NOTES ON TOURISM-RECREATION-PARK DEVELOPMENT
OF BOSTON HARBOR ISLANDS

by Dr. Clare A. Gunn, Professor,
Department of Recreation and Parks, Texas A&M University

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INTRODUCTION

No other geographic location has the same characteristics nor offers the same lure as does the coastal zone. While neither pure land nor pure sea, the coast, especially the waterfront, peninsulas and islands, represents a special amalgam with much more powerful properties than either the land or the sea.

For tourism-recreation-park use, coasts exceed all other places for social and economic importance. In many coastal areas, leisure uses surpass all other consumer activity. Local residents find the coast a desirable place to live and recreate. Visitors from inland areas seek out coasts for their weekends and vacations. And, more recently, foreign visitors are coming to the coastal areas of the United States in unprecedented numbers.

The following notes reflect preliminary response to the charge for improved planning and development of the Boston Harbor Islands. These comments are not offered as complete solutions to development problems but rather as a foundation for discussion.
ANCIENT ROOTS

Since ancient time, the seacoast has been man's principle habitat—first providing easy food and well-shaped rocks for tools. One scientist builds the thesis that because of this atavistic geographic imprint, man continues to hold strong affinity for the sea. Where land and sea meet is a locale that continues to offer strong symbolism of an earlier time. "We still like to go beachcombing, returning to primitive act and mood. When all the lands will be filled with people and machines, perhaps the last need and observance of man will be, as it was in the beginning, to come and experience the sea" (Sauer: 1967, 310). For generations, the sea has been a mecca for all who seek renewal, refreshment, and linkage with ancient roots.

FUNDAMENTALS

If the Harbor Island area is to provide a rich and long-range foundation for a humanized setting, a broad and comprehensive view must be taken. Popular polarized positions, while accenting special interests, must be viewed from a higher vantagepoint. Following are some key fundamentals that need to be considered for future planning and development of Boston Harbor Islands, particularly for tourism-recreation-park use.

The tourism-recreation-park functional system

Viewed from a comprehensive perspective, there are literally hundreds of kinds of establishments and programs encompassed in the fields of tourism-recreation-parks. Tourism involves a great variety of travel, transportation, lodging, food service and entertainment programs and
establishments. Recreation involves many structures, land developments and programs for a myriad of recreational activities. Parks are of many sizes, locations and types to protect resources and provide personal enrichment through visiting natural and cultural resources. This complexity almost defies understanding and also compounds the problems of management. Yet, all parts must be considered in concert if the needs of people are to fit well with the many pieces of land development.

One way of viewing this overall complicated array is to divide the total into five manageable components, as illustrated below. This model

Model of the tourism-recreation-park functional system.  
(Source: Gunn: 1979, 36)
intentionally omits, for purposes of clarity and emphasis on function, the several influential factors, such as political organization, economic trends, decision-making, and land regulation. These factors are more easily manipulated after the basic functional relationships are known.

These five components, each containing a great many separate elements, are always in a very delicate but dynamic balance. Any change in one component has direct influence on all others. Knowledge about each component, as applied to the Boston Harbor Islands, is essential to their future development.

The tourists (visitors, recreationists) encompass the full range of those who come to the islands. An awareness of the many sources of these visitors and their personal characteristics as related to the islands are important to the future success of any development of the islands. Ultimately, the key to all development will be the extent and the variety of visitor experience and satisfaction on the islands.

But, these experiences are related to the attractions offered by the islands. The extent of existing attractiveness and the potential for further attraction development must be documented. Attractions, as here considered, include protected natural and historical areas as well as man-made facilities for leisure use.

Paramount in all development of the islands will be consideration of transportation and access. The geographic linkage with the mainland, the capacity of each mode, and the several factors relating to service are important considerations.

In support of the recreational and leisure experiences at attractions are the many services and facilities. No matter whether public or private
in ownership and management they are essential to visitors. The location
and quality of these services, both now and in the future, deserve
careful consideration.

Finally, people depend increasingly upon many forms of information
and direction. Advertising, publicity, news media, and writings of all
kinds including novels and poetry, influence a person's knowledge and
understanding about attractions, transportation, services and facilities.
For the islands, an analysis of existing media as well as potential
information and direction mechanisms needs to be made.

It is recommended that in the consideration of future planning and
development of the Boston Harbor Islands, as well as the surrounding
waterfront and land areas, this model may be useful in integrating the
many functional elements that might otherwise remain in isolation.

**Beach and shoreland are rare and irreplaceable resource assets**

In recent decades, esthetes, environmentalists, biologists, and land-
use specialists have raised shoreland and inland issues to the level of
national concern. No longer are the coastal waters and edges considered
infinite and capable of absorbing all of man's waste. The history of the
Boston Harbor Islands is vivid proof of this earlier belief, now being
reversed.

Throughout the country, for inland waters as well as for seacoasts,
policies and legislation have declared the unusual and irreplaceable nature
of beach and shoreland. Environmental consciousness resulted in the Coastal
Zone Management Act. But, even before this, many states, such as Michigan,
Wisconsin, Vermont, Florida, and Hawaii, had regulated setbacks and water-
front uses.
Even without regulation, private enterprise resort development has increasingly shown respect for the rare and irreplaceable qualities of the water's edge. Sea Pines Plantation (Georgia), Amelia Island (Florida), and Palmas del Mar (Puerto Rico) are examples where all major development is kept back, retaining a natural shoreline and protecting heavy capital improvement from erosion.

There is little question that the coastal resources are very special and demand much more studied solutions today to overcome the abuses of the past.

Protection and development are compatible

Today, polarized and antagonistic positions have been fostered by protectionists and developers. Both positions have logical and well-documented foundations. But, neither position, taken in its extreme, is completely tenable by mass society.

A point, frequently missed by waterfront developers, is that without protection of basic resources, most development has little purpose and less than optimum value. Because much of coastal development depends upon the biological, esthetic, and geological resources of the coast, protection and stability of these resource assets are essential to development. For coastal tourism-recreation-park development, the protection of beaches, sealife, waters, wetlands, shoreland resources, and plant and animal habitat are essential.

Conversely, without some public uses of coastal areas, publics are reluctant to provide funding and legislation that supports protection. Protection, for only protection sake, may be espoused by a few but generally is contrary to the entire American social and economic system. It is
doubtful if our protected national parks, national forests, state parks, and city parks would exist if publics were not allowed to use them.

More and more we are understanding that polarized positions do not solve our coastal land and water use problems. Rather, a studied and carefully designed approach is proving that both protection and development can coexist. But, much depends upon how this is carried out so that masses of populations can gain the valuable experiences of coastal association at the same time that basic resource assets are perpetuated. It is a design and management problem that does have solutions. But, too frequently, such solutions have not been sought.

**Public and private can be complementary**

Much as this country is a free enterprise land, custom and law have decreed that for tourism-recreation-parks an equally important land owner-manager is that of public agencies. This role of developer is entirely separate from the original role of government as regulator and umpire.

Early activities of governments within the realm of recreation and parks were justified on the basis of public welfare. The wholesomeness of outdoor recreation, for example, was cited as providing a social function of physical and mental value to the many publics who used such public areas. The thousands of acres set aside in our national parks, national forests, state parks, and city parks are testimony to the effectiveness of implementing this governmental role.

However, some factions have taken this to be an axiom that only public agencies can provide wholesome and rewarding amenities and leisure activities. Many private developments in recent years have disproven this thesis. It is doubtful if the millions who have visited excellent private
resorts and the Disneylands, Disneyworlds and Six Flags establishments would agree that their experience was less than rewarding and worthwhile. The point is that both sectors (as well as another--non-profit organizations) are responsible for development, and that all are needed in the total mosaic of providing for leisure pursuit.

Increasingly, the symbiotic relationship between private and public development is being recognized. Mixes of land ownership, allowing the private sector to provide portions of supply at the same time public agencies fulfill their roles, are appearing. Examples, such as Mission Bay (San Diego) and Lake Lanier Islands (Georgia), demonstrate the successful interdependency of public and private development for recreation, tourism and parks.

Waterfront esthetics--a dominant force

The physiographic openness of waterfronts offers a very special esthetic setting, unlike any other. This edge has been romanticized in literature, song and drama for centuries. Water’s edge beauty is of a special and a very high order.

But, esthetics of shoreland and waterfront are complex. Wild land against water offers a lure and an invitation for solitude. Wetlands and waterfronts provide settings for esthetic appreciation of many natural features--birds, amphibians, fish, and shoreland plants along sandy beaches or rocky cliffs. In recent years, it has become the favored locale for many who love to paint, sketch, photograph or merely relax among such natural settings. All this argues for the prohibition of major man-made development.
On the other hand, some man-made development is equally acceptable on esthetic grounds. Waterfront parks with manicured lawns, fountains, flower gardens, outdoor furniture, walks, gazebos, band shells, and attractive vacation home complexes are aesthetically pleasing to many. For others, viewing sailing craft or fishing boats is a pleasurable form of beauty. Water reflections of cities, either toward a setting sun or from sparkling lights after dark are esthetically rewarding to many.

Development too close to the water's edge--high-rise waterfront development, heavy industry and massive construction that blocks views, such as billboards--are generally considered in conflict with waterfront esthetics. In some coastal areas, such as Hawaii, billboards have been banned and all other signs are controlled. Consideration of vistas, both toward and from the water, is of very high priority in all shoreland development. But, these are not necessarily always free from man-made development.

Low resource depletion

As compared to most other uses man makes of the coastal zone, tourism-recreation-park use is a low consumer of natural and cultural resources. With the exception of the "consumption" of prime beach lands by structures and facilities for recreation, generally the resources upon which they depend are left unimpaired though "used."

Whenever a visitor views the vista, whenever he uses a boat on the water, whenever he photographs a scene, whenever he runs along the beach, and whenever he studies the historic lore and background of a coastal area, he leaves the resource virtually the same as he found it as far as his principal activity is concerned. Certainly this cannot be said about
extractive industries or manufacturing plants whose waste products are of much less value than the original resources.

The tourism-recreation-park "product" is the individual experience. As such, it is composed not so much of material goods as of psychological value. Therefore, what one experienced today may be replicated day after day by thousands more with virtually no deterioration of the resource.

Obvious exceptions to this argument occur with the construction of facilities and services needed to accompany the experience. Single family vacation homes, for example, are very large land users. But, usually most tourism-recreation-park structures can be designed, built and managed in ways that do not directly impinge upon the basic resource and yet provide access to it. This demands a planning strategy that sorts out the several functional elements into locations best suited to each.

**High priority use: tourism-recreation-parks**

Because of their great utility and service to man, waterfronts have been assigned many uses over the years. Harbor and port functions are a logical outgrowth of waterfronts at points of entry.

However, some uses (both public and private) especially at cities, have been made that do not necessarily demand the rare resources of the water's edge. Shopping centers, highways, arenas, parking lots, industries, jails, courthouses, power plants, and waste dumps, for example, have too often preempted lands near the water.

Tourism-recreation-park uses, however, provide enrichment for much larger masses of populations. When designed and managed to do so, these functions can protect the resource assets at the same time that individual
and social functions are fostered. This cannot be said for many other waterfront uses.

**Clustering is a viable concept**

At one time, a seemingly obvious planning answer to heavy public use of coastal resources was dispersal. But, implementation of such a policy demonstrated the many negative consequences of scattering use, especially creating difficult problems of management. Now, with further understanding of the several segments of publics and the characteristics of support services for recreation uses of waterfronts, the concept of clustering seems much more feasible. It has advantages from several perspectives.

New tourism physical plant is much more viable at places where visitor volume is larger. Business success is necessary to a thriving economy. Such success is much more stable at service centers rather than scattered about. Furthermore, these centers frequently can be developed at locations that complement local services. Such clustering provides for greater economic stability and community benefits.

From a social perspective, clustering fosters greater interactions between visitor and host and among visitor groups. Often visitor interests in local customs and history stimulate greater local redevelopment of these themes. Few tourism-recreation-park uses are solitary; more are social and gregarious. By clustering the mass uses, other areas are better suited to the solitary and private uses.

Environmentally, clustering brings development into nodes where they are less disruptive of overall environments. Expansion of current viable urban areas is likely to alter natural environments less than carving out
new areas from rural and natural settings. Intensive site development offers more efficient management control, and is highly appropriate for many coastal land uses.

From a promotional perspective, clustering lends itself well to "packaging" complementary activities and services. The possibility of "theming" is enhanced, broadening the appeal to greater numbers of people. Placeness is given better identification than is possible through haphazard and scattered development.

As a planning tool, clustering of attractions, services and facilities offers many advantages.

Both "touring circuits" and "focused" development offer potential

Coastal resources, especially off-shore islands, lend themselves well to "touring circuit" development. Recreation users, local and outside, gain satisfactions from a sequence of events over their weekend or vacation time. Water circuits, touching a variety of land and water resources, provide an interesting diversity of experiences. Properly planned circuits can become feasible for private enterprise when coordinated with markets and resource development at stops on several peninsulas and islands.

Equally important, but suited to a different market, are "focused" or destination developments offering longer-stay opportunities. Resorts, organization camps, fishing sites and diving areas require slightly different resource assets and development so that activities can be repeated by the same visitors.

When focused and touring circuit developments converge, greatest opportunities are found for providing efficient services.
Negative impacts can be avoided or ameliorated

Tourism-recreation-park development can have negative impacts unless plans are laid to avoid them. Frequently cited are negative economic, social and environmental consequences.

Development does have economic costs as well as benefits. Costs of infrastructure (water supply, power, waste removal, communications, police) need to be a part of the input-output calculations. And, opportunity costs may dictate other types of land use. By and large, and especially on a regional scale, economic benefits can outweigh costs.

Social costs include the adjustments made by a local society to adapt to greater waterfront development and use for tourism-recreation-parks. Unless local populations understand the opportunities for cultural and economic enrichment, antagonisms can develop. Some fear that their ethnic or local culture will be diminished. However, research has shown that local customs, crafts and artifacts can even be enhanced by the influx of visitors.

Regarding environmental impacts, it is hard to conceive of new tourism-recreation-park uses as creating anywhere near the negative stress already placed on Boston Harbor Islands. Generally, leisure functions are far less impacting than other forms of development, such as industry. With restoration of historic sites, improvements of beaches, restoration of plant and animal life and increased sensitivity to these resources, new development should improve the quality of the environment.

Avoidance of negative impacts can come primarily from better planning, design, and management. Each component—attractions, facilities, services,
transportation—requires planning for given capacities. People can be handled in great numbers when the places and facilities are designed to do so.

BOLD PLANS NEEDED

For future enhancement of Boston Harbor Islands, for visitors and metropolitan citizens, creative and bold plans are needed to turn the resources around from waste and refuse containers to places of high human value. While some benefit can come from study of waterfronts elsewhere, the greatest potential lies in building upon the unique assets of this special harbor setting. The many productive efforts of existing agencies and interest groups can now be built upon for both protection and development.

Because the islands are part of the total harbor complex, it may be best to develop plans and strategies for the overall complex. Otherwise, island solutions may be out of context. For example, the islands and peninsulas are approached from the mainland through separate entrances and relate to separate mainland communities and transportation systems.

A second point of strategy is that of reversing the order of approach. Instead of starting with ownership and management as givens, it may be more appropriate to start by determining appropriate potential functions. Then, after a perspective on functions is obtained, the several public and private owners-managers can evaluate how well they can carry out these functions in the future. This may suggest changes in policies or even changes in management.
Suggested here are some questions that are appropriate for future development of the Boston Harbor Islands for tourism, recreation, and parks. Answers to these may already be in progress or completed. In any case, they should be part of the strategy. While most may be appropriate for existing management entities, others may require new ad hoc or permanent structuring.

1. **Have zones best suited to commercial enterprise been identified?**

   Necessary is an evaluation of zones best suited to commercial support of leisure use of the islands. Based on the clustering concept, several criteria should influence the location of such zones.

   a. nearness to established services to build upon past location experience.

   b. at an optimum location for servicing visitors to the attractions, present and potential.

   c. at locations best served by public infrastructure (now and planned) such as for water supply, waste disposal, police, fire protection, electricity, emergency service.

   d. nearness to transportation and access service points on the mainland.

   e. expressed interest in tourism and recreation services by the private sector.

   When zones, based on these criteria, are identified, private sector entrepreneurs can be stimulated to enter into feasibilities of many kinds of service enterprises.

2. **Have the special resource qualities of every island been identified?**

   Certainly, each island has its own special geographic position and content, lending itself to special theme resource development. In concert
with the next point (3), the following criteria should be considered in evaluation of each island:

a. location, relative to other islands and shore.

b. relative accessibility.

c. internal resource assets and liabilities for leisure use and enrichment:

- water, waterlife
- vegetative cover (including pests)
- special climatic and atmospheric conditions
- topography, soils, geology (including beaches)
- wildlife (including pests)
- historic and archeological sites and structures
- legends, lore

With such an assessment, the islands, or portions thereof, best suited to protection or development can be ascertained. The limitations of present use or future change and adaptation can be identified.

3. Have the several present and potential markets been identified?

Any future plans must take into consideration the many characteristics of the markets, now expressed or latent. Only when this is tested against the resource qualities can the appropriate attraction and limited service development on the islands be determined. Some of the factors to be considered in analyzing the markets are:

a. demographics—age, sex, income, social status.

b. geographic location—local metropolitan, regional, other U. S. and Canada, overseas.

c. existing preferences for leisure activities and types of attraction locations.

d. special populations: handicapped, poor, minorities.

e. seasonal preferences.

f. trends that may change market preferences.
g. cluster analysis that can lead to market stratification.

Paramount in such an investigation is discovery of the most appropriate and desired visitor experience and therefore the special resource-market themes for the islands.

4. Have the socio-environmental issues of affected communities been investigated?

It must be known whether the local populations most likely to be impacted by expanded development are supportive. Early understandings of local conditions that may limit or foster the opportunities for future leisure use and development of needed island-mainland systems can assist greatly in carrying out plans. The transportation ways and potential commercial zones on the mainland best suited to expansion need the support of the communities in which they are located.

5. Have both "touring circuit" and "focused" destinations been considered?

Plans need to include both categories of use. Some resources may be best suited to one or both of these categories of attraction development. Each will require slightly different support services. Because of the relative remoteness of the islands, it may not be feasible to encourage very much long-stay or "focused" development. This may be served best by the peninsulas or other shoreland areas better supported by infrastructure. It would appear that "touring circuit" development has great potential.

6. Have all financial mechanisms been investigated?

Many different financial arrangements between the public and private sectors have been experimented with throughout the country. These should be examined for their possible application to the island situation.
It would appear that there are two basic opportunities for private enterprise with each requiring a different arrangement. Based on the assumption that the basic attractions and their resources are to be owned-managed by a public agency, concessions and other similar financial structures can be used. These could stimulate businesses in a direct resource-related enterprise on the islands, such as boat harbor concessions, snack bars and island-based guide services. In turn, lease revenues received from these businesses can be used to foster the attractiveness and protection of the island resources. On peninsula and mainland shore situations, more intensive commercial development of resort hotels, marinas, food services, and entertainment could provide tax, lease, or other revenue support to the island resource protection and management.

In every instance, private enterprise that benefits directly from the public subsidy of the attraction should be encouraged to provide some share in that public subsidy.

7. Have sources and techniques of information and promotion been investigated?

When the attractions have been developed so that they can accommodate visitors (and only then) every effort should be made to utilize appropriate media and techniques of information and promotion.

Information is increasingly in demand. People deserve better guidance, not to take the edge off the value of adventure but to help in its fulfillment. People seek accurate descriptive information on timetables, weather conditions, linkage between access modes, safety, risk, and the many recreational activities available. An area so rich in cultural and
natural resources deserves well-written and illustrated literature and interpretive guidance.

Promotion, including paid advertising and publicity, can be effective in stimulating interest in the islands. However, such promotion should be appropriate to the opportunities truly available. The ultimate goal is visitor satisfaction. Such satisfaction may be dampened if promotion promises more than can be delivered.

It is especially important that both information and promotion be lodged at mainland focal points where it can be most effective for the most people.

8. Have creative solutions been sought?

These rare and important assets—the Boston Harbor Islands—deserve more than routine and perfunctory solutions. Every effort should be made by leadership to break out of routine processes of development and management. The creative talents of artists, writers, architects, landscape architects, and non-professionals should be allowed to flourish in innovative ways to protect the resources and enhance visitor rewards. Additional forums, such as this roundtable, may yield imaginative solutions that would not otherwise appear through normal business or bureaucratic channels.

CONCLUSIONS

Review of the Boston Harbor Island situation of today reveals many more opportunities than obstacles. In spite of some resource abuses of the past, these natural and cultural resources have great unmet potential for future enrichment and enjoyment by great numbers of people.
Viewed from a tourism-recreation-park perspective, it is likely that protection and enhancement of the basic resource assets of the islands is a first step. Such a step will improve and assure the leisure and recreational attractiveness of these special land areas. Such a plan does not entail major capital investment and should be possible within present agency management.

Linked with this improvement of attractiveness is an understanding of the several market groups who might be interested in enjoying the islands if facilitated. Certainly, the majority of users would be from the metropolitan Boston area. However, if development and promotion were overtly designed to do so, many outside visitors could gain personal rewards from contact with the islands. But, before this takes place, much more needs to be known about the characteristics of other U. S., Canadian, and foreign visitors.

The relative remoteness of the islands suggests that commercial services and facilities on the islands should be minimal and directed primarily to day use. The need for infrastructure and access from the mainland and interior suggest that mainland and near-shore are the preferred locations for lodging, food service, car service, shops, boat termini, and other visitor services. It would be at these locations that greatest impact of tourism—employment, taxes, income—would be generated. Certainly, the mainland waterfronts must be party to overall island planning.

Critical to island enjoyment will be transportation. While mass use could best be accommodated by ferries, personal craft should not be ignored. Boating (power and sail) is likely to increase as the attractions
are enhanced, requiring enlarged facilities at appropriate docking locations. Again, consideration of mainland linkages to facilitate easy transfer from land to water modes must be considered.

As development and management control increases, the many assets and personal benefits from visits to the islands will need to be promoted. Such promotion should be within the framework of the quality and reality of the potential experience. Promotion should be comprehensive, including efforts by many mainland shops, hotels, air terminals, bus depots, and by many local organizations including service clubs.

Management will need to investigate every avenue of inviting input from non-profit organizations and commercial interests. Free enterprise has great opportunity and must be free to operate within its own framework of innovation and market selection. Each potential financial arrangement should be investigated—tax increment financing, special tax district, tax incentives, land writedowns, leases, concessions and others.

Finally, future development of Boston Harbor Islands can be one of the greatest improvements of urban living ever accomplished by Boston and Massachusetts. For the first time, it would declare that these one-time abused and wasted resources now have great human interest and value and are being given high priority in new management strategies.
REFERENCES


