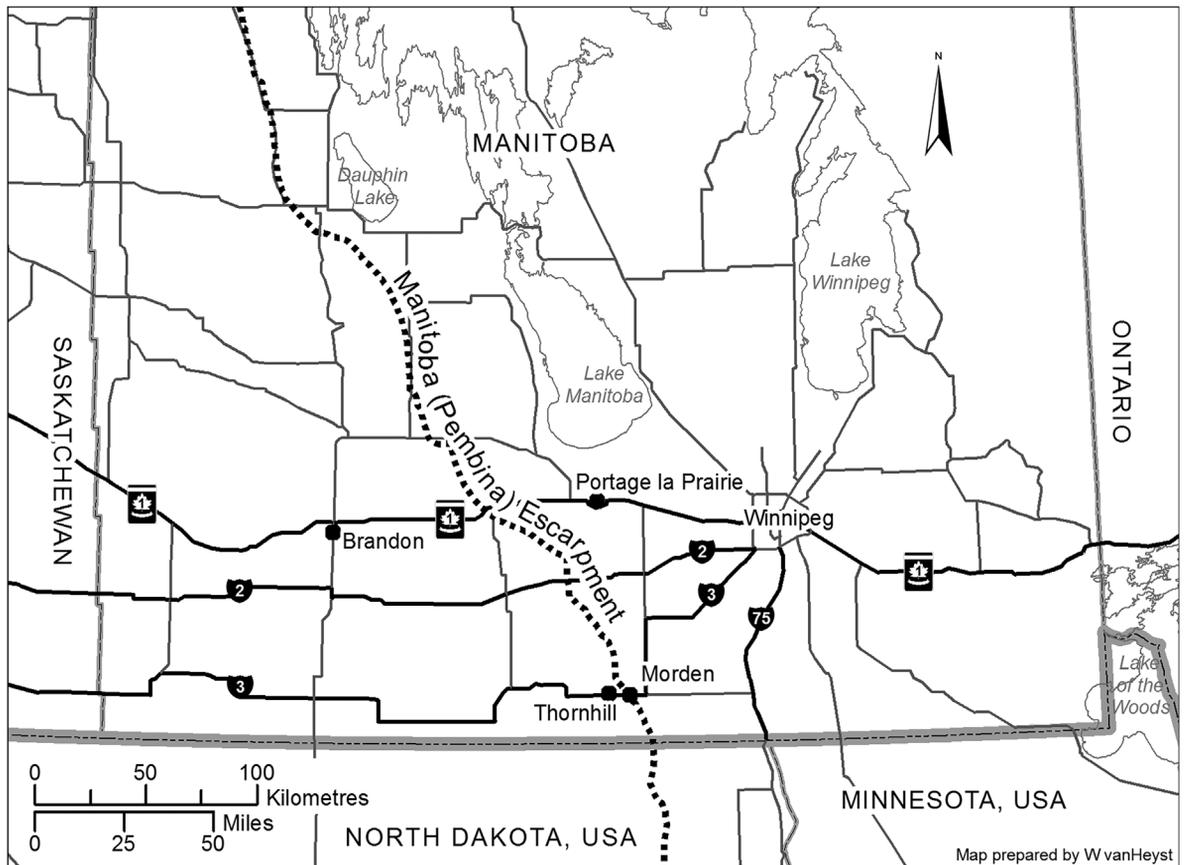


Figure 1
Morden, Manitoba, and surrounding area.

of Morden has proportionately outpaced even the provincial average (Table 2). The population of Morden doubled between 1976 and 2011 (Statistics Canada 2001, 2011; Manitoba Historical Society 2017). Between 2006 and 2011 alone, the population grew by 1,241 or 18.9% compared to a provincial growth rate of 5.2% (Statistics Canada 2011). Between 2011 and 2016, the population grew to 8,668 (+11.0%) (Statistics Canada 2016). This compares to a provincial growth rate of +5.8% over the same five-year period (Statistics Canada 2016).

While much of south-central small town Manitoba has prospered over the past decade, in the Morden region, including the adjacent community of Winkler, growth is also the result of innovative approaches for attracting new residents and economic diversification initiatives beginning most notably in the 1970s. Much of its population growth is due to a special provincial program in partnership with the Federal Government, the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, established in 1998 to attract immigrants to particular locations within Manitoba (Kelly et al. 2013). Most notable is the period between 2006 and 2011, which coincides with the global recession and the desire for individuals and families from Europe, and Russia in particular, to seek new economic opportunities (Moss et al. 2010; CIC News 2014). Further to the growth of Morden, the region as a whole is growing. While the population of Morden grew by 27% between 2001 and 2011, the adjacent community of Winkler and the surrounding rural municipality of Stanley grew by 34% and 63%, respectively over the same period. Such growth has been part of the reason for a rise in leisure and

tourism spending, including spending by residents arising from visits by family and friends to the region. Morden represents a mixed economy, including agricultural services, manufacturing, public services (e.g., schools and hospital), professional services, retail services, and hospitality and tourism.

Regional tourism and “Star Attractions”

Pembina Valley Central Plains Tourism is the regional tourism organization which includes Morden and surrounding area. For 15 years (1998–2013), there were two separate tourism regions: Pembina Valley and Central Plains. The Provincial Government, through the Crown Agency, Travel Manitoba, mandated the amalgamation of these two tourism regions (Penner 2013). This was not viewed as entirely positive, most notably as each association had received an annual operating grant of \$35,000—as an amalgamated association, the total operating grant was \$35,000 and thus was viewed as a 50% budget reduction (Mlinavevic 2013). This speaks to a larger issue of developing and marketing tourism products in regions large in area but small in population base. While coming together posed some challenge, the commonalities in Aboriginal history, agricultural heritage, and physical landscape provide an opportunity to build a diversified tourism product base in the region.

In the mid-1990s, the Government of Manitoba established the Star Attractions Program. The intent of the program was to market marquee attractions across Manitoba in an effort to boost the provincial tourism sector. As of 2016, there were 57 Star Attractions in the province with most being museum or heritage sites (29), followed by parks and natural areas (16). In 2008, the CFDC was designated a Star Attraction by the Government of Manitoba. As noted by Peter Cantelon, Executive Director of the CFDC, this signage has little impact on CFDC visitation. He feels that large billboards on main thoroughfares would have a higher impact, especially if they noted the Star Attraction designation. However, attractions such as the CFDC lack funding for such marketing endeavours.

Table 3 applies the typology of attraction or destination types (see Table 1) to the Morden region. Other than the casino/resort and roadside attraction/mural categories, the Morden region includes a diversity of attractions. Morden, along with Winkler, are service centres to a large rural surround

Table 2
Population data for Morden, Manitoba, 1976–2016.

Year	Population	Number (percentage) change from previous census
1976	3,886	n/a
1981	4,579	+693 (+17.8)
1986	5,004	+425 (+9.3)
1991	5,273	+269 (+5.4)
1996	5,689	+416 (+7.9)
2001	6,142	+453 (+8.0)
2006	6,571	+421 (+7.0)
2011	7,812	+1,241 (+18.9)
2016	8,668	+856 (+11.0)

SOURCES: Statistics Canada (2001, 2011, 2016); Manitoba Historical Society (2017).

Table 3

Rural and small town destinations in the Morden, Manitoba region.

Destination type	Example
Parks / natural areas	Lake Minnewasta Recreation Area (municipal park: camping, golf, cycling, water activities); Pembina Valley Provincial Park
Casinos/resorts	N/A
Festivals/events	Apple and Corn Festival
Culture/heritage	Aboriginal, Mennonite, Germanic, agricultural
Town sites	Winkler, Morden
Landscapes	Agricultural, bentonite mining
Accommodation destination	Farm accommodations, hotels/motels, B&Bs, campgrounds
Museums / cultural centres	Manitoba Agricultural Museum; Manitoba Baseball Museum; CFDC
Roadside attractions / murals	Bruce*

*A 15-metre replica of Bruce was erected in Morden, Manitoba in July 2016.

(Figure 1). Thus, hotels and other accommodations are attractions for those visiting the community, as well as those stopping between their destinations. The CFDC is the premier, year-round attraction for Morden and the surrounding region. The presence of the CFDC benefits the visitorship for other tourism products, including the Corn and Apple Festival, campgrounds, and other accommodations in the community. Lastly, the volunteer archaeological digs throughout the summer months increase the time per visit spent in the community.

Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre

Origins and development

As early as 1914, bentonite was discovered in the region, along the Manitoba Escarpment in the Pembina Valley Region. Bentonite was created from volcanic ash from western North American volcanic activity. It lies in alternative layers between shale deposits. The first mineral claim for bentonite was not made until 1934. By 1940, the Pembina Mountain Clays Company was established, which included a drying and crushing plant that was built in Morden and a secondary processing plant built in Winnipeg. Bentonite has several uses: for example, it serves as a binding agent in cattle feed and oil reclamation, and as a filtering agent in cosmetics and detergents.

The first fossils were discovered during bentonite mining activities in the 1930s, although no formal collection process was implemented until much later. In 1969, local residents established a committee to develop a Morden and District Museum (the Museum). In 1971, the Museum opened its first location on the second floor of the Morden Post Office, now an historic building in the community. The theme of the Museum was community and regional history and its collection was largely based on the donations of local citizens. A major change occurred in 1974, with the discovery of “Bruce,” a 13-metre long Mosasaur (*Tylosaurus peminensis*). The discovery was made near Thornhill, 10 km northwest of Morden, and resulted in a more serious recognition of the rich fossils within the region. The fossils were originally stored in the basement of the Post Office due to lack of exhibit space and it took from the discovery of Bruce in 1974 until 2003 for Bruce to be displayed in full skeletal remains as an exhibit (Siddiqui 2014). In March 2015, a second Mosasaur, named “Suzy” (9.1 metres), was displayed alongside Bruce (Reimer 2015).

In 1979, the Museum was moved to the Morden Recreation Centre, a community multiplex that includes skating and curling rinks and other community spaces. It is now home to the Manitoba Baseball Hall of Fame and, in the 14,000–square foot basement, the CFDC. By 1982, the first paleontological exhibits were completed and opened to the public. In 2005, the Centre acquired a 44-hectare parcel of land northwest of Morden. This area now hosts organized fossil digs and paleontological tours. Located in a community-owned facility, the CFDC is structured as a community-based charitable organization that is governed by a volunteer board of directors (Peter Cantelon, pers. comm.).

Museum attendance has fluctuated between 1997 and 2015 (Table 4). Attendance increased each year from 1997 to 2002. After two years of decline, attendance then grew each year from 2004 to 2011. In 2012 and 2013, attendance dropped significantly but recovered in 2014 (CFDC 2010, 2011, 2012). According to the Executive Director of the CFDC, the fluctuations are due to “a new marketing and PR strategy that focused on the Winnipeg market and relied heavily on Travel Manitoba as an advertising aggregator” (Peter Cantelon, pers. comm.). Attendance in 2015 increased again, in part due to the introduction of the new Suzy exhibit (Peter Cantelon, pers. comm.).

Table 4

CFDC attendance and spending, 1997–2015.

Year	Attendance	Spent	Average \$/visitor
1997	1,400	No Data	n/a
1998	2,900	No Data	n/a
1999	3,300	No Data	n/a
2000	6,200	No Data	n/a
2001	7,300	\$489,100	\$67
2002	7,400	\$592,000	\$80
2003	5,600	\$476,000	\$85
2004	4,247	\$403,465	\$95
2005	5,441	\$402,634	\$74
2006	6,573	\$354,942	\$54
2007	6,741	\$539,280	\$80
2008	7,706	\$631,892	\$82
2009	10,909	\$741,812	\$68
2010	11,137	\$657,083	\$59
2011	11,931	\$894,825	\$75*
2012	6,863	\$514,725	\$75
2013	6,594	\$494,550	\$75
2014	8,429	\$632,175	\$75
2015	12,151		
Total	120,671	\$7,824,483	Average \$64.84

SOURCES: CFDC (2010, 2011, 2012); Peter Cantelon, Executive Director of the CFDC, pers. comm.

*No explanation provided for \$75 each for years 2011–2014.

Beyond museum visitation, the CFDC has introduced two additional revenue streams: outreach events and facility rentals (Table 5). The purpose of these additions was “to grow and diversify revenue opportunities in order to prevent too much reliance on one stream” (Cantelon, pers. comm.). While museum attendance increased between 2004 and 2011, and again since 2014, outreach events and

Table 5

Total CFDC facility attendance, 2009–2015.

Year	Outreach events	Facility rentals	Total museum visitors	Total overall visitors
2009	5,879	2,115	10,909	18,903
2010	1,147	1,440	11,137	13,724
2011	277	2,200	11,931	14,408
2012	1,440	3,235	6,809	13,806
2013	4,001	5,750	6,594	16,345
2014	7,965	2,057	8,429	18,451
2015	0	281	12,151	12,439
Total	19269	16797	55,809	95,637

SOURCES: CFDC (2010, 2011, 2012); Peter Cantelon, Executive Director of the CFDC, pers. comm.

facility rentals declined (Table 5). There have also been initiatives undertaken by the CFDC, including a proposal to build a stand-alone facility (Stantec 2008; CFDC 2009; Peter Cantelon, pers. comm.). Most recently, the CFDC contributed a new characteristic of the typology (Tables 1 and 3) with the construction of a 15-metre replica of Bruce on a provincial highway east of the city (Guenther 2016). Commissioned by the CFDC for completion and delivery in July 2016, this roadside attraction is meant to be a marketing tool for attracting more people to the CFDC (Hoye 2016).

Visitor survey

Slightly more than half of the survey respondents (56.6%) were female. Almost one-third (31.0%) were between the ages of 30 and 39; the next largest age group was 50 to 69 years (24.8%). Most respondents were visiting as a family with children (60.5%), followed by 26.6% who reported visitation with a friend/spouse/partner. Table 6 lists the reasons for visiting the CFDC, which include the CFDC being the main purpose for a trip to Morden (36.0%), or one of several activities within the trip (30.1%). The latter is illustrative of the route-based tourism aspect in rural and small town tourism; that is, travellers making several stops along a common pathway. It was surprising that one-quarter of respondents indicated that their visit was an unplanned activity. The survey did not include a follow-up question that asked how respondents came to modify their trip to include a visit to the CFDC. However, Morden is located on a provincial highway that includes Star Attraction signs located at each of the four entry points to the town, which could account for this high percentage. While not specifically asked in the survey, another scenario could be family visitors

Table 6

Reasons for visiting the CFDC, 2012. (n = 136)

Purpose of trip	N	%
Main purpose	49	36.0
One of several activities	41	30.1
Unplanned activity	34	25.0
Live in area and planned	8	5.9
Live in area and unplanned	4	2.9
Total	136	100.0

Table 7

Most common experiential perception responses of CFDC visitors to open-ended questions, 2012.

Question	Response	n	%	
What did you like best? (n = 121) 4 items mentioned twice; 6 items mentioned once	Seeing Bruce	73	60.3	
	Well laid-out information	14	11.6	
	Variety of fossils	6	5.0	
	Learning about ancient reptiles close to Morden	6	5.0	
	Connections to Manitoban history	4	3.3	
	Everything	4	3.3	
What did you like least? (n = 84) 5 items mentioned twice; 11 items mentioned once	Nothing	31	36.9	
	Not long enough / museum too small	15	17.9	
	More interactive displays for the children / televised	7	8.3	
	Exhibits under construction / incomplete	4	4.8	
	More information / more plaques	3	3.6	
What would you change? (n = 94) 2 items mentioned twice; 19 items mentioned once	Nothing	14	14.9	
	More interactive displays / video / easier for ordinary people to understand	14	14.9	
	More fossils and exhibits	11	11.7	
	More hands-on exhibits for kids	8	8.5	
	A much bigger facility / a better home for Bruce	7	7.4	
	More information on how/where the fossils were found	5	5.3	
	More kid-friendly exhibits / interactive	5	5.3	
	Audio guides available / audio to supplement written materials	4	4.3	
	Wish we had had a tour guide	3	3.2	
	What would you keep the same? (n = 85) 3 items mentioned twice; 8 items mentioned once	Bruce	19	22.4
		Keep it the same	16	18.8
		Most of it / everything else	13	15.3
		Displays are good / more displays	10	11.8
Displays look great		5	5.9	
Nice and knowledgeable staff		4	4.7	
Hands-on / touch experiences		4	4.7	

who sought activities during their stay and decided to visit the CDfC following their arrival. The findings also support the concept of “self-drive tourism,” as 41.9% of visitors to the CDfC reported that they came from Winnipeg—and comprised the majority of the 64.3% of visitors emanating beyond 80 km from Morden. The rest of the visitors were local (15.5%), from Canadian provinces other than Manitoba (13.2%), and international (6.2%).

Table 7 summarizes the responses to the four open-ended questions that participants answered at the end of their visit to the CDfC. There were higher numbers of positive responses in terms of what respondents liked best versus least. In fact, 31 respondents took the time to state that there was nothing they liked least. In terms of what respondents would like added, most either stated that nothing needed to be added or suggested more interactive displays and more for children. Not

surprisingly, Bruce was popular. Taken together, the responses to these four questions about perceptions indicate overall satisfaction with the CDfC, but that an expanded site with more interactive displays, including with technology, would be welcomed.

Summary and conclusions

Many rural regions around the world, including Canada, are struggling. With economic restructuring, retaining services and retaining and attracting people to rural areas can be problematic. These issues were reflected in the review of the literature on rural economies and tourism, and in the development of the typology of rural and small town tourism. Morden, Manitoba represents a unique case of rural and small town tourism as

the community and surrounding region is growing at a rate proportionately higher than the provincial average. The economy is diversified, existing families are staying, and new families are being attracted to the region. In fact, the growth of the community has been greater than the provincial average for more than a decade. The CFDC directly links back to two staples economies in the Morden region—agriculture and mining. A surprise dividend was the fossil discoveries; the discovery of Bruce in 1974 changed the game. The progression from a community museum to the CFDC has been gradual and in the process, proper fossil preservation and preparation has been ensured. The result is a facility that has become a tourist attraction both to the CFDC in Morden and the continued archaeological dig sites outside of town. The presence of Bruce, the largest intact Mosasaur skeleton in North America, is the marquee attraction of the CFDC and provides the highest item of satisfaction as indicated by respondents to the survey. An important question to ask as the CFDC seeks to expand, including commodifying the product is: how can authenticity be maintained and ensured?

The CFDC in Morden is a unique case in that the size and type of facility is not normally found in such a small community. In addition to the growth of Morden and its surrounding region, it is located a reasonable distance from the provincial capital, Winnipeg, with a 2016 population of approximately 735,600 people (Winnipeg 2017). The CFDC is currently located within a larger recreational and community complex that includes the Manitoba Baseball Hall of Fame. Thus, the CFDC could be an attraction or an additional activity for those with some other travel purpose (e.g., sports). The contents of the CFDC, as well as the paleontological dimensions at the dig sites, currently tap into what could be called a “Jurassic Park Effect.” Coincidentally, the world-famous Royal Tyrell museum in Drumheller, Alberta, exists in a city of approximately the same population (8,000) as Morden, and is situated a similar distance from a major centre, Calgary (140 km), as the CFDC is from Winnipeg. The Royal Tyrell Museum received its ten-millionth visitor in 2011, during only its 25th year of operation (Royal Tyrell Museum Cooperating Society 2011)—capitalizing on the Jurassic Park Effect and the longstanding ability of dinosaur fossils to inspire curiosity about the natural world with children (Stemmler 2006). Both institutions present displays,

conduct paleontological research, and are located in rural areas close to important fossil dig sites; however, a major difference between the two is that the Royal Tyrell Museum is owned by the Province of Alberta, which has recognized its immense importance as a tourism attraction. As evidence of this, the Province of Alberta recently invested \$9.3 million dollars in the museum (Royal Tyrell Museum 2017).

The importance of the CFDC as a tourism product has been recognized by Manitoba’s Provincial Government through its Star Attraction Program. The distance from Winnipeg, coupled with the unique and popular paleontology exhibit, firmly place the attraction within the “self-drive tourism” concept described by Hardy (2007, 2). Winnipeg produced roughly 42% of visitors in the questionnaire survey, with 54% total beyond 80 km; in addition, 36% and 30% of the visitors reported the CFDC as their main reason or one of several reasons for visiting Morden, respectively. This finding illustrates that Morden does not exhibit the same issues that other rural attractions and destinations face in developing high quality, year-round tourism attractions and destinations (e.g., Bramwell 1994; Schmallegger et al. 2010; Carson et al. 2014). Distance is a key factor in this case: what would these percentages be if Morden was 250 or 300 km from Winnipeg? Hardy’s (2007) concept likely has a threshold distance where perception of distance and time reduces the pull factor of a unique attraction such as the CFDC. The dominance of visitation from people in Winnipeg is a reflection of Morden being located within a touristic rural-urban fringe. Having said this, Winnipeg accounts for approximately 70% of the population of Manitoba, suggesting a degree of distance friction, an issue explored also by others (e.g., Weaver 2005). It also, however, suggests opportunity for marketing and promotion.

The CFDC continues to build on its strengths, most recently with the addition of Suzy, but also in the continued dream of building a stand-alone facility in Morden. There is strong support in the visitor comments to warrant expansion and the updating of current displays and interpretation programs. Perhaps there is an opportunity for the CFDC to partner with the Royal Tyrell Museum in Alberta and the smaller fossil centres in Saskatchewan. This would provide an extended route-based tourism product as highlighted in the typology

(Table 1). Future research should monitor this development, along with the growth of the community and continuing digs.

This paper makes the case that Morden and its surrounding regions include examples of all of the characteristics described in the typology of rural and small town attractions. The CFDC primarily represents two elements of the typology: museum and landscape. A third could be added since the research was completed, with the construction of a Mosasaur roadside attraction. The key factor in the CFDC's continued development relates to the authenticity of the product as it is further commodified. In fact, some may argue that the establishment of a roadside attraction could be the first step towards such an infraction, or even a first step towards creative destruction as articulated by the work of Mitchell (Mitchell 1998; Mitchell and Vanderwerf 2010). Others, however, could argue that the "new" Bruce, as a life-size replica, is authentic and that it balances the need to attract visits with the educational aspect of illustrating the actual size of the Mosasaur.

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