CAN TOURISM BE PLANNED?

A Presentation by Dr. Clare A. Gunn, Professor Emeritus
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I would like to begin my remarks with a quote: "Is tourism planning necessary? Is planning possible? We don't know how to plan for tourism." These remarks were made fifteen years ago by Dr. Kresc Car, then Deputy President of the Republican Council for Tourism, Yugoslavia. These are provocative questions—questions that are the focus of this conference. These are the kinds of questions that have stimulated my curiosity and given my career of forty years its main direction.

Today, I would like to offer some answers to these difficult questions by discussing just three points. First, how our preoccupation with promotion has retarded progress on the product side of tourism and particularly understanding tourism as a system. My second point concerns some of the processes we might use to improve tourism development as a system. Then, I want to discuss the issue of future integration of the system through planning.

HOW TOURISM FUNCTIONS

Almost every agency and organization under the title of tourism in this country spends virtually all of its budget on promotion. The concept of "sell, sell, sell" has so absorbed our attention that we've forgotten what we are selling. So our understanding of how tourism really functions, how we can plan for better functioning and who is to do the research and education for tourism planning and development have lagged far behind.

In our rush to satisfy growing travel markets, tourism has met with many successes. We can take pride in the many innovations and technical advances that make the United States the best tourism country in the world. But, even so, we face challenges today we did not have only a few years ago. Promotional competition between states has increased dramatically in only the last decade. Intensive promotion of other nations has placed new stress on our domestic tourism. New government initiatives and programs the world over are luring Americans to new and exciting foreign destinations. Serious pollution and erosion problems continue to plague resources important to tourism, such as deterioration of the Great Lakes. The hub airport concept, so innovative twenty years ago, now is the greatest bottleneck to air travel. In our rush to build the individual pieces of tourism and to overemphasize promotion, we have forgotten how all this complicated mosaic fits together.
For teaching purposes, I have found it useful to consider tourism as an overall functioning system. This requires the grouping of all the parts into basic components, as illustrated in Figure 1. The diagram emphasizes the two major forces of "demand" and "supply."

**Figure 1.** THE FUNCTIONING TOURISM SYSTEM
All functioning components and their many parts are highly dependent upon one another.

While the marketers have increased their research sophistication, we still need to know much more about travelers and non-travelers. The demand is made up of the market population that has both the interest in travel and the ability (money, means) to travel.

Without doubt the most powerful component on the supply side is that of attractions. Attractions provide the pulling power and also the satisfactions from travel. If it were not for attractions, there would be no tourism—we would stay home.
Then, when we are drawn to a destination, we have need for a
great variety of services. Because of volumes of people in
destinations, entrepreneurs can establish businesses for lodging,
food service, entertainment, and retail sales of many products.

Of course, we do not travel without the several modes of
transportation. Highways, waterways, airways and the many types
of vehicles provide the linkage between the market locations and
destinations.

Finally, I have grouped the two functions of information and
promotion into one component only because they are often found
this way in organizations. Information includes guide books,
literature, maps and all those ways in which we, as travelers,
learn about places. Promotion includes the four forms popularly
used today: advertising, publicity, public relations, and
incentives (give-aways, discounts).

This simplified diagram should raise several questions in
our minds. How well do these components relate one to another?
Certainly they do in the minds of the traveler. But, do our
organizations and institutions allow much contact, to say nothing
of cooperation, between the members of the several components?
Much of the problem of integrating this system stems from our
lack of understanding the difference between tourism and other
forms of economic development, especially manufacturing.

Tourism is a Special Form of Economic Development

This conference is billed as "A Workshop on Tourism in New
York State's Economic Future." Because economic development is
so very important these days, it is well to understand that
tourism is not like other forms of economic development. It
varies in several ways. Let me mention just a few.

For tourism, markets are distributed to products, not the
other way round as in manufactured goods. Instead of
manufacturers trucking goods to retail outlets, travelers are
transported to destinations of their interest.

This important difference in the relationship between
markets and products means that tourism destination places have
great significance. For manufactured goods, the consumer really
doesn't care where the plant is located; for tourism it means
everything. The physical destination plant is anchored to place.

It is at places away from home that the true product--
personal experience--occurs. Whether for business or personal
reasons, travel destinations must be able to provide worthwhile
experience or one will not go to the trouble to travel, and
certainly not to repeat a bad experience.

If places are this important, it must also mean that not all
places are alike. For economic development, this fact means that
tourism may not be possible for every location—some are better endowed than others. Locating a manufacturing plant is much simpler than locating a tourism destination.

There is another big difference between the manufacturing plant and the tourism plant. When market factors change for a manufactured product, the plant doesn’t have to move. It can retool for new models or even new products. But, for tourism, if market tastes shift, a destination may find its plant obsolete and noncompetitive. Tourism products are more perishable.

Tourism promoters tend to refer to tourism as a "smokeless industry," implying that tourism has few environmental impacts. Studies in recent years are proving just the opposite, that tourism can erode resources, cost money, and cause social problems. In some instances, tourism has had greater environmental impacts than the addition of manufacturing.

And, tourism is complicated by such a tremendous array of decision makers. To bring a manufacturing plant to a community requires one corporate decision whereas tourism development expansion requires decisions by many governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, and a great diversity and large number of businesses.

No, tourism development does not follow the same pattern or process as for other kinds of economic development. All the more reason that planning is needed, especially on a broad scale. The very complexity of tourism is the compelling reason for planning. Somehow, this huge mass of independent pieces of development need to be integrated.

Barriers to Integrated Tourism Planning

If the concept of better integrated tourism planning at all levels is so desirable, why isn’t it practiced more? This ideal of greater cooperation and even collaboration on tourism planning and development is frequently thwarted by some very real and stubborn barriers.

Misunderstanding of the tourism product is often a constraint on an integrated tourism system. Many hoteliers still believe their product is rooms whereas their service is greatly dependent upon other factors such as transportation, promotion/information, and especially the attractions that bring people to their doors in the first place. If it weren’t for attractions, the hotels would not be needed. Highway departments tend to believe their product is graded concrete ribbons whereas the true product is personal travel satisfaction with safe, convenient, interesting, and dependable access from home to destinations and back. Resource managers continue to believe that their objective is only resource protection whereas in most instances their legal mandate includes public use as well. But, how many resource managers are trained in visitor behavior as
well as biology or forestry?

Rigid jurisdictional boundaries often make it difficult for agencies and organizations to cooperate. Many public agencies, created for other than tourism purposes, are often heavily involved in tourism, nonetheless. Federal, state, and city departments of parks, wildlife, highways, forests, waters, police, health, taxation, airways and planning—all impinge upon tourism. Yet, these generally do not reach out beyond their boundaries. They become entrenched in narrowly prescribed bureaucracies that make integration for tourism functioning very difficult.

For tourism the increased scatter of private organizations tends to cause further disintegration of the tourism system. Organizations of hotels, restaurants, attractions, airlines, and rental cars have increased greatly in number. But, seldom do they communicate one with another.

Tourism is complicated further by a narrow perception of markets. When we hear the statistics on the great economic impact of tourism we tend to forget that not one of the businesses of tourism is directed exclusively to travel markets. Even hotels often provide many functions for residents—banquets, meetings, entertainment, bars, and shopping. Restaurants, service stations and shopping centers generally cater more to local trade than to travelers. This strong focus on local markets tends to dilute the enthusiasm of local businesses toward tourism.

Finally, in many regions the concept of integrative tourism planning is hampered by philosophical issues. Stress often occurs between groups only because they hold different beliefs, primarily on development versus conservation and resource protection. Arguments can become so heated that no matter the value of cooperation on tourism development, it does not take place.

These are just a few of the obstacles that get in the way of better tourism planning. But, they are not insurmountable.

TOURISM CAN BE PLANNED

In other parts of the world and here in the United States, I am seeing evidence of a turnaround. In more and more places, tourism is being taken more seriously. Based on my study of several planning approaches, I would like to suggest two that have considerable merit.

Regional Strategic Planning

Some states, most recently New York and Oklahoma, have begun to review state policy, particularly the responsibility of the state office of tourism. While the emphasis is still on
promotion, concern over the supply side and how it may be improved is increasing.

For several years, we have been experimenting with an approach to identifying potential destinations. In other words, if certain techniques are used to find oil reserves, why not apply a similar process to tourism?

Study of tourism generally has led to identifying a number of factors that favor one area over another for tourism development. We have grouped these factors into program factors and physical factors. Among the program factors that need to be investigated are:

- Market characteristics
- Promotional programs
- Information systems
- Planning bodies
- Socio-economic factors

The physical factors that not only need to be investigated but also mapped are:

- Water, waterlife
- Vegetative cover, wildlife
- Climate, atmosphere
- Topography, soils, geology
- History, ethnicity, archeology, legends
- Esthetics
- Institutions, industries, existing attractions
- Service centers (cities)
- Transportation, access

Let me describe an example of how one can make a search for potential destination zones. A few years ago, we studied a 20-county area in central Texas that includes the cities of Killeen, Waco, Temple, Bryan, and College Station. By means of a series of nine maps and a computer graphic program, we overlayed these maps to form two composite maps. One was for the discovery of areas best suited to new touring circuits and another composite map showed longer-stay potential.

The process used was traditional, including five steps of (1) setting objectives, (2) researching resources and other factors, (3) synthesizing these findings and drawing conclusions, (4) developing concepts for development, and (5) stating recommendations.

For this region, our research identified eight potential touring circuits. In other words, these were the areas where the several factors were the most abundant and of the best quality. In addition, the study showed several general development opportunities:
* greater development of historic architecture
* greater visitor use of industrial and agricultural areas
* new ranch resorts and farm vacation centers
* greater use of nature and scenery for tours

A similar composite map, together with other study findings, showed four zones with the greatest potential for tourism catering to longer-stay markets. Each one showed a special combination of assets that would make it a destination. Some of the opportunities were:

* increased meeting and conference facilities
* greatly improved entertainment attractions
* greater use of water resources for recreation and resorts
* improved travel linkage between cities and attractions

This technology is in place and was modified in our state tourism master plan (led by Price Waterhouse) for Oklahoma. Here, we did not divide the potential into touring circuits and longer-stay but wanted the combined potential. Using a similar approach, aided by computer mapping, we identified three levels of zones: two primary zones, four secondary zones, and six tertiary zones. The primary zones were areas where the best and most abundant resource factors are in greatest combination. The secondary zones show significant potential for development in the combination of several factors. The tertiary zones were areas where a few factors combine sufficiently to have some potential for development.

For Oklahoma, this led to recommendations for three kinds of product development: product enhancement, product packaging, and product building. This planning document offers the foundation for public agencies, nonprofit organizations and businesses to make further investigation, but primarily in those areas recommended. There is no use encouraging development in locations that are infertile for tourism, no matter how enthusiastic the supporters may be. Then, after development has been improved it is time to step up all promotional programs.

Community Tourism Development

A similar process can be applied to the community level. In Texas, we have just finished the draft of a manual for community tourism development. Most of these recommendations are based on our experimental work in two communities in Texas—Gonzales and Mineral Wells.

At the community level several tourism fundamentals need to be emphasized. Economic improvement comes directly through the primary service businesses—hotels, restaurants, shops. However, merely building new hotels does not necessarily enhance tourism, not unless there is already a deficiency of rooms for certain markets. Instead, tourism will be stimulated only through the development of new attractions. And, instead of replicating
attractions found elsewhere, best competitive edge is created by building on those assets unique to the community and its surrounding region. It is important that communities realize that the surrounding as well as the urban attractions are very important to future success.

For community development of tourism much depends on the natural and cultural assets. Surprising to most local citizens is the fact that most of what is needed to attract visitors are the very same things desired by residents—pleasant parks, museums, clean streets, interesting amenities, a safe and attractive downtown. Finally, tourism development is not solely the responsibility of the Chamber of Commerce or Visitors Bureau—it requires commitment by the entire community.

From a consultant’s perspective, it is essential to emphasize that most of what happens in the future will be accomplished by them and not by the consultant. The consultant can carry on the first two steps: (1) research and analysis of resources and markets, and (2) the development of concepts and recommendations for development. It is the responsibility of the local community to take the next steps: (3) prepare feasibilities of the several projects recommended, (4) establish new physical plant projects, and (5) increase promotion of both new and established attractions.

In the case of Mineral Wells, a town of about 20,000 in northern Texas, our first step was to establish a local tourism development committee. This was intended to provide three functions: (1) assistance on research of the community, (2) feedback regarding proposals of the consultant, and (3) followup after preparation of the report.

At the start, several problems and issues were identified as we worked together:

* Insufficient attractions
* Low level of attractiveness/image
* Low level of public sector involvement
* Insufficient information
* Insufficient promotion
* Lack of research data
* Insufficient organization

After several months of investigation and workshops with local people, six basic concepts for expanded tourism development were identified:

1. Downtown: new wellness theme
   historic restoration
   parks and parking
   convention center
   visitor shops

2. Parks: new visitor activities
   upgrading of existing parks
added festivals, events

3. Retirement Village: remodel housing
new market

4. Recreation: new parks
linkage with state park
resort complex
helicopter access

5. Airport: new welcome facilities
new parks

6. Highways: improved landscapes
sign improvement
new truck route
information system

This study resulted in 70 action recommendations, grouped into two main categories: (1) development (downtown, environs, countywide), (2) program (activities, information, promotion, research). In addition, recommendations were made on organization, development, strategy, and phasing over time.

One may well ask, have these plans worked? The answer is yes and no. Yes, in the sense that much greater interest and understanding of tourism was stimulated during the studies. However, there has been less actual implementation than the planners expected. These experiences, and those of tourism planning elsewhere in the world, expose one main weakness--too much, too fast. The greater complexity of tourism as compared to other forms of economic development suggests the need for what Lang (1985,25) calls "strategic planning." This is not only a plan but a method of accomplishing it. Lang offers three criteria for strategic planning: (1) action-oriented (implementers brought in early and active throughout), (2) focused and focused early (data collection is selective, to solve agreed-upon issues), and (3) flexible and adaptive (iterative, a process that is self-corrective).

The more that I work with tourism planning the further away I have moved from my thinking several decades ago. Having been trained in the profession of landscape architecture and having studied the profession of planning for many years, my bias was toward the creation of plans. Because of specialized training and hopefully some talent, designers and planners were supposed to know what is best for people, especially in the designed environment. To a large degree, this is still a fundamental truth.

When we view tourism in all its complexities and ramifications, we must realize that it is impossible for any one person or even a consulting team to visualize what is best for everyone involved. I am finding that even in so-called planned economy countries, they are facing the same problems of
integrating planning. It is for this reason that I now emphasize the importance of a planning process rather than plans. Sure, it is helpful to create specific planning documents, especially if none exists. But, the most effective continuing planning will come about only when the individual parts of tourism see the need to do their own planning in cooperation with those many external forces that have such a strong influence on their own success. It is all well and good to do a good job of management on each site, but every site involved in tourism is related to every other site.

Revision of Goals

Perhaps the best route to the achievement of integrated and strategic tourism planning is to revise our goals. Throughout the world, the central goal of planning tourism is economic—employment, income, taxes paid. This will continue.

However, planning falls short if three other goals are not sought right along with economic improvement. When these goals are raised to a higher level of awareness, even to commitment, there is a much better chance that tourism can be planned.

a. To assure user satisfactions.

No planner or planning process can guarantee that visitors will always obtain rewarding experiences from their travels. Travel behavior and motivation are too complicated for such guarantees to be made. On the other hand, planning must be directed toward this ideal goal. Physical development and programs can be established that match as closely as possible the desires of the several market segments—but only if planned to do so.

Planning can avoid the problems of wasted time, money and energy on the part of travelers. Planning can anticipate the visitor’s need for guidance and interpretation at attraction locations. Planning can foster the establishment of lodging, food service, entertainment and transportation best suited to the several travel segments. Better planning can provide development of a quality that relieves the traveler of much stress and tension.

The fulfillment of "spiritual goals" was identified as important for tourism development by the "Manila Declaration on World Tourism" resulting from the World Tourism Conference in 1980:

* total fulfillment of the human being
* a constantly increasing contribution to education
* the liberation of man in a spirit of respect for his identity and dignity
* the affirmation of the originality of cultures and respect for the moral heritage of people
b. To protect resources.

Often, in the zeal to increase economic impact, the erosive characteristics of tourism are overlooked. Because so much of tourism depends on an abundance of high quality resources, they must be protected. Over a decade ago, environmentalist Raymond Dasman (1973,115) stated that "the more local people benefit from tourism the more they will benefit from a commitment to preserve the environmental features which attract tourism."

Especially the heavy land-consumptive forms of tourism, such as vacation homes and resort complexes, need careful planning or the very resources that attract visitors can be eroded. National and state parks and forests require planning for development at locations that will protect resources.

Historic sites, structures and artifacts are particularly vulnerable to erosion from visitors. Special design and management solutions must be built into overall plans for the expansion of tourism.

As the volume of travelers increases, the social impacts from tourism need to be assessed. A planning goal must be also the protection of the local and regional social integrity.

c. Integration into a community's present structure.

Tourism development that is too fast and too big can be very disruptive. At any point in time a community has its political, social, physical, and fiscal structure and traditions. Smaller cities especially can be overwhelmed by massive tourism development, demanding new costs of infrastructure, new police and fire protection, new amenities and attractions, and particularly new conflicts between hosts and guests.

Frequently, the magnitude of modern tourism complexes requires outside investment and ownership. Such non-resident control of finance, land, and even politics can place heavy stress on a community.

Only through early integrative planning can these difficulties be avoided.

d. Increased economic rewards.

There is no question about the ability of tourism to enhance an area's economy. Every state can cite statistics on traveler expenditures, employment, incomes and taxes paid. Tourism, especially in underdeveloped areas with high quality resource potential, can provide economic gains.

However, it must be emphasized that such economic gains may come at considerable cost. Added increments of visitors require increments of water supply, waste disposal, street improvement, litter control, and transportation in order to cope.
For private enterprise, there must be promise of profits. The mountains of red tape, excessive regulation, and prejudice against tourism finance can inhibit tourism development and economic progress.

A continuing goal of tourism planning must be the growth of economic rewards.

CONCLUSIONS

Review of the status of tourism planning today reveals the major conclusion that it can be done. But, this conclusion is tempered by the lack of strong evidence of accomplishment to date. It does appear that the proper elements are now in place for greater planning in the future. Tourism agencies and organizations are becoming more aware of the need. More are beginning to network with others for the good of all. In this country, the public sector is less capable of carrying out integrated tourism planning than the private sector.

The private sector can initiate new policies and programs for both sectors. It can sponsor more technical assistance programs. In our study for the recent master plan, we heard throughout New York that local communities would welcome outside technical assistance on tourism development. With urgings from the private sector, the public sector could initiate better interagency cooperation, better research and education, and new incentive programs. The private sector could exercise better monitoring of regulations, and a new thrust toward integrated tourism planning—not for altruistic objectives but for their own vigor and stability. Certainly, with this private sector initiative, all four goals—better visitor satisfactions, better protection of resources, better adaptation to existing community structure, and new economic impact—are more likely to become realities.
REFERENCES


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