PLANNING GUIDELINES
FOR NATIONAL AND REGIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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A major challenge facing tourism everywhere today is to improve our ability to discover new opportunities for tourism development. The present preoccupation with promotion tends to obscure the need for new and better quality of things to promote. Put forward here are two major changes, that if implemented, could dramatically enhance the many benefits of tourism in any nation or region. These changes are managing tourism as a system, and discovering new opportunity.

I. MANAGING TOURISM AS A SYSTEM

Many regions already have made great strides in their development of tourism. However, the 1990s are presenting new challenges. Economic, social, and environmental changes are demanding that traditional approaches to tourism need improvement. One of these is what I call "site-only" decision-making. Tourist businesses and park agencies necessarily concentrate on their own site location, building design and management. However necessary these are for development, they fall short of reaching their own as well as regional and national tourism goals. The reason: lack of managing tourism as a system.

A parallel can be drawn with an electrical system. Just as it consists of a generator, transmission lines, and end product uses of great benefit and enjoyment, so it is with tourism. Attractions at destinations stimulate travel over transportation networks. By means of activities and services, we gain enjoyment and enrichment from the experience of travel. But, in either system, when any one part breaks down, the entire system falls to meet its purpose. For tourism, this breakdown of the overall system often results in less than desired economic impact, social conflict, and environmental degradation.

An example may illustrate the point. A recent study of tourism in a South Pacific island revealed that hotel occupancy was less than 50%, fewer than 10% visitors returned, and the level of guest satisfaction was very low. (Moorea, 1991) All this was in spite of magnificent mountain scenery, marvelous beaches, and relatively uncongested development--items reported as preferences on market surveys. In spite of good design and management of some individual resort properties, the major island tourism was failing because of lack of planning and managing tourism as a system. The mountain scenery was not protected and was being eroded, spoiling its beauty and damaging wildlife habitat. The sea was being polluted with sewage from hotels. There were virtually no attractions outside the hotels in spite of the many ancient archeological
sites and abundant natural resources. Tourist movement was strangled by a monopoly on transportation. Opportunities for growth were abundant but the system was breaking down.

This is not an isolated case but rather is symptomatic of the need for new policies and new organizational structures everywhere—to plan for integrating the overall tourism system. This can be done at the same time that individual integrity of development is maintained. The solution does not call for autocratic centralized planning but rather better cooperation and collaboration of actors already in place.

Tourism is a dynamic system with "push" from the market (demand) side and "pull" from the supply (development) side. Critical is balancing these so that there is a match between the two at all times. (Taylor, 1980) Accomplishing this goes beyond the individual hotelier, park manager, or advertiser and requires managing as a system.

The "supply" side of tourism includes five components: attractions, transportation, services, information, and promotion. Nations that are planning to improve tourism could help themselves greatly by evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of all parts of each of these components. For the system to function smoothly, all must be maintained in a balanced and dynamic relationship. Because attractions provide visitor experiences—the real tourism products—they become the power unit for the entire system. For new tourism development, the search for new attractions, as well as improvements in the other components, becomes a major objective.

II. DISCOVERING NEW OPPORTUNITY

By using new computer mapping technology, today we can identify areas of a region having greatest tourism development potential. In recent years, this technique has been used in tourism plans for Oklahoma, Washington, Delaware, and South Carolina. In all cases, greater integration of tourism planning is taking place.

The technique is based on the thesis that wherever a series of important tourism resource factors converge, these are the locations with greatest development potential. This is not a marketing tool but a way of discovering areas where new tourism programs and investments would be most productive. (More detailed explanation of the technique can be found in Gunn, 1988 and Gunn and Larsen, 1988).

The process consists primarily of five steps:

1. Research of key factors: natural resources, cultural resources, transportation, cities
2. Mapping of factors by computer graphics
3. Weighting factors
4. Aggregating factor maps
5. Interpreting destination zones
Application to a six-county area of 3,849 square miles (10,000 km²) in northwestern South Carolina demonstrates the technique. (Gunn, 1990) All factors were studied by means of review of existing literature, reconnaissance of the region, and interviews with key knowledgeable. Figure 1 illustrates the overlay mapping process. Aggregating two map series results in two composite maps, one for zones suited to natural-resource development and one for cultural-resource development.

An intervening step, weighting of factors, was performed by a panel of tourism specialists, resulting in the following:

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Professional tourism planners then reviewed the computer composite maps and made generalized determination of zones based on natural resources (Figure 2) and zones based on cultural resources (Figure 3). These are the destination zones that are not yet marketable but rather contain the best mixture of key factors shown in Figure 1. It will be noted that these zones not only contain favorable natural and cultural resources but also a community and highway access, each of which is critical to the successful functioning of each zone. The zones also cross over several jurisdictional and administrative boundaries. If the two sets of potential zones are combined, the result for total tourism potential zones is shown in Figure 4.

From this study, potential for over 40 new attractions was identified. Natural resource assets suggested the opportunity to develop a scenic wildland tour, a forestry interpretive center, new resort and marina complexes, a scenic mountain tour, and farm guest ranches. Among the cultural-resource-based opportunities was a complete restoration of a textile mill village, a Cherokee Indian interpretive center, an equestrian ranch, an historic pageant and music festival, a living history farm park, and a railroad excursion.

The next step would be for tourism leaders in each zone to promote investment and development of these new opportunities by all three developer sectors--governmental agencies (for parks, nature centers), nonprofit organizations (for festivals, historic sites), and commercial enterprise (for profit making attractions).
This technique for discovering new opportunity is applicable to any region, accomplished rather quickly, and is not very costly to perform. When done properly, it can stimulate the many stakeholders of tourism to give tourism a fresh and productive thrust toward new and appropriate development of the tourism system.

III. PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

The main advantage of this or similar approaches is to encourage development where it has the best foundation and opportunity to function as a system. And, conversely, it advises some areas to be cautious about trying to develop where foundations are weak. Another advantage is the revealing of opportunities for new cooperation and collaboration on development by private and public developers in each zone. Joint effort toward investment, development, programs, and promotion can be very productive.

It must be emphasized that this technique must be updated in its application because it is dependent upon changes in the regional tourism system. For example, markets change over time, making it necessary to review and probably modify zone boundaries from time to time.

Identifying these zones is only a first step of a much larger effort of tourism planning and management. Tourism planners, leaders, investors, and designers need to make further study of each zone for several reasons. The strengths and weaknesses need to be documented in greater detail. There must be agreement and commitment within the zone that tourism development is desirable. The environmental saturation level needs to be investigated. Even though the factors may indicate potential, the reality of existing development may preclude any expansion.

This process of identifying zones must be carried out with caution so that premature development is not stimulated. Areas of outstanding beauty or rare ecosystems can be irreversibly damaged if not planned with sensitivity to the limits of the resource.

Professional planners, landscape architects, and architects today are implementing new development plans with much greater sensitivity to the environment. Needed is greater engagement of their services early in development stages. They are employing new design solutions that increase visitor use and also protect resources against damage such as interpretive visitor centers, especially near nature preserves and historic sites.

All regions of the world can assure themselves of more appropriate and successful tourism development by treating tourism as a system and encouraging development in locations where most likely to succeed.
FIGURE 4. OVERLAY OF ZONES BASED ON NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

FIGURE 1. COMPUTER OVERLAY MAPPING PROCESS
REFERENCES


