AN APPROACH TO REGIONAL ASSESSMENT
OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a concept for assessing the potential of a region for development of tourism and its application. It contains brief essentials of the concept, such as the basic assumptions, the factors needing research in a region and a model of a region's elements for development and their location.

Application is made in a 20-county region of Texas. Steps include weighting of physical development factors, computer mapping and developing overall conclusions on both physical and program factors. It demonstrates how areas of highest development potential can be assessed.
INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world, and especially in the United States, it is the component of promotion that receives the greatest emphasis within the field of tourism. Comparatively little attention is given to the development of the tourism "product"—satisfying experiences based upon things to see and do at the most productive locations. With increased environmentalism, increased costs and increased complication of individual site development, it is becoming evident that a broader regional approach is needed in the coming decade.

The concept described here is that of determining geographical zones that, because of the strength of certain locational and organizational factors, have greatest potential for future development. An example of its application in Texas may demonstrate principles applicable elsewhere in the world.

THE CONCEPT

This concept is based upon the following sequence of assumptions or premises:

1. Tourism development is most frequently promoted because of its economic impact, derived through service businesses and facilities.
2. These service businesses depend upon flows of tourists who seek things to see and do—attractions, such as parks, recreation areas, commercial attractions and events.
3. Attractions, while they have components of imagery and perception, are primarily physical land developments.
4. Attractions and many other important tourism developments depend, in varying degrees, upon both physical and program factors.
5. When these factors are well known and identified with locations, better assessment of future policy decisions can be made at the site scale.

In other words, this concept goes beyond the popular belief that all land has equal potential for tourism development if promoted heavily enough. While promotion is an essential and well-exercised factor of contemporary tourism, other elements, such as the foundations of things to be developed and promoted, accessibility and location of prime service centers are equally important. Long ago in the field of agriculture it was learned that land is not homogeneous. Certain lands have much greater strength of factors in the support of potential tourism than others. The concept, providing information on a regional scale, assists both private enterprise and governmental land use agencies by providing basic guilelines within which they can more logically make site selection and development decisions.

The following physical factors were derived from examining the range of tourist activities generally and the extent to which their development depends upon physical conditions:

1. water, waterlife
2. vegetative cover, wildlife, pests
3. climate, atmosphere
4. topography, soils, geology
5. history, ethnicity, archeology, legends
6. esthetics
7. institutions, industries, attractions
8. service centers
9. transportation and access
To these must be added program factors, such as the following:

1. markets, promotion
2. information, direction
3. socio-environmental
4. implementing agents

Another element of this concept is recognition of the difference between touring and destination tourism. Touring tourism development need not withstand repetitive use by the same users, time after time. Visiting historic sites, natural resource attractions and enjoying roadside scenery are examples of touring tourism. For destination tourism, however, development requires a set of activities at attractions that are repetitive and more limited to a localized vicinity. For example, conventioneering, resorting, vacation home use and organization camping require slightly different attraction development and foundation factors. Figure 1 illustrates the concept of identifying zones suited to touring and destination tourism development. The white areas of this diagram are those portions of the region containing highest potential, especially for attraction development. These areas, in turn, are in a logically accessible relationship to a community that has best potential for clustering most service businesses related to travel. These service centers are also well related to major transportation corridors.

APPLICATION

A region of 20 counties in south-central Texas was arbitrarily selected for application of this concept. The boundaries, primary cities, counties and main highways are illustrated in Figure 2.
The first step consisted of research of the region's physical factors. By means of study of documents, reconnaissance of the region and interviews with experts, both narrative statements and maps were produced. Special mapping procedures were used to lay the foundations for the zones with greatest potential.

Tables 1 and 2 indicate a separate weight, or "index", given to each physical factor, based on the assumption that these factors are not of equal weight in support of either touring or destination tourism development. These weights were developed by a panel of experts. Obviously, this is a subjective evaluation but is based not upon whim or local pride but upon documentation of facts about each factor. For mapping purposes, each index was divided into five levels of potential support, from "strong" to "weak." The resulting number values could then be used in preparation of a hand-drawn map for each factor. Figure 3 illustrates a hand-drawn map for the factor of "water-waterlife" for touring tourism.

The several hand-drawn maps were then translated into computer maps so that they could be aggregated. Wherever the totals were the largest, the strength of support of tourism development would be strongest. By using a computer map grid for the SYMAP (Dudnik: 1971) program, each cell for the scale of map used represented 6.25 square miles. Figure 4 is a computer printout of the same map as Figure 3.

As the computer maps were aggregated, it was not necessary to produce printouts at the various stages. However, this is possible and examples are shown in Figures 5 and 6. These represent aggregations of three physical factors and all natural resource factors, respectively. The main advantage of the computer is that these values can be stored in order to produce totals.
To graphically illustrate these totals, the maximum score is divided into ten levels, printed out as symbols; the dark to light illustrating high to low scores. For ease in identifying the potential, these ten symbols were graphically regrouped into five, showing areas where the combined factors were "strong" to "weak," as illustrated in Figures 7 and 8.

Study of both the research information about all factors and the results of the computer mapping provided locational conclusions about what kinds of development had potential and where such development most logically could take place. This final assessment is illustrated in Figures 9 and 10. Graphically, four main elements are illustrated: zones with highest potential; locations with high potential for future attraction complexes; key community service centers and transportation and access.

Touring Tourism

In Figure 9 are indicated the potential touring tourism developments that could take place because of the assessment resulting from this concept. The main foundations were historic sites and artifacts and natural resource assets. In many instances, no development had yet been made at historic points of interest with the potential of large and very meaningful complexes. Developing museums, restoring buildings, adding pageantry nearby, and identifying historic sites and buildings, could offer opportunities for loop walking or drive trails and holding special events in squares, malls or parks. Interesting land features, such as reservoirs, rivers, isolated forests, beaches and coastal resources provide many opportunities for touring tourism activity development.
Wherever there appeared to be a grouping of these attraction complex potentials around a service center and near a circulation corridor, a zone was identified. This is merely a generalized area in which a number of complexes could be developed and served by the same service center and access.

Because of the importance of the travel ways for touring, all transportation corridors, when finally selected, would need to be studied and possibly redesigned to fulfill tourism functions. This might require very little redevelopment—perhaps only some signage and improved information—direction material. On the other hand, major cleanup, scenic easements, new highway design, expanded service center functions (toilet facilities at rest stops), new landscape plantings and the installation of certain constraints against public trespass along the way may need to be initiated. For air travelers, new linkages with ground tour corridors may need to be created.

Although this provides ideas and impetus for new tourism development, further refinement would be necessary. For example, the developers of the several tours could conceive of another stratification—that by topical interest of the tourist. The basic routings could remain the same but a "heritage" tour might make stops at different attractions complexes than an "industrial plant" tour or a "scenic" tour.

Service centers were chosen on the basis of their own existing service capability, their potential for expanded service, their proximity to potential attraction complexes and the accessibility.
Destination Tourism

For destination tourism, shown in Figure 10, this region has good highway access and some air access to existing and potential markets. The following five destination zones contain cohesive resource foundations lending themselves to considerable future tourism development.

Zone A contains potential for vacation home complexes, resorts, dude ranches, organization camps, water sports areas, conference centers and major sports arenas. The hills, lakes, topography, history and state capital combine to provide strong foundations. By increasing the things to see and do, linkages with expanded markets could be made. Research of socio-environmental factors showed that a few counties in this zone were concerned about social impacts of tourist growth.

Zone B, a coastal area, has great potential because the resource assets have not yet been developed to a very large extent. Increased development to utilize the birdlife, waterlife, waterfront forces, biological production in the estuaries and geological formation of barrier islands has many possibilities. Large nature interpretive complexes could provide an important tourist function, leaving extensive areas in protected zones for preservation of natural ecosystems. Other potential lies in the festivals, pageants, historic restoration and interpretation of the coast.

Linkages with outside markets are not strong. Special design care must be exercised to prevent erosion of the esthetic resource assets as better access is provided. Service centers are not yet fully developed for tourism but have this potential.
Zone C is well suited to inland Texas tourism development, such as for dude ranches, resorts and special development around the German and Czech themes. Market sources are generally available, accessible over good highways and the service centers are beginning to orient themselves toward tourist development.

Zone D is a coastal plains destination area with the city of Victoria and the Guadalupe and Lavaca Rivers are prime assets. Opportunities for camping, vacation home, water recreation and conference activities can be found here. The countryside is picturesque and the outside markets would find it a zone much more interesting and appealing than the typical Texas image.

Zone E, although relatively small, does have potential centered on the natural resource assets of river valleys. Camping and vacation home complexes could offer interesting vacations for many and are readily accessible from markets.

Program Concepts

Although not lending themselves as well to mapping, the research of program factors led to conclusions important to development potential. Study limitations did not allow adequate depth of local citizen input. Certainly, any regional assessment must have great input from local citizens, governments, developers and potential investors.

One conclusion centered on the need for greater education on the several facts of tourism development. Some of the prime businesses oriented to tourism were aware of its impact but tourism does not now enjoy a high level of understanding within the region. For example, it is not well known that in these counties there is now an economic impact annually of $307,692,700, employment of 2,000 people and returns to local taxes of $3,116,800. (The Impact: 1978)
Both nearby and distant markets might be cultivated but only following coordinated development-promotion-information programs. This is not now available for these zones. Special market interests could be emphasized: spring and fall offer idyllic vacation settings. Careful market studies of the special opportunities within this region could be of value.

Improved information and communication offer other opportunities. Even existing attractions and services are not well communicated to the visiting public. It is not easy for the visitor to learn about points of interest, travel ways, accommodations and specialty shops.

If the concepts of physical development are to be realized, it is clear that stronger organization to stimulate development is needed. In several instances, industrial development is promoted but no comparable programs for tourist development can be found.

Linkage needs to be established between the many forces fostering resource protection and restoration and the developers of tourism. While there is a functional spinoff from such programs as historic restoration, there is no organized linkage with the programs of inviting and providing services to visitors.

The physical development of tourism could be enhanced if greater coordination of decision-making could be accomplished between the several state agencies that impact on tourism. Without creating new and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures, there is merit in each agency input to the other on tourism matters.

Another important level of communication and decision-making is that between counties. Perhaps through leadership and catalytic action of the councils of government, the several counties of the region can bring the several opportunities into alignment and implementation.
Finally, linkage between public policy on park and recreation programs and decisions on commercial development of tourism is a great opportunity for improved tourism. One major new policy of all public agencies could be to stimulate innovative and environmentally sensitive development by the private sector. Closer collaboration and cooperation between the public and the private sectors shows promise of improved location selection, improved service to visitors and improved protection of the many resource assets of the region.

CONCLUSIONS

This concept is directed toward increasing the ability of regions to make early assessments of their tourism development opportunities. At a time when some lands show signs of overdevelopment and others underdevelopment, evaluations of opportunity could be of great value. This concept is not intended to shortcut or diminish important decisions be entrepreneurs. It does not include individual project feasibilities. It suggests that rather than the present haphazard approach to land use, study of basic foundation factors for tourism can provide more sophisticated guidelines. Without such guidelines, overemphasis on promotion can overshadow the critical importance of the development of the tourism product. As new research of assessment techniques takes place, better policies and decisions on land development for tourism can be accomplished. Perhaps new approaches to development can guide tourism into growth patterns that can be more socially, more economically, and more environmentally acceptable.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Gunn, Clare A. *Vacationscape: Designing Tourist Regions*. Bureau of Business Research, University of Texas, Austin. (1972)


NOTE:

The concept described here and the illustrations are from the forthcoming book, *TOURISM PLANNING* by Clare A. Gunn, published by Crane, Russak, Inc., New York, N.Y.
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Figure 1. Touring and Destination Tourism

Diagrams showing tourist and destination type zones for overall tourism.

Legend:
- Transportation
- Service Centres
- Attraction Complexes
of tourism development potential.
In this experiment, the assessment
of the 20-county region of Texas used

Figure 2: The Study Region

*Gulf of Mexico*
A map translating Figure 3 into SYMAP

Map of the location of one physical

Figure 3. "WATER AND WATERSHED ZONES AND INDEX"
begin to take on importance. Both upper and lower portions of the region
471tion of all natural resource factors.
A SYMAP computer printout showing average

development. Intensity of support for tourism
1 factors and the resultant range in aggregation of three physical resource
Figures 6. "Touring Resources--All Natural Resource

Figure 5. "Touring Resources--Three Factors

Legend:
Good
Moderate
Fair
Meak