SMALL TOWN AND RURAL TOURISM PLANNING

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The purpose of this paper is to examine a less popularly discussed side of tourism—the role of small towns and rural areas. The popular view of tourism is that of urban bigness—large hotel corporations, large airlines, and the many millions of dollars spent in tourism promotion by state, provincial, and federal governments. While there is much truth in this perception, it omits a major segment of tourism, becoming increasingly important as tourism demand diversifies and frequently brings the small towns and rural areas into play. In the United States and Canada, the regions beyond the major cities provide strong resource assets for tourism. States Canada's Minister of State (Tourism), "Canada is a magnificent country. It has grandeur of mountains, forests, rivers, beaches, prairies and wilderness along with sophisticated cities, friendly country towns and fishing villages." (McMillan, 1985?) A
survey of planners in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick shows tourism to be an important secondary economic activity in rural areas and small towns, needing greater planning attention. (Corbett, 1986) This discussion is based partly upon research of others and partly upon many years of study and close association with the field of tourism. The paper is divided into three parts: several perspectives on development, the tourism system and implications, and some ways of resolving issues.

PERSPECTIVES

Tourism, a phenomenon considered today to include all travel, is certainly not viewed the same by all segments of the population. It may be useful to view tourism development through the eyes of four key constituencies.

The Tourist Participant Perspective

While much of pleasure and business travel concentrates on urban areas, the rural regions and small towns play a very important role as viewed by tourists. Table 1 lists some of the key activities enjoyed by tourists in rural areas. This reflects the market interest in rural lands. A wide range of age groups, family status, incomes, and occupations fall into the market segment interested in rural lands and small towns. In tourism jargon, this represents a
very large portion of the "push" side—the market demand for experiences in these settings. While much of this demand in the past has been restricted to a few weeks in summer, increasingly it is spread over shoulder and winter seasons as well.

Through many writings about the love of nature and the values of outdoor recreation and through great growth in numbers participating in and telling about these activities, the public demand for the rewards from such recreation has grown to be a significant force. For example, outdoor recreational trip expenditures in Texas in 1983 were $9,280,841,000 (1983 Outdoor, 1984). No doubt, many segments of the population will continue to look toward rural and small town lands for recreational opportunity.

The Developer Perspective

In countries operating under a political philosophy of a market economy, entrepreneurs and developers are free to respond to market demand. In addition to economic impact, substantial personal and social rewards from people-contact between host and guest have been derived from commercial development of travel and recreation in rural areas.

From the developer's perspective, historic and natural resources of rural lands and small towns are seen as
foundations for new development. As the private investor, seeking revenues from development, learns about demand for rural tourism and recreation he searches out new possibilities for development.

Developers have increasingly come from outside small towns and rural areas. The increased sophistication needed for feasibility and market studies, the increased complexity of finding sites, and the increased maze of governmental regulation encourage outside rather than local interest in tourism development.

Developers, because they are larger and come from the outside, have access to more resources. They can get financial backing for large investments and can assemble many specialists to study and develop plans for development.

If and when rural and small town lands become feasible for development of tourism, it occurs.

Other Outside Influences.

Commercial tourism developers from outside aren’t the only ones to impact small towns and rural areas. Governments, as owners and developers of land at all levels from federal to local in many regions of the United States and Canada, have great influence on recreation and tourism decisions and policies in rural areas. In the United States, over 85 percent of outdoor recreation takes place in
land owned and managed by nearly one hundred federal agencies. While all of these agencies, except perhaps the National Park Service, were not mandated in their organic acts to provide recreational and tourist use, they have done so due to public pressure. There are some 1.4 million visitor use days at sites administered by the National Wildlife Refuge System; the U.S. Forest Service supports over 230 million recreation visitor-days per year; the National Park Service, 330 million visitors per year; the US Army Corps of Engineers 480 million recreation days per year, just to name a few. (Clawson and VanDoren, 1984) These are rural lands. A similar situation of control over vast rural areas by federal and provincial agencies exists in Canada. Each agency has its own policy, created in centralized bureaucracies at long distances away from the local areas impacted by their decisions. This creates a local situation that may be confusing, contradictory, and seemingly beyond local control.

Another group, generally beyond local public control and yet greatly influencing tourist use of rural lands, is that of outside industries and other non-recreation activities. The use of sites for radioactive or toxic waste dumps and the damming of rivers for power production are often the result of decisions outside local jurisdictions. Major
mining and extractive industries can alter greatly the environmental resources of rural regions that might have had potential for tourism.

Increasing in the United States are the nonprofit organizations who often exercise control and management of rural lands and resources, such as nature preserves, archeological sites, youth camps, and historic sites.

Local Perspective

In many regions of the United States and Canada, rural lands have been developed for tourism with little or no conflict. Forest and farm owners have often gained financially from the increased demand and therefore increased land values for recreation and tourism development. Even so, enough problems do exist to suggest that improved policies and practices are needed in order to cope.

Because the past economy for many rural areas has been largely dependent upon mining, forestry or agriculture, local populations often cling to these foundations for future hope. This preoccupation results in poor training and experience in the field of tourism. Like most people, unfamiliarity with a phenomenon creates skepticism and sometimes even antagonism. "For reasons of fiscal restraint
or because they are unfamiliar with tourist needs, many small towns are unable to offer anything more than basic services to travellers." (Mountain, 1985)

Because the scale of small town and rural development has been small—small business, small community budgets, and small political hierarchies—there is usually skepticism and sometimes antagonism toward the larger outside tourism influences. "...Canadians residing in towns and villages currently enjoy many of the 'advantages' of the city but they are at the mercy of market forces and the bureaucratic filtering-down of urban-type policies and standards." (Hodge and Qadeer, 1983)

Wall (1979) has modeled the impact of tourism and recreation applicable to rural areas, Figure 1. From the demand side (shown on the right) and the supply of tourism opportunity, participation in activities takes place. This results in three impacts: environmental, social, and economic. Others have added legal and ecological impacts as important categories.

Environmental problems have been identified as disturbance of livestock, erosion of trails, erosion of banks of waterways, damage to crops, loss of vegetation and disturbance of wildlife habitats (Ironside, 1971). Social problems center on difference of attitude toward use of the
land and behavior of outsiders on private land. In Texas and in many areas, this has been the key issue against the use of rivers and streams for recreation. Riparian land owners (ranchers, farmers) fear damage and extra management problems from public use of their lands. Pizam (1978) identified several negative concerns by local people toward tourism development in rural lands near Boston: traffic, litter, noise, vandalism, high prices, drugs, and alcoholism. Legal issues, increasing greatly, are primarily those of liability--concern over lawsuit from users who may be injured while on private land.

Often in small towns the local populace is close-knit. Outsiders and outside interests are therefore frequently seen in a negative manner. The local recreation lands are "theirs" and outside visitors are seen as invaders of their private environments. Furthermore, land owners who often bear the costs of allowing tourists use of their lands do not feel they are adequately compensated (Swinnerton, 1982).

The results of a study in England showed that three local groups in tourist centers (probably equally applicable to rural lands) have quite different attitudes toward tourism development. "The prospect of additional leisure facilities encourages the administrators, is promoted by the business sector and is viewed with suspicion by the
residents." (Murphy, 1983)

But, over time, some localities make remarkable adaptation to invasions of tourists, even though these outsiders are known to disrupt usual community life. Rothman (1978) found that resort cities realized that visitors required extra effort to cope during the peak season: church schedules were changed, residents tend to avoid popular visitor places, and the pace of activity and congestion increased. Even so, the tradeoff of additional revenues, seasonal jobs, expansion of services, and "an opportunity to see old friends," was worth the temporary upset. Research of cultural impact of tourism in the Amish community of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, showed a strengthening of subcultural values at the same time more visitors were accommodated. (Buck and Alleman, 1979)

THE TOURISM SYSTEM

With these perspectives, it may be well to review some fundamentals of tourism as a system (Gunn, 1979). Perhaps if this were better understood by small towns and rural areas, they could cope with tourism with less fear and frustration and even gain greater social and economic rewards.

The diagram in Figure 2 is a broadly generalized model of the functioning tourism system. It is not an "industry
model," limited only to the economic and business side of tourism. Because tourism is pluralistic in development and management—by commercial enterprise, nonprofit organizations and governments—all three sectors can be found throughout the system.

The population component includes the market side, with interest in and ability to travel. The remaining four components constitute the supply side. The power unit of the supply side, the major "pulling" power, is the attraction component, providing for both the appeal and the provision of satisfactions from participation. Essential also, and in intimate balance with all other components, are transportation, services, and information/promotion.

Carrying this model onto the ground may bring tourism into better focus for understanding developmental roles and issues in rural areas. Figure 3 illustrates a generalized tourism development scheme showing destination zones.

From a tourism perspective, referring to this diagram, certain principles emerge. When small towns and rural areas understand these more generally, they may be able to deal with development to their greater satisfaction.

First of all, the major economic impact from tourism is derived through service businesses, primarily in the medium to larger size cities. It is in the hotels, motels,
restaurants, transportation systems and souvenir and retail shops that the greatest employment, incomes, and taxes are generated. Generally, small towns and rural areas are not the best locations for the majority of these businesses. Most of their revenues (with the exception of hotels) come from local trade. And, tourist markets prefer the diversity of these services in the larger communities. These larger cities and surrounding attraction complexes make up the primary destination zones.

Second, these very tourist services are greatly dependent upon the attractions of the surrounding hinterland—the secondary destination zones in and around the small towns and rural areas.

Third, the rural and small town areas sometimes support two types of tourism with limited development—touring circuits and destination longer-stay. Around lakes and hills, especially in the north, there may be opportunities for resort development. Because of wildlife and scenery, there may be opportunities for tours. Indigenous natural and cultural resources are preferred foundations for tourism development.

Fourth, isolated and scattered development is neither successful for business nor for conservation of resources. Generally, clusters of development at nodes is better
business and better environmental design. Much of the complaint about tourist degradation of resources is lack of design and management to cope with larger numbers at concentrated service centers (at small as well as large towns) rather than in fragile and rare resource areas.

Fifth, the travelways, for main access to the region and for linkage between communities and attractions require special scenic protection.

And, finally, from a tourism perspective, the vast majority of the market is satisfied with attractions and services close to communities, large or small.

RESOLVING ISSUES

If there is pressure of demand for tourist use on rural and small town lands (even though proportionately small), if the tourism system is dependent greatly upon attractions in rural areas, and if small towns lack understanding of how to cope with tourism, what can be done? How can some of the skepticism and conflict be ameliorated? How can communities actually prohibit negative impact from tourism?

Certainly, there are no simple answers to these questions and because every community, large or small, has its own "personality" (tradition, politics, economic viability, social norms), there may need to be several
potential scenarios. Following are some general ways in which other communities have answered the need to deal with tourism.

**Establish Leadership**

No matter whether tourism development is conceived within or from outside rural areas and small towns, local leadership must be established. Leadership for tourism planning can come from any source, public or private. Leaders should be individuals with proven capability of even-handed accomplishment in working with people. A tourism leader, familiar with promotion only, may not be the best leader for planning. Key functions are:

* Assist in the planning process
* Help evaluate the alternatives
* Gather data on the alternatives
* Share the responsibility of selecting alternatives
* Share the responsibility of implementation
* Supervise reporting procedures
* Evaluate

(Tourism USA, 1978)

**Integrate Planning**

Tourism must be accepted by planners of rural areas and small towns, as well as urban areas, as part of the overall
planning responsibility. Piecemeal planning, directed singularly, such as for water supply, forestry, agriculture, or transportation, creates, rather than solves many tourism problems. When tourism is incorporated into overall economic and land use planning, all sectors gain.

"A major issue is resource development and the problems involved in developing these resources with conservation and protection also being a prime objective." (Corbett, 1986) Especially critical are natural preserves, such as national parks. Rare and fragile natural resources can be given greater protection when visitor service enclaves (small towns) are allowed to meet market demand for tourist services. Needed is a zoning hierarchy that provides for both ends of the development scale—intensive to remote. (Forster, 1973)

Hold Local Forums

Local meetings in which outside specialists are brought in to present tourism development information can be enlightening before action is taken (Wirth, 1983). Or, special meetings can be held exclusively by local residents in which only important internal issues are addressed—what special qualities of the area should be protected and what levels of development could be accepted and supported?
Other forums could address the hazards and risks as well as social and economic values associated with commercial tourism development.

Utilize a Catalyst

An outside meeting specialist can obtain local consensus on tourism development issues through the use of traditional workshop techniques. An equal number of highly reputable members of the area are drawn from several actor sectors: tourism promoters, tourism business developer-managers, governments, environmentalists, and other publics. Rather than plenary session discussion, that can easily become bogged down by dominant members, small groups (5 each, composed of one representative from each actor group) can discuss answers and opinions to a posed question and develop consensus. When returning to a plenary session, all information and opinions are presented and recorded, eliminating redundancies. Several questions, such as tourism resource assets, problems, and issues, can be addressed in one day. This offers the diverse factions a voice in forming a foundation for further planning of tourism development.

Establish Local Power Base

Frequently, small communities, because of past
frustration, give up on tackling tourism development issues. Often, they have much greater power than they realize. By establishing a simple platform, behind which several local constituencies can rally, local citizens can carry their needs to larger outside decision makers. Governments, as well as private corporations, will listen if arguments are well prepared and truly represent general local support. A local power base must include representatives of several interests, even if opposing one another on some issues.

Use Simulation Techniques

Specialists in simulation techniques have developed tourism development "games," in which several scenarios are explored that simulate a series of decisions on development. Loukissas (1983) has explored several of these opportunities such as IMPASSE, Impact Assessment Technique; UNITODES, United Nations Tourist Development Simulation; and TAG, Tourism Activity Games. He concludes that where the game is simple enough to be easily understood and yet comprehensive enough to cover important issues, simulation can help bring public and private sectors together on tourism development issues.

Develop Networks

Small towns and rural areas, once isolated, now have an
abundance of communication channels to the outside world. These channels should be made to work for the good of tourism development if desired. The unity, the simplicity of visitor image, and the staying power of small towns can be retained at the same time that the many contemporary services, funding sources, technical assistance and professional guidance can be tapped for local benefit. From universities, private firms and governments, a great amount of help can be obtained, often without cost.

**Work Through Channels**

Direct contact with the concerned governmental agencies often can bring results. Too often however the issues are reactive rather than proactive. Highway departments, natural resource agencies, environmental agencies, and business regulatory agencies are in constant flux—new policies are being formed regularly. Local interests can avail themselves of pending policy changes and establish their points of view early in the process and thereby avoid future major issues.

**Seek Legislative Change**

Some governmental regulations and policies may be obsolete, insufficient, or counter to local and rural interests. While change may be a slow process, improvement
can be made if sufficient pressure is brought to bear. For example, riparian rights to waterfronts may need clarification in order to both protect this limited waterfront resource and yet allow development of surrounding lands for appropriate tourism.

In the United States, where free enterprise and private rights dominate, many land use controls have been enacted. It has been understood in several key tourism states (Hawaii, Florida, Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Delaware, Virginia, Wisconsin, Michigan, Colorado, Oregon, California) that such controls are necessary to protect tourism’s future as well as the environment for residents. (Destination USA, 1973)

CONCLUSIONS

Because of a continuing tourism demand for rural areas and small towns, because developers continue to respond to this demand, and because most major development is likely to be done by outsiders, it is not surprising that regions beyond major cities are increasingly concerned over their own destinies. But, as they become more knowledgeable about tourism, perhaps the advantages of outer land development for tourism can be realized at the same time that problems can be assuaged.

First, no province or state should anticipate great
economic enhancement through tourism development of rural areas and small towns. The vast majority of impact continues to increase in the urban areas. This conclusion must be recognized by governments at all levels as well as rural localities. Especially in areas of waning agricultural, forest, fishing, or mining economies, hope for recovery is unlikely from tourism, except in certain rare situations.

Second, rural areas and small towns do contribute greatly to the overall provincial or state tourism system, even though economic impact is greatest in the larger cities. These outer regions, especially those readily accessible, provide great natural resource assets of value to many tourist attractions. Careful review and examination of these resources may suggest even greater potential. Important to rural areas is recognition of their need to network with related cities so that tourism can be developed compatibly with both.

Third, even though provincial or state tourism may not gain substantially from development of rural areas, small towns may be able to increase their economies substantially under certain circumstances. If they are interested, if they can obtain the investment backing, if they can find the entrepreneurs, and if certain resources would find markets
if developed, there may be potential. Sometimes, the addition of only a few businesses can substantially increase the economy of a small town. Guide services, remote hunting/fishing camps, and limited food and lodging services near attractions may obtain seasonal business. Business and service enclaves within national, provincial and state parks sometimes add to local economies. Vacation home developments and package tours can sometimes bolster rural economies.

Finally, it must be concluded that in all instances, local communities must weigh the advantages against the costs of tourism development. Social impacts from visitors, greater development of the resources, and increased burdens of infrastructural support must be offset by advantages of cultural exchange and strengthened economies. In any case, local areas need to utilize all strategies available to them to increase their sophistication about tourism and to initiate the proper actions to cope with tourism development.
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