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.

Needed is 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 traveler 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 cooperation for unified planning of the whole.

Planning must be directed toward four additional goals as well as to stimulate the economy: to increase visitor satisfactions, to protect resources, and to consolidate with overall community social and economic development.

KEY WORDS:

Tourism, planning, system, goals, markets, supply
Never before in the history of mankind have so many people traveled—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 therefore given their highest priority. As a result, tourism is now a major form of economic development, cherished by those nations who now have it and sought by those who do not. And yet, we know so little about this gigantic phenomenon—tourism.

In historic terms, mass tourism came upon us so rapidly that development outpaced our understanding of it. Our preoccupation with promotion has clouded our vision of the emerging consequences of tourism. Tourism has been touted as a "smokeless industry" implying that it has no environmental impact. It has been promoted as if it provided only economic gain and had no costs. And, the hawking of tourism has concealed the many social and cultural clashes resulting from this immense global wonder.

One must conclude that today we are tourism illiterate. We know a great deal about the many pieces of tourism but very little about the phenomenon as a whole. Until we move above our naive impressions of tourism and fully comprehend its complexity, tourism will increasingly disappoint both travelers and developers to say nothing of exacerbating social and environmental problems in destination areas. And so, our only hope is better planning.

TOURISM REDEFINED

A traditional and often denigrating view of a tourist is that of an uninhibited bumpkin on vacation, always dressed in flashy clothes, with a tape recorder and camera hanging from his neck. But, experience and market analysis are teaching us much more about tourists.
Tourism Includes Total Travel

Vacation travel continues to be important but is no longer dominated by vulgar intruders. Travelers today are very diverse. The typical travel unit once was a man and wife and two children. To this has been added the single parent and child, the retired singles and couples, groups of students traveling together, the sports spectator and the business person. More and more travel is being done for health, fitness and recreation. In recent years, there has been a great increase in what might be called intellectual travel—learning about history, crafts, arts, and music of other lands. More frequently today, a spouse accompanies the business person and additional time is planned for cultural tours, entertainment and special events. It is no exaggeration to say that travel has become extremely diversified. Tourism is now defined in terms of total travel, not just for pleasure.

Tourism, Unlike Industrial Development

Past methods used to promote industry just are not working because tourism is more complicated and different from industrial development. For tourism, markets are distributed to products, not the other way round as for manufactured goods. This important difference in the relationship between markets and products means that tourism destination places have great significance. For manufactured goods, the consumer really does not care where the plant is located; 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 have different market and development opportunities for tourism. In fact, it may mean also 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. But, 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 nonprofit organizations.

And so, 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.

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. I submit that if the system were more clearly understood, there would be a lot more cooperation and collaboration, a lot more of what has become known as networking--not because of altruism, but for self-protection and greater success.
A Dynamic Functioning System

For teaching purposes, I have found it useful to diagram the functioning tourism system as illustrated in Fig. 1 (Gunn, 1988a). This is not merely an "industry" diagram—it encompasses much more than business enterprise.

Just as with all economic development, there is a "demand" and a "supply" side.

The demand side is made up of the market population—actually many market segments. This is often called the "push" side of tourism. As more people have the desire and obtain the means, they push on toward destinations. The more we learn about the markets—where they are located, how far they generally travel, what they like—the better we are able to plan for them. Unfortunately, we do not have the best information about them because they are not organized—we have to make special studies of market segments. One study of visitors to a national historic park identified six different market segments (Mills & Wegner, 1986).

If we turn to the supply side, we see that there are four important components. These together make up the "pull" side of tourism because they offer the enticement and fulfillment for travel.

Probably the most powerful component of the supply side is attractions. Attractions provide two main functions. They not only contain the inducements for travel—the things to see and do—they 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 archeological 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 centers, have become important attractions. When attractions draw visitors, a need arises for many services. Volumes of travelers coming to a destination need lodging, food service, and travel supplies and products, such as camera film, health aids, clothing, and souvenirs. Travelers 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 travelers. Good visitor and interpretation centers are growing in demand.

All Parts are Interrelated

Thoughtful analysis of these components reveals many important implications. 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 coordinated planning.

However, my work with tourism regularly reminds me of how little this principle is 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—that every part is dependent upon every other part—could revolutionize the entire field of tourism. We would see cooperation and collaboration on an unprecedented scale.

And, we would be much better prepared for our future.

System Influenced by Outside Factors

The functional system just described does not operate in a vacuum. It is influenced by several external factors as illustrated in Fig. 2—factors that must be taken into account if tourism development is desired (Gunn, 1988a).

* Natural resources—The number and quality of natural resources influences attraction development: water, wildlife, forests, topography, climate.

* Cultural resources—Tourist development depends on historic and archeological sites as attractions.

* Entrepreneurship—The availability of business developers, managers can greatly influence tourism growth.

* Finance—Public and private investment sources are critical to all components of the tourism system.

* Workers—All parts of the system are influenced by the diversity and availability of competent workers.

* Competition—The extent of competition for the same markets can influence tourism success.

* Community acceptance—Communities must accept and thoroughly support tourism if it is to succeed.

* Governmental policies—Regulations and policies at all levels must stimulate, not hinder, tourism development.
Organization and management—Better coordination of tourism organizations and management is needed for best functioning of the tourism system.

Integrative Planning

The very structure of tourism includes countless agencies, organizations and businesses, each going its own way. If planning is to succeed in fostering 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: (1) planning that involves those affected as well as the stakeholders, and (2) interaction, including feedback, consultation, collaboration, and negotiation.

Needed, 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 cooperating 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 just now happening in the United States.

Only four 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 cooperation 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 cooperation 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 organization. No matter, the need is urgent for breaking the many barriers between the many parts of tourism in order to plan a better future together.

GOALS, REVISED

It is now clear that planning toward the singular goal of economics is too narrow. Not only can many problems and issues arise but the very rewards from tourism may be disappointing. Instead, planning of tourism--national to local--must have four goals.

Increased Personal Satisfactions

In the complexity of today's travel, the traveler needs a great deal of help, especially for two major aspects of his travel--mechanics and rewards. First, the mechanics of travel, such as transportation, border customs, hotel and food selection, and personal health and safety of the traveler nowadays require a multitude of arrangements. Those responsible for planning tourism need to understand the traveler's perspective and make sure all arrangements are feasible and will be honored by the many actors. Second, the experience must be rewarding. Exaggerated promotion, poor quality attractions, poor interpretation programs, rote presentations by tour guides, lack of preparation for bad weather conditions, and lack of understanding the desires and habits of the several market segments can
deny the traveler the experience anticipated. All planning of tourism must incorporate the tourist's desires, habits, wishes and needs.

Protection of Resources

Too often omitted in the past has been the recognition of linkage between resource protection and tourism. Greater political support for public policies of land resource protection can usually be derived from greater public use of conserved areas. The greater the number of areas of natural and cultural resource protection, the more that people can be enriched by travel to them.

National parks and preserves are of particular interest. The linkage between the urban services needed by tourists and visits to national parks is not well understood. By planning the major tourist services of food, lodging, car service, banking, travel arrangements in a nearby service community, the resources of a park can be protected (Gunn, 1988b). More complete visitor and interpretative centers with exhibits, presentations, lectures, literature and demonstrations can satisfy major market needs without eroding rare resources.

Integration Into Community

Frequently, the promotion of tourism by one sector has been thwarted by another. In order for tourism to function properly, there must be total community accord and commitment. All public and private organizations and particularly the local residents must be prepared for tourism.

Community preparedness includes many public and private decisions. Decisions must be made on how masses of tourists can be moved from highway interchanges, airports and harbors to their destinations. Is the capacity of public services of water supply, waste disposal, police and fire protection sufficient for tourism growth? Will residential neighborhoods
be able to retain their privacy? What changes in taxation and policies on public expenditure will be required? And, private sector decisions will need to be made in order to accept more visitors.

Tourism should not be forced onto a community that does not 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.

Stimulate 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 insight particularly of its complexity and diversity. Greater enlightenment can be stimulated by any catalyst, public or private. But, 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—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.
REFERENCES


