ECOTOURISM--DESIGN WITH THE LIGHT TOUCH

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Today, I am pleased to have this opportunity of sharing with you what has been at the heart of my career for over four decades--the challenge of protecting our environment at the same time catering to more visitors. I have never been satisfied with the belief that it can't be done,

. . .such as the national park superintendent who told me his job is to keep people out of his park.

. . .or the hotel manager who claims environmentalists are the cause of his business failure.

These attitudes do not solve the issue of conservation and sustainable development, which is a major responsibility of our profession of landscape architecture.

Let me begin by reminding you that tourism is huge and of a great social and
economic significance worldwide. And, it continues to grow. In the U.S. we take about 1.3 billion person-trips a year. In 1989, over 430 million people were carried by our airlines. Once considered soft, frivolous, and capricious, tourism is now a solid part of worldwide economy.

For the last 60 years, we in this country have done an outstanding job of increasing public awareness on conservation and environmental issues. We have done so well that now it is coming back to haunt us—millions more people are traveling to visit natural areas. This market segment has grown so large that we have had to coin a new term—ecotourism. In spite of the millions that increasingly flock to Disney World and other man-made attractions, visits to natural resource areas continue to grow. Visits to national parks have increased by one-third in the last decade. Over 18 million people visited the Blue Ridge Parkway in 1989.

Today, I would like to address just three
points:
1. If we are to deal with ECOTOURISM, we need to be reminded of how tourism really functions.
2. Then, I would like to offer some principles of ecotourism design and development.
3. Then, I shall close with some examples of bad and good ecotourism design.

FIRST, SOME TOURISM PRINCIPLES
(SLIDES)

* Tourism is driven by two forces--MARKET (demand) and PLANT (supply). Today, we are talking about a significantly growing segment of the market--people interested in nature and natural resources. We need to ask ourselves, how well are we prepared as designers to cope with this new demand.

* Actually, the supply side is made up of five components, most of which are within the scope of landscape architectural practice.

The services component is where the dollars from tourism are made.
The transportation modes are important links between destinations and markets. Information helps the traveler understand his travel objectives, and Promotion alerts us to travel opportunities. But, the real driving force of all tourism is the component of ATTRACTIONS.

* ATTRACTIONS stimulate us to travel to destinations. They also give us the satisfactions we seek. We need to remember that these are developed not by just one, but three sectors--governments, nonprofit organizations, and commercial enterprise.

* At the REGIONAL SCALE, we find DESTINATION ZONES interconnected with CIRCULATION CORRIDORS and made available by means of MAIN ACCESS. The attracting force lies within the Destination Zones.

* If we are to assist in the development of tourism, and especially the destination zones, we need to recognize the important foundation provided by
three sets of factors.

Certainly, NATURAL RESOURCES are the basis for a great deal of tourism development. We need to know where these are, how abundant are they, and of what quality.

* Of growing importance to tourism every day are the CULTURAL RESOURCES.

* Then, there are several factors that are important to us as planners and designers of tourism. We could call these PROGRAM factors.

* If tourism depends on MARKET INTEREST, PARTICIPATION AT ATTRACTIONS that in turn depend on DEVELOPMENT that is related to resources, why can’t we reverse this sequence? Start out with a search of the resource base and discover areas with greatest potential.

I have experimented with this approach for several years and, in connection with several state tourism plans, have been able to apply it to Oklahoma, Washington and Delaware.
The best way I can explain this is with an example of how this process was applied to six counties in northwestern South Carolina.

* The first step was to research and map the NATURAL and CULTURAL resources as well as the location of CITIES and TRANSPORTATION. This illustrates our map of the importance of water zones—best, moderate, and fair quantity and quality.

* We prepared a map like this for six factors—water, vegetation and wildlife, topography and soils, existing natural resource development, transportation, and cities. By digitizing the six natural resource maps, we were able to overlay them by computer to illustrate places of best, moderate, and fair (red, blue, yellow) support for tourism development.

* This was then generalized into these six zones. These are the areas where the NATURAL RESOURCES combine in the greatest quantity and quality. For example in Zone A, we recommended that the local
people look into the opportunities for developing a MAJOR FORESTRY INTERPRETATION CENTER, A CHATTOOGA HIKING TRAIL, A WILDLAND ENVIRONMENTAL TRAINING CENTER and a TIMBER FESTIVAL.

* Then, we did another set of six overlay maps for CULTURAL resources. This was the composite, produced by the computer.

* Then, the CULTURAL potential was generalized into these four zones. For example, because of our research information, for Zone B, we recommended the establishment of a world-class TEXTILE CENTER at Greenville, a new FITNESS RESORT, and a MOONSHINE-CLOGGING FESTIVAL.

* If we overlay the CULTURAL ZONES with the NATURAL ZONES we see how they relate to each other. This suggested opportunities for several loop tours, provided that the proper design and management recommendations for scenic tours be implemented.
This process has several important implications:

1. These zones need to be examined for further expansion—they may already have reached their capacity.

2. Developers in these zones can become more aware of how they need to cooperate on plans for development.

3. For these zones we need to be thinking of design ways to expand visitor use at the same time we protect the resources.

ECOTOURISM

* Now let me focus on our topic by first trying to define this phenomenon we call ECOTOURISM. Definitions vary, but it seems to stem from these market interests:

--to observe, enjoy, photograph nature

--to obtain personal rewards from natural settings.

--to understand ecological fundamentals

--and to learn the need for conservation and sustainable development.

* As designers, what does this mean? We
need to consider how we can create better ecotourism environments at the REGIONAL, COMMUNITY/AREA scales as well as at the SITE scale.

* As landscape architects, we can:
  --Set up new MECHANISMS, such as conferences, seminars, and meetings to get the public and private sectors to cooperate on ecotourism plans.
  --We need to persuade ECOTOUR companies to provide financial support to the parks that are the attractions, that in turn put them into business.
  --We can help by taking a SYSTEMS approach to ecotourism development, recognizing the interdependence of all the supply-side components.

* For example, for national parks with ECOLOGICAL significance, we should encourage zoning them—to concentrate visitor use and protect rare and fragile resources. Here are suggested five zones:

1. KEY RESOURCE PROTECTION ZONE
2. WILDLAND, LOW-USE ZONE
3. EXTENSIVE RECREATION ZONE
4. TOURIST ZONE

5. A SERVICE COMMUNITY

I argue that such a relationship is a win-win situation. We keep intensive development where it belongs and protect resources where they need protection.

A good case in point is the ARANSAS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE in Texas where in the last twenty-four years, the almost extinct whooping crane has increased from only 42 to 146, at the same time visitor numbers have increased over 50%.

* One design principle that will help us greatly is CLUSTERING.

--Attraction complexes are easier to manage than scattering attractions all over the countryside.

--Businesses thrive better and can be serviced more economically when clustered.

--Then, heavy development is kept out of areas needing resource protection.

* Another design solution that I am excited about is greater use of INTERPRETATION CENTERS.
--They become surrogate attractions by keeping people under control, and yet
--Stimulating their interest and providing them with education and enrichment that visitors seek.
--Controlled tours can be designed to radiate from the center, providing access at the edge of the resources, and yet...
--Protecting the natural resources around them.

* Certainly, we must maintain eternal vigilance in cleaning up the environment.
--The greatest threats do not come from tourism but from other sources. A worldwide national park study showed greatest threats were from poaching, pollution and erosion.
--Certainly, here is the role of landscape architects--to create better tourism designs.
--Perhaps we can even stimulate the tourism business sector to take a PROACTIVE STAND is support of protection of the resources that are their bread and butter.
* I am challenging all of us in the profession of landscape architecture to become more heavily involved in tourism.

---This is the only profession best able to integrate tourism planning and design, and at all scales.

---And, especially needed is the landscape architect's role as catalyst to bring the several actors together to solve ecotourism issues. This is our heritage, going way back to Olmsted, our founder.

NOW, SOME EXAMPLES--GOOD AND BAD

* Obviously, this is not the way to do ecotourism design. Thoreau is probably flipping in his grave to know how his Walden Pond is being desecrated by bad policies and bad design. This internationally known historic site is being trashed by turning it into a recreation area and allowing overuse.

* There is no excuse for allowing tourism to degrade the environment as is happening in this national park. We can do better.
* As I mentioned, properly designed interpretive centers are ideal for providing most of the visitor’s rewards without damage to the environment.

* For example, the Cornell Ornithological Center near Ithaca, is now expanding its ability to handle many more people who wish to learn more about wildlife.

* Properly designed nature trails, combined with informed tour guides, can provide for satisfactions from ecotourism.

* An especially fragile mountain top vegetation is made available to many tourists with this design solution. This is in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park, Nova Scotia.

* A private resort development in South Carolina allows observation of natural resources and yet protects these assets with good trail design.

---By the way, did you see the excellent article about an ecotourism resort in
* We need to be more creative in our decisions on people-movers. This cable-car system in the Sierra Nevada National Park, Venezuela, protects the environment and allows considerable public access.

* Landscape architects, JJR, faced this challenge in Michigan's Upper Peninsula—a badly eroded popular attraction, Miners Castle, along Lake Superior.

* Their design solution has halted this erosion allowing even greater numbers of visitors to enjoy this interesting site.

* Another JJR example of good ecotourism design is their concept for the Cincinnati Nature Center.

* JJR was charged with solving heavy visitor use of the Garden of the Gods, Colorado.

* And provided this plan for a visitor center to concentrate use where it can be controlled.
* EDSA. Ed Stone's firm in Florida, has demonstrated sensitivity to fragile waterfront problems in their design for Marriott Harbor Beach.

* Again, EDSA has given public access without erosion of the resource, here at Stouffer's Grand Beach.

* Another EDSA design solution--the Chattahoochee Nature Center, Roswell, Georgia

EDSA documented and analyzed three ecosystems and designed development to handle 200,000 visitors a year and even enhance the protection of the resource assets. The interpretive visitor center is designed for exhibits and programs and the site is accessed by self-guiding trails, overlooks, boardwalks, and benches.

IN CONCLUSION...

ecotourism is here to stay, opening up a whole new field and challenge for landscape architects. My question is: are we up to it?