The Role of Tourism in the Planning and Management of Special Places

CLARE A. GUNN, PH.D., F.A.S.L.A.

ABSTRACT
The paper challenges planners to become more involved in the complexities of tourism, and especially its dependence upon special places. Popular beliefs turn out to be half-truths that interfere with objective planning. In order to discover special places and zones with greatest tourism potential, computer-aided overlay mapping now offers a solution. But, as in all planning, new integrative and catalytic roles by planners seem to offer better promise for tourism planning than conventional processes of the past. Tourism is highly dependent not only on protecting special place environments but also on planning them for visitor use.

RÉSUMÉ
Dans cet article, l'auteur invite les urbanistes à davantage tenir compte des complexités du tourisme, notamment le fait qu'il dépend pour beaucoup de l'existence de sites exceptionnels. Les croyances populaires ne sont que des demi-vérités, qui nuisent à une planification réaliste afin de découvrir les lieux qui présentent le plus grand potentiel touristique, la superposition de cartes informatisées offre maintenant des possibilités fort intéressantes. Comme dans tous les secteurs de la planification, les procédures traditionnelles ne suffisent pas, la planification touristique exige des urbanistes qu'ils jouent un rôle intégrateur et catalyseur. Le tourisme dépend non seulement de la protection des milieux exceptionnels, mais aussi de notre capacité à aménager les espaces pour les visiteurs.

Burgeoning tourism is a paradox. It is seen as an economic boon, and an environmental threat to special places. This dichotomy spurs the growth of polarized factions that foster conflict rather than resolution. There are few challenges before the planning profession of greater significance today than to guide tourism so that it protects special place qualities at the same time it is allowed to grow.

Years ago, no-one predicted that tourism would become such a powerful economic and developmental force throughout the world, now cited as the largest item of world trade. In the U.S., in 1989, citizens took 1.3 billion personal trips (Cook, 1990). The U.S. airlines carried over 430 million passengers that year. By that year, three-fourths of all U.S. adults had traveled by air as compared to only two-thirds in 1980. On any given day, approximately 14 million people are traveling more than 100 miles from home. In Canada, travel ranks third among Canadian exports (services and products purchased by outsiders), ahead of newspapers, lumber, wheat, petroleum and natural gas (Canadian Tourism Facts, 1990).

This huge mass travel has two major dimensions. First is the motivation of travelers — their desire to seek out special places as destinations for their travels. Dann (1972) calls this the "push" side of tourism. The "pull" side includes mainly the attractions supported by facili-
Tourism Half-Truths

Research and observation are demonstrating that many popular beliefs about tourism turn out to be myths or half-truths. This finding tends to change the foundations for considering planning and management of special places. Following are some of the more pertinent half-truths that interfere with efficient and objective planning.

**Half-Truth: Promotion Is the sole producer of tourism.**

This is the preponderant belief of Chambers of Commerce, tourist bureaus, and tourism officials throughout the world. Evidence can be found in what they do. They spend nearly all of their billions of dollars of budget funds on promotion — very little on research, education, or planning. Traditionally, politicians support this practice and businesses have implicit faith in the value of promotion.

Although private entrepreneurship must be protected in market-economy countries and some government-supported promotion may continue, other public roles need greater attention. Talented and qualified researchers need greater support. Schools, colleges and universities need greater backing for tourism training and education. Communities and rural areas need planning assistance in order to protect local amenities in the face of growing demand for their resources. No elitist or centralized planning is called for here; rather, a shift from the disproportionate emphasis on the market side to a greater awareness of the needs of the supply side.

**Half-Truth: Tourism is an industry.**

Certainly, the business side of tourism and its economic impact are key factors. Scholars continue to refine economic impact models to document the many jobs, incomes, and tax revenues that travelers generate. These are topics associated with industries — and it is true that the greatest economic flow from tourism is through the businesses of lodging, food service, retail sales, and transportation.

However, these businesses are not the cause of tourism. These are facilitators. Actually, tourism is a pluralistic economic phenomenon. There are two other very important sectors that must be added to the business sector, especially for their role as providers of special places.

Throughout the world, the non-profit sector is revealing its significance in the tourism system. Many historic sites, festivals, and natural resource areas, popular with tourists, are owned, developed, and managed by non-profit organizations. Nature conservancy groups, archeological societies, service clubs, historic and preservation societies, youth groups, camping and health organizations and many others are among the great number of non-profit groups involved in special places utilized by tourism.

Perhaps the largest sector responsible for resource-based attractions is government. In rural areas, federal state (or provincial) county, and local governments own and manage parks, reserves, forests, wildlife refuges, reservoirs, and other outdoor recreation resource lands and facilities. Often, local governments own and manage amenities used by travelers as well as residents, such as parks, museums, historic sites, outdoor theatres, zoos, convention centres and sports arenas.

To describe tourism as an industry omits essential areas and investments by non-profit organizations and governments. In fact, if it were not for them, there would be much less need for the tourism business sector.

**Half-Truth: Tourism is a smokeless Industry.**

Tourism development manuals and advisors often state that tourism does not use resources nor create environmental damage. While it is true that tourism may not equal extractive or production industries in its impact on the environment, it can pose threats to water quality, wildlife, soil contamination, and air quality when improperly planned and managed. Most threats to tourism resources however, come not from tourism but from other sources.

Planners, developers, and managers of tourism must increase their understanding of the high dependency of tourism on natural and cultural resources. Traveler demand continues to
increase for resource-based activity. The growing popularity of theme parks has not come at the expense of visits to cultural and natural resource areas. Visits to the U.S. national parks have increased by over one-third in the last decade (NPS Statistical Abstract, 1989). In 1989, there were approximately 96.5 million visits to NPS cultural areas. Over 18 million people traveled the Blue Ridge Parkway that year. A Canadian survey of the U.S. travel market revealed at least 20 million adults in the U.S. interested in visiting Canadian cultural places (Canadian Tourism Facts, 1990).

While it may be literally true that tourism puts little smoke into the air (except automobile exhaust pollution), it is false to imply that tourism has nothing to do with resources. Wight (1988) has provided a substantive essay on the relation between tourism and the environment.

**Half-Truth: Tourism is the economic salvation for dwindling economies of small towns and rural areas.**

Today, in both the United States and Canada there is a groundswell of concern about the shrinking economies of rural areas and small towns. Many advisors are recommending tourism as an easy and quick solution.

Some rural areas and communities may have some opportunity for tourism development, but not without thorough examination of local conditions. Only if they have good access from travel markets, abundant cultural and natural assets, adequate infrastructure (water, waste removal, etc.), and a strong commitment (as well as financial support), do they have a chance. An example of a helpful guide is the Community Tourism Action Plan Manual (1988), issued by Alberta Tourism, Edmonton.

There is strong linkage between rural areas and larger cities for tourism. Many of the resources for attractions lie outside the cities. Small towns can benefit from exploiting these resources. However, the largest economic impact will continue to gravitate to the larger cities, because they are able to support larger and more diverse development. It is often forgotten that virtually all tourist businesses prefer an urban location, because they depend heavily on local as well as travel markets.

Small towns and rural areas should investigate their potential for tourism, especially to identify special places that need protection.

**Half-Truth: Tourism has potential anywhere.**

Closely allied to the rural and small town issue is a prevailing belief that tourism can be developed anywhere. Just as in agriculture, there are "infertile areas" for establishing a tourism economy. Not all areas have the natural and cultural resource foundations, transportation access, or sufficient infrastructure of community services nearby upon which tourism can be built. Generally lacking have been sufficient research data and strategy models for identifying areas of greatest potential. For many decades, agriculture has benefited from scientific data on soils, drainage and climate, recognizing that not all areas have equal potential for agricultural development.

The following discussion centres on a computer-aided process whereby special tourism places — destination areas with potential — can be found.

**Discovery of Special Places**

In the past, the more spectacular travel attractions were obvious — Niagara Falls, Miami Beach, Yellowstone National Park, Banff National Park. But as travel volume increased, market preferences proliferated into many more interests. Especially dramatic has been the recent increase in "intelligent" travel — educational, environmental and historic experiences (Tighe, 1990).

As competition increased, areas and regions have begun to seek guidance on identification of new destinations. Unfortunately, geographers and planners have been slow to develop models for assessing potential. In 1965, a conceptual model was created (Gunn, 1965), and then applied to a study of Michigan's Upper Peninsula (Blank and Gunn, 1966). Getz (1986) cites this and several others in following years — Burger and Arbel (1975), Arnett (1979), Lawson and Baud-Bovy (1977), and Mill and Morrison (1985).

Further experimentation and improvements in computer graphics have increased the speed, accuracy, and capability of assessing tourism potential (Gunn and Larsen, 1988). In co-operation with Price Waterhouse, this technology was applied to state tourism plans for Oklahoma, Washington, and Delaware. Recently, in co-operation with Clemson University, it was applied to a six-county region of northwest South Carolina.

The process of determining zones of greatest potential can be generalized according to the following steps:

1. Assumptions of market potential
2. Study of tourism factors for:
   a. Natural resource-based tourism
   b. Cultural resource-based tourism
3. Description and generalized maps of tourism factors
4. Computer conversion of factor maps
5. Aggregating factor maps for:
   a. Composite of natural resource potential
   b. Composite of cultural resource potential
6. Interpretation and generalization into zones of potential

A description of how this process was applied to "Upcountry South Carolina" may explain how it can identify special places for tourism development. This work was performed in the Department of Park, Recreation and Tourism Management, Clemson University, fall 1989.

The first step, market analysis, relied on existing data, reaching the conclusion that travel markets in this region could be grouped into three kinds: those interested in: (1) natural resource-based development; (2) cultural resource-based development; and (3) "pass-through." This suggested that it was appropriate to search for areas with the best natural and cultural resource bases, modified by locations of cities and transportation. Even future pass-through travel will depend a great deal on how well these two kinds of resources are developed for tourism.

The next step, study of tourism factors, relied on research into descriptive literature, maps, interviews with knowledgeable and renaissance of the region. Two sets of tourism factors were studied. The natural resource factors were: (1) water, wildlife; (2) vegetative cover, wildlife; (3) topography, soils, geology, and (4) existing natural resource development for tourism. The cultural resource
factors studied were (1) prehistoric, archeological sites, (2) historic sites (3) economic development, and (4) existing cultural resource development for tourism. For each set, the factors of transportation and cities were added. This step was directed toward two products—descriptive information on the distribution, quality and quantity of each factor, and a generalized map of each factor. For these maps, the zone of influence of each factor was broader than the literal area of the factor. Each map indicated four scales of quality/quantity: best, good, fair and poor (or none).

The following step converted these maps to the computer so that they could be aggregated to discover zones where the factors combine in strongest support for future tourism. The computer mapping was performed by the Regional Resources Development Institute of Clemson University. This employed the ARC/INFO software (trademark, Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc.). Data entry used Arc Digitizing software and the Arcedit module of ARC/INFO.

These factor maps were then weighted and aggregated by computer to illustrate areas where the most and the best factors are congruent. Figure 1 shows how the two sets of computer maps were aggregated. Computer data output produced two composite maps—sums of natural resource factors and sums of cultural resource factors. Again, this was displayed in four levels: best, good, fair and poor (or not at all).

Then, utilizing both these composite maps and the research notes, zones of tourism were generalized. Figure 2 illustrates the zones based on natural resources, and Figure 3 shows zones based on cultural resources. Figure 4 is an overlay of figures 2 and 3. This final step also included general concepts of tourism development that this process suggested would be appropriate.

This process produces basic development foundations based not on the opinions of developers or promotion, but on the reality of basic development factors. In other words, zones of the highest or lowest potential are defended by the fact of the several factors being present or absent. This approach is conceptual only, and provides the foundation for all three sectors to consider project feasibility.

Such an approach identifies those special places that need even further study. The zones of greatest potential need to be examined for expansion opportunities. They may already have reached their saturation of development. Second, the communities and rural areas within these zones need to co-operate on what further action they may wish to take. Third, each project that may be based on this analysis needs to be designed with resource protection, as well as development, in mind.

For example, there are many resource locations (natural and cultural) that would
be destroyed if overrun by visitors. However, designers could plan for further feasibility of individual projects. For example, by introducing new visitor centres, guided trails, overviews, displays and collection points, people might be given a satisfactory experience without degrading the environment. The Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge on the Texas Gulf Coast illustrates how this can be done. With judicious planning of drives, trails, overlook tower and interpretive centre, the annual number of visitors has increased from 37,000 to 52,000 over the last 20 years, as the endangered whooping crane increased from 42 to 146 in the same period (Schwindt, 1989). The environment has been improved, and more visitors have been served.

The delineation of these zones includes not only the location of resource potential, but also the nearby cities as service centers. This suggests that these communities need to co-operate on further planning for tourism. This process should show these communities how important the resources are to their future tourism expansion.

**Planning Considerations**

This review of half-truths and a process for discovering special places for tourism raises many planning issues. Can a phenomenon as complicated and comprehensive as tourism be planned? If the conclusion is yes, who should accept this responsibility? The following comments are put forward not to offer complete answers to these questions, but to stimulate planners to take greater interest in the field of tourism.

**Can Tourism be Planned?**

Relevant to special places and tourism is the question whether tourism can be planned. This question has been raised by experts and governments for many years. At a tourism seminar in Zagreb, Yugoslavia in 1972, Dr Kresa Car, deputy president, Republican Council of Tourism, asked: "Is planning necessary? Is planning possible? We don't know how to plan for tourism." In recent years, as destinations have proliferated and competition increased, more nations are concerned over how special places can be protected as tourism grows. This has given rise to the term "ecotourism," signifying a new market interested in natural resources and the needed supply-side development to meet this demand. A bibliography of ecotourism (Packard and Miller, 1990) lists over 200 references pertaining to this topic. Fennell and Eagles (1990) describe a framework for ecotourism relationships and an application to Costa Rica. These new trends of relating the environment to tourism raise the question of why planning did not consider these issues many years ago.

The very structure of tourism development in industrialized nations, with its
emphasizes on site planning, has militated against comprehensive planning of tourism. It is an error to say that no planning has taken place, but its focus has been on the site, not the region, state, or province. Hotel entrepreneurs have sought out lodging sites. Restauranters have chosen and planned sites for food services. Highway departments have selected alignments for new routes. Park agencies have selected and developed sites for resource protection and recreation. Historic societies have restored buildings and sites of significance in the past.

As the development of the separate parts of tourism took place, so did the establishment of a great many professional and trade organizations. Gee and Choy (1984) list over seventy private-sector associations related to travel. To this must be added the many non-profit organizations and bureaus and agencies of government that are active in specific roles regarding parts of tourism. Each one of these actors is naturally concerned with the internal success of its own constituents. But very little attention is paid to external relations.

This lack of co-ordination of the many players in tourism is understandable but it results in the disunity of tourism development across the land. There are few mechanisms available to take on the role of the traveler and foster communication between the many elements that, in fact, depend intimately upon one another. Any traveler can testify to the many difficulties encountered from the beginning of travel plans through carrying them out. The many pieces relate to one another more by accident than by intent.

Perhaps the greatest problem resulting from the disunity of tourism development is the impact on special places. Understanding functional linkage between special resource sites (historic, natural) and the other parts of tourism has been hampered by site-only concern on the part of the many actors and organizations. This lack of integration begs the question of who should plan tourism as a whole.

Who should plan tourism?
The idea of planning tourism has generally fallen outside the traditional professional and political arenas of planning. When most national, state and provincial tourism offices speak of tourism plans, they are dominantly marketing plans with a strong focus on selling.

In 1978 and again in 1980, the World Tourism Organization's surveys of tourism development plans revealed that most plans requested governmental funding for direct intervention into physical development and for marketing. (Inventory, 1978 and Report of Physical Planning, 1980). Soon thereafter, Baud-Bovy (1982) analyzed reasons why few plans were implemented. He found that the major causes of failure were lack of adaptability to changing conditions, land speculation, the great diversity and number of tourism action bodies, problems of land-use control, and lack of integration into political processes.

Observers and scholars have pointed out the deficiencies of conventional planning practices, and advocate strategic planning processes as being far more potent (Lang, 1986; Grant, 1989). Among the advantages of strategic planning, Lang points out that it is action-oriented, considers externalities, is proactive, values intuition and judgment, and is a continuing process. Certainly, if tourism is to be planned, it should follow processes with these attributes.

Unfortunately, there is no agency or organization that seems equipped to perform this role. If government does it, the private sector sees such action as regulation and unfair intervention. Generally, the private sector has not been interested in improving its success through an integrative role for tourism planning. This void in accepting planning responsibility opens the door for many scenarios, especially for professional planners. Perhaps the ideal approach is a joint public-private responsibility for "unofficial" planning, led by planners as catalysts rather than as elite experts, instead of formalizing a process and then attempting to implement it. There seems to be great need for informal steps first. In the U.S., many states now have joint annual conferences between the public and private sectors of tourism. A portion of the program is devoted to seminars and educational sessions. Several universities have extension programs that sponsor seminars, conferences and educational meetings. These often provide forums for cooperation that otherwise would never occur.

An example is the successful conflict resolution performed in Comal County by the Extension Service of Texas A&M University in cooperation with the National Park Service Cooperative Park Studies Unit (Watt, 1988). By means of almost two years of meetings between environmental advocates and tourism developers, these adversarial factions agreed upon constructive planning-action steps. Now, more visitors are being accommodated. Guadalupe riverbank erosion has been stopped, lawlessness and vandalism have almost disappeared, and conflict between visitors and riparian owners has been resolved. That special place—the Guadalupe River resource—has been rejuvenated and protected at the same time as tourism has increased.

Canada has been active in tourism planning for several years (Gunn, 1988). While it was centralized in the beginning, now most provinces and many communities are active in some form of planning tourism. For example, recognition of the role of natural and cultural special places in tourism was included in recommended policy actions in Alberta's Position and Policy Statement on Tourism (1985).

The suggestion here is that new planning mechanisms such as catalytic roles by planners need to be explored in order to integrate the separate actions by the great multiplicity of players in the overall tourism system.

Conclusions
The main conclusion from this discussion is that special places are absolutely essential to tourism. Instead of following a trend toward homogenizing attractions, communities can become more competitive by utilizing indigenous resources. Their special natural and cultural advantages can provide the foundation for tourism unequaled anywhere else.

It may be concluded also that planners need to exercise a stronger educational role. Communities and regions generally
lack expertise on the relationship between tourism and special places. Planners can foster conferences, workshops, and meetings, and perform a catalytic role in bringing the right actors together for proper tourism growth.

Urban planners have the opportunity to incorporate tourism considerations into their city plans. Because communities are focal to tourism economics, all urban plans should incorporate tourism interests. Critical to this is the intimate connection with surrounding small towns and rural areas. Needed is an integrated and strategic approach to planning.

Planners can increase their effectiveness in tourism and special places by using the latest techniques. Modern computer graphics offer a valuable tool for assessing resources and identifying zones of greatest tourism potential.

Finally, planners can take a much stronger proactive stand regarding better conservation and sustainable development. Intervention by planners as catalysts can take the heat off development versus resource protection arguments. Rational planning can accept expansion of tourism at the same time as resources and special places are given even greater protection.

References


Car, Kresa. Presentation at Tourism Seminar, "Techniques of Yugoslava."
Inventory of Tourist Development Plans. 1978 Madrid World Tourism Organization.
Schwindt, Kenneth. Director of Interpretation Aransas National Wildlife Refuge. Texas 1989 (Telephone communication).