THE COMMUNITY AND REGIONAL TOURISM CHALLENGE

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You are radiant with family pride as your child squeals with joy as the very first fish is caught. For the first time in your life you see icebergs and whales in a kayak tour off the coast of Newfoundland. You look down on monkeys and lush exotic plants as you sway a bit on a suspended canopy walkway, some 75 feet above the rain forest in Peru. As you mountainbike through Kananaskis Country in Alberta Canada, you see not only the stately Rockies but also native wildlife, such as elk and moose. You reminisce over your wartime experience as you visit Normandy or Corregidor.

Or, you travel to witness a wedding. My wife and I did just that recently in Vermont where friends and relatives came from as far as Scotland and Norway.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is what tourism is all about--your experience of being there. There is no substitute for this experience. Nothing can replace it, not even the modern trend toward telecommunication.

But, as tourism continues to grow, it consumes thousands, perhaps millions of acres of land yearly. New resorts, new airports, new roads, and new shops, casinos and hotels demand the very best of our remaining land resources.

Land planning for tourism is today's greatest challenge to all planners and developers the world over--one that I am convinced we are failing to meet. It is not only within our ability to resolve but it is our responsibility to do so. No longer will we enjoy the fruits of tourism--economic and social--unless we do a better job of planning and development.
For my presentation today, I want to focus on two main points. First, the bad news--environmental planning concerns. Then, the good news--the key challenges and possible solutions to the dark side of tourism development today.

THE URGENCY

The bad news is in need of urgent solution. Certainly, if we intend to accomplish all the gains that are possible through tourism, we must act, and soon.

For the next few minutes, based on my experience for quite a few years, I want to emphasize five major pitfalls every community is likely to face. Again, all of these can be avoided with foresight and planning.

Environmental Degradation is of serious concern.

Natural and cultural resources, the very foundations for tourism, are being eroded as never before.

Especially damaging is water pollution because clean water is the basis for extensive travel objectives. Examples of water abuse are abundant. For example, we are told that more than 2.5 billion gallons of untreated waste is flushed into Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island, every year (Brancatelli 1994).

In 1994, volunteers for the Center for Marine Conservation collected seven million items of trash and a ton of debris for every mile of the Texas Gulf Coast.

It was reported that $2.5 million a day of tourist revenues were being lost because arsenic, grease, and other toxic wastes were flowing into Galveston Bay.

And, this is a worldwide as well as an American problem. Resort hotel sewage is frequently discharged directly into the water used for swimming, fishing, diving, and boating, such as at this South Sea Island resort.

Equally significant is the depletion of vegetation, wildlife habitat, and soils due to unplanned tourism development.

These are just a few of the clues to the environmental crisis that is so very significant to tourism everywhere.

Our myopic vision has resulted in disunited tourism development.

Each developer, public and private, thinks only of his own development.

The result is too often a chaotic mass of unconnected development. This lack of integration creates a confusing and often ugly juxtaposition of land uses.

This situation produces less than optimal business success, poor visitor satisfaction, conflict with existing community values, and environmental damage.

Neither the public or private sector seems to be concerned about the overall result. Only when the issue becomes critical, such as gridlock traffic
congestion or killing of an endangered species is action taken.

**Today's design trend is toward greater homogenization.**

Mass tourism development today is a homogenized landscape—the same no matter where we go. Business developers tend to copy others that have appeared to be successful. Franchise and chain firms tend to repeat the same land use and building design in all locations and geographic regions.

In the great desire to standardized brand recognition, the visual landscape is beginning to look all alike. The traveler today is less and less aware that he has left home.

**Too often, tourism destroys unique place qualities.**

Closely related to homogenized development is the destruction of individual place qualities.

Hills are bulldozed flat, native vegetation is destroyed and replaced by standardized plantings, significant vistas are blocked, historic places are destroyed by gambling casinos.

Vernacular architecture is replaced by international glass-box style. Prehistoric sites are buried under golf courses and resorts. The subtle qualities of community traditions are often obliterated.

Place qualities, the very essence of the pulling power of tourism, are unwittingly being decimated, and what are we doing to prevent it?

**We are guilty of poor or even the absence of needed land use policies.**

Most of the ills I have just described are due to the lack of land use and design policies by both the public and private sectors.

Tourism is dominated by waterfront development. Yet, we seldom see regulations or business decisions that prevent building too close to the water's edge—certainly a hazardous location.

This is what can happen to a resort hotel too close to the shore. A hurricane virtually demolished it.

At Walden Pond, the historic setting for the profound man-nature principles set forth by Henry David Thoreau 150 years ago, is being destroyed. This is not because of the tourists. It is because of park policies that have turned it into a recreation site rather than an historic shrine.

* And so, here is our challenge.

* These are just a few highlights of tourism development pitfalls. And, there are others. For example, the community's infrastructure may be overtaxed—traffic control, water supply, waste disposal, police, fire protection, and erosion of local amenities, such as parks and historic sites.
* I suggest that communities today have just three choices. First, a community can merely say—"No, we don’t want any tourism." We have observed elsewhere how it has damaged the environment, increased social stress, upset our way of life, and cost more than it has returned. "No, we don’t want any."

A second choice, a very popular one today, is to just let it happen, willy-nilly. *Any time and any place that someone wishes to develop tourism, we’ll let it happen.* This has happened in many places, such as Niagara-On-The-Lake, Ontario. Many residents now have their homes for sale because the little town of 2,000 people now have 3 million visitors a year. Tourism was allowed to create gridlock traffic congestion, pollution from tour buses, and the conversion of main street into only tourist shops.

A third choice, and I am convinced it is the better one, is to guide the growth of tourism in ways best for the community. This can be done. But, it takes considerable cooperation among many residents and effective input from planners, designers and developers.

THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

So, now, the good news. Certainly we cannot solve all the issues just mentioned but I am convinced we can do a lot of *prevention.* Just as in health care today, the emphasis is on prevention, not just fixing problems after they happen.

For the next few minutes, I would like to call to your attention eight of the most important ways in which I believe developers, local residents and professional planners can exercise greater power to resolve today's land development issues of tourism. The ability is there. All we need to do is harness it.

**First, we need to understand the Real Clients.**

Traditional planning practice involves a designer-client (usually property owner) relationship. For tourism, an intervening factor too often is missed or incompletely considered—the *real* client, the visitor.

The true clients are the users of the land areas we design. Understanding these land users has not been part of the training of designers and planners.

Today's travel markets are not only diverse, they are highly specialized, requiring individual land design solutions. To the traditional market seeking beach resorts must be added a great many other travel segments, such as viewing and photographing wildlife
birdwatching and learning from a guide
viewing and photographing interesting vegetation
engaging in adventure and challenging activities
learning about other cultures
or plunging into ancient history by visiting castles, fortresses, and
monuments of the world. And, of course, there are many other travel segments
today.

The point is that planners and designers must incorporate travel market
researchers into the design team. This research can provide insight into important
characteristics, such as demographics, life styles, psychographics, and other visitor
factors that must influence the design and development of tourist places.

The ultimate success of tourism depends not only on the desires of the
owner-developer but more critically upon how well it meets the needs and interests
of the travelers.

Next, we must admit that our traditional elitist design and planning focus no
longer works; we must employ greater public involvement in the design
process.

The old approach to planning by planners--I know best what is good for
you--is now obsolete.

Today we are being humbled by the opinions and tastes of many others,
especially local citizens that will be impacted by tourism development. The public
is much smarter than we thought. Many constituencies today are much more
vocal, especially on land use issues related to tourism. Residents frequently block
tourism project proposals, such as hotels in their back yards, new highways
through parks and a Disneyland at Gettysburg National Military Park in
Pennsylvania.

Local residents, not a do-good environmental group, along the 470-mile
Blue Ridge Parkway are now speaking up. They are objecting to proposals for new
housing projects nearby.

At the center of the controversy is local citizen demand for protection of
scenic viewsheds, old structures, mills, farmsteads and historic fence details.
Communities are often ahead of planners in creating their own destinies of better
design.

Landscape design educator and practitioner, Lane Marshall (1983), has put
forward this design process that advocates citizen and governmental input from the
very beginning and throughout.

This input would be accomplished by workshops, brainstorming, attitude
surveys, public information, and review of policies that will influence the design of
the project. Today, all tourism projects supported by the World Bank require
involvement of local people from the very beginning of the planning process.
Another aspect of this new design paradigm, especially by landscape architectural consultants from outside the project location, is cross-cultural ignorance. Professional planners Dimanlig and Hilario (1990) have observed, "Attempts at change are often resisted, particularly where planning approaches and values differ widely from those of intended beneficiaries and are imposed without the benefit of an acculturation process".

Designer Safei Hamed (1990) experienced cultural problems that often arise when consultants work in the Middle East. Regarding a park plan in Saudi Arabia, he comments, "In the case of Asir National Park, the cultural gap between the American designer and the typical Saudi user was manifested in many instances and has caused problems to users and managers. These include such issues as insensitivity toward the separation of the sexes, the inappropriateness of Western style bathrooms and the inadequacy of typical American picnic tables for the Bedouin style of eating." Conflict can arise because visitors would be a mix of residents and foreign tourists. Planners have much greater opportunities for success of tourism projects when they fully understand cultural characteristics of the country in which they are working.

**For tourism, we must understand External Site Implications.**

For example, resort hotels on a South Pacific Island, like this one, were losing money and visitors were bored and felt cheated. No nature interpretation or trails were available in the magnificent mountain in the center of the island. Transportation was controlled by one individual, a tourist bandit. All attention was directed to each individual hotel site.

Ancient Polynesian sites, abundant on the island, were not available nor interpreted for visitors. Visitor uses of the beautiful waters of the lagoon within the coral reef were untapped. The rich traditions and cultural assets of the island demanded by the visitors were not being carried forth in dance, pageantry, costumes, legends, or crafts.

Surely the designer and developer for each hotel site cannot resolve all these issues but they should have been raised in early discussions. When external opportunities are considered, all parties will gain. Visitor appeal and activities can be enhanced, businesses can be more successful, and resources can be protected.

**It is time that we assert much stronger Proactive Environmentalism.**

Probably no other form of economic development is so dependent upon the protection of cultural and natural resources as tourism. Support of resource protection is not mere altruism, it is sound tourism economics. The great mass of tourism activities depends on clean water, scenic vegetation, wonders of nature,
wildlife and their habitat, dramatic topographic change that is free from erosion, prehistoric and historic settings, and rich cultural landscapes. These land qualities are essential ingredients of the tourism "product".

Today, the topic of ecotourism is being popularized. Although definitions vary, generally the term refers to the many visitor interests in nature and culture, such as:

--to observe, enjoy, and photograph
--to improve mental and physical wellbeing
--to understand ecological fundamentals, and
--to learn the need for conservation and sustainable development.

However, I wish to emphasize that in the design of ecotourism settings, we should exercise some professional ethics. In some locations such as this very fragile environment, generally the difficulty of providing electrical power, water supply and waste disposal would preclude any development, such as on this tropical island.

But by using wind and solar electricity and recycled water and waste, many more units now being built like this will destroy the beauty of this unique landscape--merely because technology allows us to do so. I question the ethics of such a design and development policy, especially for ecotourism.

Tourism requires planning at Three Scales.

Too often, planners and developers consider only the site scale. For tourism, however, it is very helpful, even for better site development, to be involved in two other scales.

By regional scale is meant a relatively large area, such as a state, province, or even a nation. At this level, major issues, such as policies on transportation, park and reserve areas, and relationships between communities can be dealt with.

Throughout the world, communities now seek the rewards from tourism development. Planners and developers now have the opportunity of guiding tourism destination zones that include communities so that they can avoid the many pitfalls that can occur without foresight and planning.

The significance of viewing tourism planning at all three scales is to provide long range integration of the many pieces of land development that make up overall tourism in a region.

Over many years of experimentation and application, I have utilized GIS overlay mapping to determine destination zones that have the greatest potential for future tourism development. When the natural and cultural resource factors are combined with transportation and city locations, those areas with greatest quality
and quantity of supporting factors can be delineated.

When this method was applied to the state of Illinois, for example, these primary and secondary zones were identified. With this basic information, developers and designers can now study and plan for new tourism projects appropriate to the resource foundation.

**An important new role for planners is to Be a Catalyst.**

Because planners have no vested interest in tourism projects they are generally respected as being neutral and objective. Frequently, opposing forces can be brought together in order to work out solutions when landscape architects serve the role of catalyst.

A case in point was the solution to a long-standing stalemate between environmentalists and highway engineers at Franconia Notch, New Hampshire, USA. (Rigterink 1992) For over twenty years, an eleven-mile section of an Interstate highway had been held up due to objection from environmental groups. Their resistance centered on potential destruction of a traditional mountain landscape feature if Interstate standards were applied.

This issue was finally resolved when planners and landscape architects intervened with a design solution that retained important landscape character. In order to implement the solution, however, Congressional action was required to change standards for the 11 mile strip—narrower shoulder, narrower median, and reduced speed limit. The needs of tourists, environmentalists and engineers are now met by an unusual scenic design that still allows traffic flows.

Acting as a design catalyst, bringing several decisionmaking forces together, can become a major function of planners, especially for tourism applications.

**New Innovation, Creativity—Essential Today**

Fortunately today, more designers are influencing tourism development in creative ways.

For example, landscape architects are providing access to coastal resources in ways that protect fragile shoreline sand dunes from erosion.

The design work of landscape architects in South Africa has resulted in a beautiful waterfront setting for hotels in Durban.

Elevated walks provide tourist access to forest reserves without damage to the plant and animal life.

By design, thousands of tourists gain insight into the nearly extinct whooping crane from this overlook tower. Testimony to the success of this design feature is the fact that both visitor and whooping crane volumes have increased
greatly in the last twenty years.

This ecododge resort design in Western Australia shows sensitivity to the natural resources of the site and surrounding area.

Increasingly, the stereotyped design of franchise businesses is being modified to fit site conditions, as illustrated here with the Kentucky Fried Chicken business located in an historic building in St. John's, Newfoundland.

One of the greatest tourism design opportunities that protect resources and yet handle masses of visitors is the creation of interpretive centers.

--they can serve as a surrogate attraction feature
--they can stimulate interest and foster education
--they can introduce visitors to the environment, and
--they protect resources by concentrating people where they can be controlled.

This cultural site in Canada, where prehistoric civilizations drove buffalo over the cliff . . .

Is now interpreted to visitors in this tastefully designed three-story visitor center . . .

Where exhibits and guides reveal the fascinating story of this significant event of ancient history.

**We must begin to Teach Tourism Design and Planning.**

Today, tourism land use issues and design principles are not being taught to future hotel managers, land developers, architects, landscape architects, engineers, and planners. Tourism should be a part of every college and university program for these tourism professionals.

Because the land is the very foundation upon which all tourism is built, principles of land design and planning must be incorporated into design and planning curricula.

Such curricula should include the following topics:

--The roles and opportunities in tourism for design professionals
--The heterogeneity of geographic factors affecting tourism
--Public involvement in tourism design and planning
--Protection of place qualities in all tourism development
--Tourism land use as part of the urban planning fabric
--Integration of tourism into park planning
--Significance of travel markets in design and planning
--Design solutions to tourism resource protection
--The politics and economics of tourism and land use
--Eco-ethics of tourism planning and design
--Site design in context with regional planning
Of course, in order to teach these topics there must be support from university administrators, research information on these topics, and teachers trained to provide such education.

**CONCLUSIONS**

What do I conclude from this discussion?

I urge you to become more environmentally sensitive, mainly because it is good business. I encourage you to recognize the characteristics of your location--your special place. Avoid planning and development that is just like everywhere else. I submit that you have considerable local power to guide tourism growth--growth that is best for the community as well as for tourism.

Remember, tourism is like fire. It can cook your food or it can burn your house down!

**REFERENCES**

Brancatelli, Joe (1995). "What is Polluting Our Beaches?" *Smithsonian*, (26) 1, April, pp.74-75.


