PRINCIPLES OF TOURISM PLANNING

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For generations our role as educators has been to organize and teach information so that it can become knowledge. Our libraries today are bursting with many books and journals that contain mountains of information. But, this information is worthless unless you and I have made it part of our own understanding and enlightenment. Only then does it become knowledge.

Tourism is so complex and involves so many disciplines that it makes our task very difficult. I have been trying for several decades to reach into the pragmatic as well as the theoretical aspects of tourism to do what university professors should do--derive principles from a mass of unrelated facts.

And so in this paper, I wish to present a list of tourism planning principles that now appear to be universally basic. They have been distilled from a variety of sources--writings and research of others, my own study and observation, and exchange of experiences at conferences. These I have grouped under four headings: planning policy directions, planning processes, tourism development, and tourism planning needs today. Even though every country, region and community may have different backgrounds and aspirations, these seem to thread through all whenever tourism development is considered.

POLICY

In only the last decade have many countries developed a federal policy on tourism. Even in market-economy countries there is a strong case for policy declaration and guidelines. Because all sectors are involved in tourism, there is need for cooperation and coordination at the highest level possible.

Tourism policy must go beyond platitudes and marketing.

Today, for tourism throughout the world, promotion is given the largest budget, the greatest staffing, and the most political support. Although leaders have great faith in promotion, such preoccupation leaves relatively little attention to the supply side. The many emerging issues of negative environmental, social, and even economic impacts are now suggesting critical need for national policy for the supply side of tourism. Valuable ecosystems and natural resources are disturbed,

historical and archeological sites are eroded, cultural clash often ensues, and, yes, there are many costs associated with tourism development. The great complexity of the supply side with its multitude of decision makers make it imperative to establish supply development policy at the federal level.

Policy should set new goals.

Because tourism involves more than commercial enterprises, goals must go beyond profitmaking. Policy must reflect this reality. Many governmental entities and nonprofit organizations as well as businesses are involved. National policy should provide the overall guidelines for all developers and managers to succeed at the optimum level. Policy sets the framework for administration. Study shows that the following four goals should be paramount in any national policy of tourism:

*To stimulate and guide the economic rewards from development, management, and promotion of tourism services and facilities;

*To assure high-quality visitor satisfactions from the experiences of travel.

*To utilize natural and cultural resources in ways that can perpetuate and not destroy the quality of resource assets; and

*To enhance the community quality of life by means of unifying tourism with all other social and economic activity.

Balanced social, economic and environmental goals are essential.

Over the years, many nations have developed ideologies of conservation, recreation and tourism--but in many instances they are in conflict. The shift from an age of industrialization with its environmental neglect to an age of communication and enlightenment has been painful but productive.

Planning for tourism must enlist the cooperation, assistance and input from many constituencies that in the past have been antagonists. Tourism cannot be allowed to cause cultural and social clash. It cannot be allowed to erode environments. Any nation, area, or community that seeks successful tourism must balance social, economic and environmental goals.

Roles must be clarified.

Review of reports and research information from many countries clearly demonstrates confusion in role identification. Certainly, each nation has its own traditions and governmental structure and tourism growth must be adapted to existing structures. But, this seems to be extremely difficult, especially because most national tourism organizations are

engrossed with promotional matters.

At the same time that many countries are retaining promotion as a federal role, several are delegating more responsibility for both development and promotion to the local or area level. This allows greater individuality than if controlled at the top.

For market economy countries, the public-private roles need to be clarified. Businesses must be free to compete on their own terms. On the other hand, broad nationwide responsibilities of research and education may need federal support. For tourism, most of the infrastructure--water supply, waste disposal, transportation, health, safety, fire control--is accepted as a governmental role. The point is that roles must be clear so that each actor can perform at his best.

Slow-paced, indigenous tourism is best.

Too many countries and regions were caught up in the apparent glamor of tourism as a panacea for a weakened economy and plunged into development too rapidly. Because too many promises were made and little consideration was given the consequences, results have been not only disappointing but sometimes disastrous.

Tourism is unlike any other form of economic development and involves many more individuals and organizations. Not all problems of absorption of tourism can be anticipated This favors a slow-growth process with strong local involvement. Conspicuous errors can be headed off before they become major problems.

Slow-paced local involvement has another advantage. By utilizing indigenous assets, any community or area can maintain its competitive edge.

PROCESS

In addition to creating better tourism policies, we need to improve our methods and processes of planning and development. Study reveals basic principles that when applied hold promise of much greater success.

Whole must be unified.

Because tourism encompasses so many separate entities, the older "go-it-alone" policies of the past are creating problems of connectivity. Although good internal management has much merit, it must be supplemented with many outside factors, such as markets, location, attractions, access, transportation and promotion.

Whenever we take a stronger traveler perspective, we observe how disjointed and difficult travel is to master. For the

traveler, all parts are interconnected. But too frequently the owners, developers, and managers do not understand this principle.

Bureaucratic and sectoral barriers must be broken down so that better unity of the tourism functioning system can be accomplished.

Market-supply match, essential.

Tourism is driven simultaneously by two forces--markets (push) and supply (pull). In the last few decades we have learned much more about the market side than the supply side. Needed is much more study, analysis, stimulation and coordination of the supply side--attractions, transportation, services, promotion, information.

New information on market segments allows us to examine more carefully how well the tourism supply side of our country, area or locality meets or could meet this demand. Too frequently, areas attempt to be all things to all people and often mislead tourists with promotion that is not matched by true offerings.

Planning requires that both sides, market and supply, be brought into better balance.

Geographic heterogeneity is a reality.

Promotion often implies that all areas have equal potential which geographically is not true. Every area has its own special characteristics--some of which are good for tourism.

But, few areas perform the research analysis of basic tourism resources to discover these assets and liabilities. A few planners have devised techniques that allow new understanding of opportunities for development. In Texas, we have experimented with analysis and computer cartography in order to delineate potential destination zones.

Not all areas are alike. The strength of tourism lies in how well the special attributes of an area are utilized.

Continuous and sporadic planning need to be balanced.

The past concept of planning has been that of preparing plans and reports, mostly on a sporadic basis. There is merit in making a deep investigation from time to time. Frequently, however, such plans have not been implemented because they were too complicated, too bulky, and too aloof from those responsible for implementation. With greater local involvement and care in presenting results and recommendations, occasional plan projects can be productive.

But, planning, the verb, is now considered as an ongoing process. Tourism demands both intermittent and continuous

planning. All planning should regularly identify priorities and staging. All public and private sector groups involved in tourism will find it essential to relate their planning, on a continuing basis, to plans of others.

Natural and cultural resources provide the foundation.

Tourism, because it is so place-oriented, depends greatly on the natural and cultural resources of an area. The problem of developing these resources is double-edged. At the same time many resource assets provide the foundation for traveler attractions, they have capacity limits. Therefore, the search for resource assets must be followed by careful site design and management. Resources to be analyzed include: water and waterlife, vegetative cover, wildlife, climate, topography, existing development, historic and archeologic sites, transportation and cities.

In many instances, such as national parks, it is sufficient for most market segments to be near rather than within the rare resource feature. This allows us to create large visitor centers at the edge of important resource areas. These centers would contain exhibits, interpretation mazes, audio-visual presentations, lectures, demonstrations, and literature about the resource. Self-guided trails, labeled with interpreted stops, or guided minibus tours can provide controlled contact with the resource. Great numbers of visitors can enjoy and be enriched by these experiences but the resources can be protected only by means of special design and operation.

DEVELOPMENT

Further study shows some additional principles relating development to the planning of tourism. How rural areas compare with urban, why services are needed advantages of clustering, and the difference between touring circuits and longer-stay tourism are important principles.

Urban-rural tourism demands a regional approach.

A former polemic attitude between outdoor recreation proponents and urban tourist promoters is not justified by the reality of urban-rural interdependency. It is true that the greatest economic impact of tourism is in the city but the city services depend greatly on the rural attractions and attractiveness.

Unfortunately there are traditional, political, and attitudinal barriers between urban and rural areas that influence tourism development. When both the hinterland and the cities begin communicating on tourism matters the benefits of cooperation become clear. Tourism should become a major agenda item in addition to matters of jobs, education, health, waste disposal, and water quality that now are bringing cities and

rural areas together.

In the United States, the special amenities of small towns, especially within a reasonable radius of larger cities, are stimulating not only settlement but also tourism.

Clustering is superior to dispersal.

Much comment is made on the congestion that tourism creates, leading to a desire for planning the dispersal of tourists. While some locations may show signs of overuse, this problem is solved most frequently by better design and management rather than dispersal.

By concentrating attractions into clusters, better crowd control and management can be accomplished. By concentrating lodging and food services, more efficient engineering of infrastructure and better management will accrue. And, because markets are becoming more selective and discriminating, they prefer clustering of both services and attractions to avoid waiting time in extra travel.

The clustering of services in an enclave at the edge of national parks, for example, protects the interior resources from debasement and provides better service for visitors.

Services depend on attractions.

That services depend on attractions is a fundamental principle for tourism planning. There must be attracting forces in a destination to stimulate travel. These attracting forces may be parks, museums, festivals, convention centers, sports arenas and many others that create a demand for travel to a destination. If a nation or region seeks the economic impact through hotels, food services, retail sales and transportation, it should consider attraction development first.

After there is a demonstrated demand to see and do things in an area, the demand for travel services increases.

Transportation requires special planning.

Throughout the world, the problems of transportation continue to be obstacles for tourism development. In spite of tremendous advances in technology of automobiles, trains, and planes, this progress has not been uniform. Travelers continue to waste much time and energy in mastering the system.

Probably the greatest problem is intermodal travel. Although a plane may whisk one through the air with great speed, travel stress can mount when connections are missed, baggage is lost, or there is no local transport from the airport. Increased use of "fly-drive" with rental car added to flight travel is contingent on car maintenance and service, which become difficult in a foreign country with a different language.

Needed are transportation planners and managers with greater knowledge of tourism and tourists. Engineering and technology now need to be supplemented with understanding of travel segments and their special personal requirements.

Touring circuits, longer-stay tourism require different planning.

Tourism development is different for two major divisions of travelers--those touring and those staying at one location for a longer time.

For those touring, attractions are visited for short periods and visited only once by the same party. Destination places are distributed over a circuit and the activities tend to be more passive--viewing roadside scenery, visiting outstanding natural and cultural areas, visiting ethnic areas, entertainment and crafts. Personal tours or motor coach tours exemplify this kind of travel.

For longer-stay the attractions within a radius of the destination are important. Activities are repeated and tend to be more active--camping, resorting, hunting, vacation home use, sports, and visiting theme parks and convention centers.

Resources and locations needed for these two patterns of travel differ. How they are developed differs. Wherever these two kinds overlap, there is greatest potential for development, and greatest exonomic impact through tourist services.

TODAY'S PLANNING NEEDS

A discussion of tourism planning principles would be incomplete without identifying some important needs: education, creativity, caution.

Research, training and education are needed.

Even though much is known about individual parts of tourism, information on its breadth and complexity not well known. Except for some schools that provide training in hotel and restaurant management, tourism programs at all levels are not very plentiful. Even in these the curriculum usually favors marketing over planning and development.

As soon as one begins to teach tourism, he realizes the dearth of research literature and reference materials. It is only in the last two decades that books, journals, and magazines have included tourism as serious subject matter. The root of the problem is lack of awareness of need and the dearth of financial support. Other forms of economic development, such as agriculture and industry, have been much more supportive of their research study. Universities and private research organizations could provide much greater and better information on both demand

and supply of given adequate support.

Teaching of tourism is needed at the lower levels of education for two important objectives. First, young people should learn at an early age about the opportunities for employment in tourism careers. Second, they should be taught how to travel, how to gain the most enrichment and enjoyment and also how to avoid the difficulties.

When administrators of all schools, universities, colleges and technical institutions become aware of the great importance of tourism throughout the world, there may be stronger acceptance of new programs, particularly in tourism policy, planning, management, development and utilization.

Creativity and innovation are essential.

Often forgotten is the need for new ideas and new solutions to the dynamic changes within tourism. Market interests and ability to travel are in constant flux. Even supply side factors keep changing, demanding fresh approaches.

New approaches can benefit from research of the past but need planners and managers to conceive of and implement new ideas. There is danger that policy statements and regulation become frozen in time and preclude freedom of innovation. Creativity should not only be allowed but fostered through programs of competition and award. It should encompass lay input as well as that of professionals.

There may need to be some "selling" of new concepts. Just because existing property values, zoning laws, and tradition may suggest otherwise, a new concept may be the "right" way to develop. Instead of suppressing new ideas offhandedly as being impractical, leaders should publicize all attempts to reach toward better goals of tourism develpopment.

Tourism must not be overplanned.

In spite of the soundness of the need for more and better planning of tourism development, a final caveat must be emphasized--the danger of overplanning.

If planning becomes so rigid and prescriptive that the traveler cannot obtain the values and satisfactions only available through travel, it has overstepped its bounds. The final tourism "product" is the totality of the traveler's experience. Designers, planners, builders and managers of all the parts of tourism must be cognizant of this principle. There is danger that governments and private sectors will be so overzealous of "packaging" tourists that the true product is procribed. Today's work, duty, law and social responsibility dictate so much of an individual's time and interest that tavel may provide the only expression of individual freedom. This freedom must be protected.

Tourism planning must be accomplished with such restraint that travelers can be free to obtain the enriching rewards of discovery, adventure and achievement. Planned physical settings, planned programs, planned political action, planned management decisions, and planned promotion can and should foster, not inhibit, the individual originality and personal satisfaction that can be derived only from travel. If domestic travel is to break down the barriers of parochialism and if international travel is to stimulate world understanding and peace, all policies and plans must be so dynamic and flexible that these objectives can be reached.

REFERENCES

Material for this paper was drawn from Chapter 12, "Conclusions and Principles," in Tourism Planning, by Clare A. Gunn, 2nd. ed., rev. New York: Taylor & Francis, 1988.