TOURISM PLANNING FUNDAMENTALS

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is a powerful worldwide phenomenon and yet it is not well understood. Research study and observation reveal that most nations today are preoccupied with promotion, to the exclusion of other critical aspects, such as adequate planning of supply. There is need for recognition of the dynamic functioning system of tourism, driven by both market and supply sides. Markets are diverse and research is providing new insight into traveller characteristics. The supply side is made up of four components: attractions, services, transportation and information/promotion. All are in a dynamic balance, meaning that every part is related to every other part. Proper functioning, therefore, requires much greater co-operation for unified planning of the whole. Planning must be directed towards four additional goals as well as towards stimulating the economy: to increase visitor satisfaction, to protect resources, and to consolidate with overall community social and economic development.

Key words: Tourism; Planning; System; Goals; Markets; Supply

INTRODUCTION

Never before in the history of mankind have so many people travelled — and to so many places. Probably no other form of human activity can provide the same richness of experience. For many, it has become a human right and is therefore given their highest priority. As a result, tourism is a major form of economic development, cherished by those nations who now have it and sought by those who do not. Yet, so little is known about this phenomenon — tourism.

In historic terms, mass tourism came about so rapidly that development outpaced the understanding of it. Preoccupation with promotion has clouded
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significance. For manufactured goods, the consumer really does not care where the plant is located, whereas for tourism it means everything. The travel destination is anchored to all the physical and cultural characteristics of a place.

It is at places away from home that the true product, the personal experience, really takes place. This simple truth carries with it some important implications. It means that not all places are alike and therefore that they have different market and development opportunities for tourism. In fact, it may mean that several locations have little promise for tourism development because they are poorly endowed with the right resources. When market factors change for a manufactured product, the plant does not have to move. It can be retooled for new models or the distribution outlets can be shifted to better market areas. This is not so for tourism. Tourism products are more perishable because millions of dollars-worth of physical development is hard to move.

For tourism, a great many decision-makers are involved, more so than for any other kind of economic activity. To bring in a manufacturing plant only one corporate decision is needed, whereas tourism development can involve countless local and outside people in governmental agencies, businesses and even non-profit organisations. Tourism needs to be defined in very comprehensive terms so that the total functioning system can be made to run more smoothly. It is hotels and airlines but encompasses a great many other physical developments and services. It is satisfying visitor experiences but also has many economic implications. It can be very rewarding to hosts and guests but also may be stressful and even detrimental to both.

TOURISM AS A SYSTEM

A comprehensive study of tourism reveals that there is a fundamental functioning system. Unfortunately, nearly everyone involved in a part of tourism sees only his part – the system is not clear. Therefore, in most countries, the system is not functioning as well as it might. If the system were more clearly understood, there would be considerably more co-operation and collaboration, a lot more of what has become known as net-working – not because of altruism, but for self-protection and greater success.

A dynamic functioning system

The diagram below (Fig. 1) illustrates the functioning tourism system (Gunn, 1988a). This is not merely an “industry” diagram but encompasses much more than business enterprise. As with all economic development, there is a “demand” and a “supply” side.
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together make up the “pull” side of tourism because they offer the enticement and fulfilment for travel. Probably the most powerful component of the supply side is attraction which provides two main functions. They not only contain the inducements for travel (what to see and do) but also provide the all-important visitor satisfactions. Many attractions are natural resource-based. Waters are used for many forms of recreation; land relief for hiking, skiing and scenic viewing; forests for camping; and wildlife for photography and hunting. In recent years, cultural resources, such as archaeological digs, historic sites and native crafts and customs, provide the foundation for many new travel attractions. In some countries, especially the United States, large entertainment complexes, called theme parks and gaming centres, have become important attractions.

When attractions draw visitors, a need arises for many services. Volumes of travellers coming to a destination need lodging, food service, and travel supplies and products, such as camera film, health aids, clothing and souvenirs. Travellers spend the most money on services, making this component the largest economic generator. The very important component, transportation, has undergone great technological changes in recent decades. Certainly no tourism destination can operate successfully if adequate transportation does not offer access from markets. Especially important are the transportation linkages between attractions and services as well as within attractions. Finally, the supply side will not thrive without promotion and information. Promotion for tourism includes all four forms: advertising, publicity, public relations and incentives. The competitive tourism world today demands effective use of all forms. Probably the tourist’s greatest need today is better and more information. The lack of maps, guidebooks and descriptive literature remains a source of irritation to travellers. Good visitor and interpretation centres are growing in demand.

Interrelatedness of all parts

Thoughtful analysis of these components reveals many important applications. First of all, it is clear that in spite of the many separate decision-making groups in each component, every one is dependent upon every other one. This is a dynamic system. It is constantly changing and in need of co-ordinated planning. However, this principle is rarely understood. Hotels still believe that they are selling rooms. Airlines still believe they are selling seats. These are only half-truths. The important half missed is their relationship to and dependency upon the other components such as attractions, promotion and information. Full recognition of this principle (every part is dependent upon every other part) could revolutionise the entire field of tourism. It would lead to co-operation and collaboration on an unprecedented scale, hence greater preparedness for the future.
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better tourism functioning, the many growth decisions on location, market selection and mode of operation must be given some cohesion and unity. One environmental planner (Lang, 1986) warns that development is not mere growth but is a process of learning, adaptation, and purposeful change capable of releasing new potentials. He proposes: planning that involves those affected as well as the stakeholders, and interaction, including feedback, consultation, collaboration, and negotiation.

Need for a catalyst

Integrated planning cannot be forced. Although some new legislation may be needed to empower outreach by agencies, the greatest accomplishments will come from a self-interest desire to do so. When hoteliers see the advantage to them of co-operating with conservationists, historical preservationists and transportation agencies, they will do so. When resource preservationists see the public support that can come from tourist visits to national parks, they will become more active in tourism-related issues. This is what is now happening in the United States.

Only fourteen months ago, the first conference on tourism and national parks was held in the United States. Most of the presentations gave testimony to the many positive results from new co-operation between national parks and tourism in nearby communities. For example, the superintendent of a national historical monument in Colorado told how he is receiving new political, financial and volunteer help because he initiated greater support of tourism in nearby communities (Rollo, 1988). Protectionists and tourism developers are discovering the many gains that can accrue from co-operation rather than antagonism. There is no uniform source of a catalyst for regional tourism planning. It could come from the private sector, the public sector, a university or a professional organisation. The need is urgent for breaking the many barriers between the many parts of tourism in order to plan a better future together.

REVISED GOALS

Planning towards the singular goal of economics is clearly too narrow. Not only can many problems and issues arise but the very rewards from tourism may be disappointing. Instead, planning tourism from national to local level must have four goals.

Increased personal satisfaction

In the complexity of today's travel, the traveller needs a great deal of help,
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want it. Where planned to make smooth adaptation to a community’s structure and tradition, tourism can be a strong positive force and a valuable experience for host and guest.

Stimulating a better economy

This fourth goal is popularly stated but its implications are not fully understood. Although the greatest economic impact comes through the service businesses (hotels, restaurants, travel service, retail stores) these services alone do not stimulate more tourism. It is likely that in order to stimulate the economy from tourism, the greatest first need will be more and better attractions. Until people, back in their home origin, learn about the wonderful things they can see and do (business or pleasure) in a community, they will have no desire to come and no new economic impact will accrue from the service businesses. Restoration and interpretation of historic sites, improvement of parks and recreation areas, better entertainment and pageantry, and better trained hosts should be given high priority in development. Only after destinations have an increased market demand will more services be needed, which in turn will provide economic gain.

CONCLUSIONS

Tourism is a new and powerful activity. It needs far greater understanding, particularly of its complexity and diversity. Greater enlightenment can be stimulated by any catalyst, public or private. It requires commitment if plans for tourism development are to be implemented. Tourism is a system, made up of many parts within a demand and a supply side. How well supply matches demand sets the stage for change. Markets today are segmented, requiring a diversity of development such as attractions, transportation, services, promotion, information. Tourism can be a curse or a blessing, depending upon how well it is planned. The many problems of environmental, social and economic impact can be ameliorated and often avoided through planning.