MEGATREND ATTRACTION MYTHS AND FALLACIES

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Without attractions, there would be no travel. Some compelling expectation of business or pleasure provides the pull to travel to a destination. These simple statements of travel function may be true but become much more complicated when the trends of travel attractions are examined. Observations and experience have demonstrated that there are many misunderstandings regarding the characteristics and role of attractions. If communities, destinations and nations contemplate a brighter tourism future based on new and better attractions, they may benefit by challenging the following myths and fallacies regarding attractions.

Fallacy 1. New technology will void the need for travel.

In spite of the communications revolution and "high-tech", "high-touch" (Naisbitt 1982, 53), travel has continued to expand. Instead of a substitute for travel, increased availability of travel attraction descriptions by video, press and promotion tends to foster travel. The argument can be made that proliferation of information about distant places has stimulated, not diminished, the desire to travel. Telecommunication, once predicted to render obsolete the business travel meeting, has not reduced business travel. There is no substitute for being there and experiencing first-hand the setting, the people, the scene, and the action—all dimensions of travel attractions.

Many travel enhancements have resulted from dramatic improvements in technology. Automobile fatigue has been reduced at the same time fuel efficiency has increased, both stimulating greater automobile use. The technology of building temperature control (heating, cooling) has revolutionized the geographic distribution of destinations, once limited only to areas of pleasant climates. New fabrics and insulation materials have provided the wilderness buff with new comfort and ability. New animation technology has made many theme park attractions possible.

There is no evidence that increased technology in the future will diminish the tourism
significance of physical attractions at distant locations.

Fallacy 2. Attractions will continue to be the same in the future.

There is a prevalent tendency among some tourism developers to continue to copy existing patterns of attractions. This is justified by the evidence of success in other locations.

However, there are several compelling reasons for expecting changes in the character of future attractions. For one, the travel market is increasingly dynamic. Migration and increased multicultural societies are changing the characteristics of travelers (Ritchie 1992, 23). Travelers are seeking a greater variety of activities. As travelers become more experienced and sophisticated in taste they are demanding higher quality involvement at attractions. Increased liberation of travelers from previous political or economic constraints continues to stimulate new kinds of attractions and their patterns of use.

Environmental awareness is dramatically changing both the travel market and supply side of tourism, especially attractions. An increasing segment is seeking more enriching and educational experiences in natural and cultural settings. Outstanding resource areas now have increased opportunities and challenges to meet this demand. Much greater care in site selection, design and management is required for development of these attractions for combined visitor use and resource protection. Wallace (1992, 36) challenges landscape architects to develop stronger guidelines, visitor control mechanisms, and assurance of economic feedback for resource protection in order to meet the needs of ecotourism.

It is unlikely that attractions of today will stay the same in the future, requiring new creativity in planning and innovations in management policy.

Fallacy 3. Contrived attractions will dominate the field.

The overwhelming popularity of theme parks, such as Walt Disney World and Astroworld, and gaming centers such as Las Vegas provide substance for belief in the dominance of contrived attraction complexes in the future. These are enjoying great popularity from a market segment interested in this kind of attraction. It is likely that new ones will appear in the future.

However, it must be emphasized that this trend is not taking place at the expense of
other kinds of attractions. Substantial growth of visits to natural and cultural resource-based attractions continues. The US National Park Service reports that visits to national parks have increased by one-third in the past decade. There were 181 million visits to the NPS natural areas and 87 million visits to cultural areas in 1991 (Statistical 1991).

Greater and greater numbers of visitors are coming to cultural attractions. Interest in prehistoric sites, historic buildings and artifacts, past ways of life, museums, ethnic customs and crafts, legendary places and locations of fine and performing arts continues to grow. Tighe (1990, 4) reported that in 1988 Americans paid more for admissions to performing arts ($4.4 billion) than to sports ($3.2 billion), both of which usually require travel. Smith (1992, 14) predicts a major expansion of "pilgrimage" travel to attractions valued for their secular and religious merit. The largest exhibition in the United States in 1991, Catherine II (the Great), brought 605,000 visitors to Memphis, Tennessee (Kyle 1992, 3).

Although more theme parks and casinos can be anticipated in the future, there is stronger likelihood of even greater diversity and abundance of new attractions based on natural and cultural resources.

**Fallacy 4. Attractions are the same as resources.**

Many promoters of tourism confuse resources with attractions. Resources, especially natural and cultural, are foundations for attractions and do elicit some images of appeal. For example, there may be some response from promoting beaches, mountains and history but unless these attributes are anchored to specific and available attraction locations, they may not function truly as attractions. If visitors cannot get to the mountains, beaches, and historic sites and enjoy their assets in a designed and managed setting, then promotion may even induce dissatisfactions.

Attractions for tourism are place-oriented. They are open to visitors, provide facilities and services, and are managed by some firm, agency or organization. It is only when they fulfill these criteria that they function as attractions. Natural resources, such as water, wildlife, vegetation, topographic change, and climate can serve as foundations for the creation of attractions. Likewise, historic sites and buildings, trade and manufacturing centers, and ethnic concentrations can provide the base for the development of attractions.
But, in all cases, these resources in their raw form are not really attractions until they are owned, designed and managed to be so.

**Fallacy 5. Service businesses are the prime attractions for tourism.**

Many areas, especially developing countries, often believe the first and best way to develop tourism is to establish hotels. Although there may be need for new lodging, emphasis should be placed first on potential attractions. Hotels, food services and transportation are essential facilitators but study and development of the attractions to lure business and pleasure travelers should be given first priority.

Without understanding the role of natural and cultural resources, unplanned new development may erode or even destroy the most important pulling power of the area. Study and planning can identify basic resource foundations and the physical design and management policies needed in order to provide worthwhile traveler experiences and also protect these resources. When new attractions—parks, museums, pageantry, events, interpretation centers—are in place, an area is then in a position to attract visitors. At this point, the demand for traveler services, such as hotels, will become evident.

**Fallacy 6. Attractions are complete unto themselves.**

It is common for developers of attractions to confine their attention primarily to acquisition of land, the design of land and facilities, and establishment of a management and operation team. Governments take this site planning approach in establishing parks; nonprofit organizations in creating festivals and historic sites; and commercial enterprise in building new theme parks.

But, attractions are part of a larger tourism development system including transportation, services, information, and promotion. Each attraction’s success in the future depends as much on the quality and effectiveness of these functions as the internal operation of the attraction.

Especially critical in the future will be the design and management of the physical area around attractions, as diagrammed in Figure 1 (Gunn 1965). The central feature, nucleus, is the main attractor but for both cultural and natural resource attractions, the immediately
surrounding area, the inviolate belt, is very critical. The aura of an historic building, for example, can be destroyed if surrounded by modern high-rise structures or gaudy, inappropriate commercialism. Much of the controversy over national park development centers on the aesthetic quality of the immediate buffer zone. The logical location for community support services, such as hotels, restaurants, travel assistance, and car service stations, is within the next outside area, the zone of closure. It is in this zone that the economic impact from travelers visiting attractions is made. Critical is the functional linkage between attractions and travel service businesses.

It is a fallacy for developers of attractions in the future to avoid consideration of the external factors, even for their own success.

**Fallacy 7. Attractions function only as attractors.**

An obvious function of traveler attractions is to attract masses of visitors. Unless market segments are pulled to places of attractions, tourism will not take place. But, this is only one-half of the necessary function of attractions.

Attractions must provide visitor satisfactions. Too often, local tourism promoters cite great volumes of visitors to sites as a complete measure of success. This is only a half-truth. Questions regarding how well the attractions met travelers’ needs and desires must be asked. These satisfactions range from the experience at lodging and food places through treatment by hosts as well as the encounter at the attraction site. Developers of attractions increasingly will need to have a more thorough understanding of market segments and also implement objective procedures for monitoring visitor satisfactions at attractions.

As tourism grows in the future, the traveler will face a great many more attraction alternatives. This fact will heighten the need for attractions to fulfill traveler objectives. For example, a study by Rao et al (1992) of U.S. outbound travelers concluded that it is "imperative to continually explore the preferences of the target market."

**Fallacy 8. All places have equal attraction potential.**

Some community leaders, first learning about tourism, become enthusiastic about launching a development program. Virtuous as local commitment is, it will need to be
coupled with some geographic realities for attraction potential in future development plans.

Not all places are alike. Many physical, social and political factors require greater emphasis in the future. The extent and quality of natural and cultural resources vary greatly. Places relatively sterile of resources may have great difficulty in establishing meaningful attractions and tourism. Relationships with travel market origins—proximity, ease of access—vary greatly from place to place. A community’s social and political traditions must be taken into account. Some communities may decide their life style and economic stability would be thrown out of balance if masses of visitors were accepted.

It will be even more necessary in the future for areas and communities to examine many geographic factors and recognize their distinctiveness for tourism potential. Those areas with water, wildlife, vegetative cover, land relief, desirable climate, and rich cultural foundations have much greater attraction potential than areas without these resources.

Fallacy 9. Attractions are destined to remain seasonal.

Many localities have had a dominance of seasonal tourism. This fact has limited their economic impact and restricted business success. This tradition has dampened greatly the support of tourism development by the financial community.

Although climatic and weather conditions will likely remain the same for each geographic area, communities and destinations can do much to spread their attraction potential over all seasons. One solution is to tap the travel market no longer bound to school and work calendars—the growing retiree and childless markets. But, perhaps the greatest opportunities lie in creative solutions. For example, the expansion of northern winter resorts to include not only a variety of outdoor sports beyond skiing but also year-round cultural and indoor events has extended the season for many businesses. Hobbs (1992, 940 has cited the year-round traveler bookings at capacity for whale-watching cruises, even in cold and foggy weather, on the Sagueneay River of Quebec. Planning, design and management innovations can turn seeming limitations into assets for all-season attraction development in the future.

Fallacy 10. Attraction development is the exclusive right of developers.

As tourism has grown in stature, it has attracted many investors and developers of
As tourism has grown in stature, it has attracted many investors and developers of projects, often from outside the project area. Although this backing has greatly assisted many local areas in their tourism expansion, experience has exposed the need for greater development care in the future.

More and more, local and area populations and their several constituencies are voicing opinions on how their areas are developed. In the vicinity of a major Canadian attraction, local residents threw stones at tour buses in protest. (Reid & Boyd 1991, 124). Although planning processes that involve local publics may delay development, greater adaptation to the social, environmental and traditional qualities are likely to be the result. For example, the people of the island of Moorea rejected the establishment of a major resort and golf course on the ground of potential environmental and cultural damage. (Kennedy 1991). Western Australia has recognized the great importance of public involvement in tourism development and issued a very complete set of guidelines for developers (Western 1992). It covers description of what constitutes public involvement, what a program can accomplish, involvement principles, and how to involve publics. It admonishes developers to recognize that:

The public has a legitimate role to play in decision-making.
Those who may be affected by a proposal have a right to know how they may be affected and how decisions will be made.
There is a variety of "publics" with different concerns, who have local knowledge that can help proponents predict and develop impact management plans.

CONCLUSIONS

Although prediction and forecasting are unsure sciences, enough experience exists to suggest that tourism attraction development of the future cannot be based on myths and fallacies of the past. New insight, new understandings and new concepts will be required in the next few decades in order to adjust to new conditions. Changes in world-wide politics, economics, human values and environmental awareness are proving the need for new dimensions in tourism planning and development, especially for attractions. Older and simpler solutions will no longer meet the needs of either hosts or guests. Of all the elements involved in tourism, greatest priority must be placed on attraction development because of its
BIBLIOGRAPHY


FIGURE 1. SPATIAL MODEL OF ATTRACTION. The planning of attractions should consider three parts: 1. the nucleus (the main feature—historic site, scene), 2. the inviolate belt (the aesthetically important enclosing area), and 3. the zone of closure (the nearby community and travel services). (Gunn, 1965, 26)
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