CONCEPTS AND PRINCIPLES OF REGIONAL TOURISM

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When a wheel thinks it's a car, it is in trouble and will get nowhere. When individual tourist businesses, such as hotels, think they are tourism, they are in trouble and may not be able to provide the services they are designed to provide. The purpose of my presentation today is to look beyond the site scale. There is no greater challenge today for all tourism and recreation Extension specialists than that at the regional scale.

DOMINANCE OF THE SITE SCALE

It has been very logical for us to have concentrated tourism concern at the site scale. After all, tourism needs hotels, motels, restaurants, marinas, highways and many other site-specific developments. For those of you old enough to remember, we have made great progress over the last 30 years, particularly at the site scale. We have better overnight accommodations, better food service, better transportation, and better site-specific kinds of services and products for our travel pleasure than ever before in history. Improved technology has made a great difference. For our overnight accommodations, we now can make instantaneous computer reservations for any destination. We benefit from instantaneous engineering control of heat or air conditioning in our motel rooms. During my early years of tourist and resort Extension work in northern Michigan, it was mighty uncomfortable on a winter's night, to light wood stoves or doubtful oil burners in poorly
constructed cabins. Our automobiles benefit from comforts and conveniences unknown to those of us who made our travels in Model T or Model A Fords. The technology of earth movement, site development and building construction is a far cry from what we used only a few decades ago. There is no doubt that we are better off in many ways than we have ever been.

At the same time, I find many deficiencies emerging in tourism--deficiencies of a larger scale, deficiencies that increasingly have tremendous impact on the individual site involved in tourism. Let me explain.

I find that individual businesses, with few exceptions, know very little about their markets and therefore are vulnerable to drastic market changes at the regional scale. Many tourist businesses have little knowledge of the information and directional system that helps visitors learn about them and find them. Most tourist businesses have no idea regarding the causes or attracting forces that bring people to their locations. Most tourist businesses falsely assume that everyone else in their community fully understands tourism, its meaning to the community and their role in it. Most governmental agencies that impinge upon tourism, and there are many, have little linkage with tourism enterprises in most states and therefore continue to develop land use, taxation, regulation and other policies that either ignore or are detrimental to tourism. And, our promotional agencies in most states are so preoccupied with advertising that they fail to recognize the geographical differences between areas. As a consequence, all areas are led to believe that the gold at the end of the tourism rainbow is within their easy reach, regardless of their potential. It appears that we have been running so fast to develop tourism at the site scale, we have not had the time, the talent nor the interest to look up and beyond the site scale to see what tourism
is all about. Then, when something like gasoline constraint comes along, we go into shock because there is no mechanism available to respond to the many ramifications of such an event.

The time is right and the opportunities are great for Extension to move in with leadership and expertise at the larger-than-site scale. I see no other organization as capable of performing this role.

**SOME FUNDAMENTALS**

Before I describe a concept that I believe has some merit at the regional scale, I would like to review some tourism fundamentals.

First of all, there is need for greater collaboration between the fields of tourism, recreation and conservation. At present, the expertise and leadership of each tend to remain separate and even at times become antagonistic toward one another. Actually, they overlap so greatly that neither ideology could survive without the other.

Recreation, in the many forms from passive vista-viewing and landscape contemplation to boating, swimming and mountain-climbing, is the objective of most tourism. Participation in much of recreation takes place at locations away from home and therefore requires travel and the purchase of goods and services, such as food, gasoline and lodging--important elements of tourism. And, the very foundation of much of tourism and recreation depends upon identifying, restoring and protecting the natural and cultural environment--goals of conservation.

This is more clearly understood when one reviews the components and many interrelationships within the functional tourism system, as diagrammed in Figure 1. While this oversimplifies a very complicated system, it provides insight into the system and the major components needing attention.
A very fundamental relationship is between people and attractions. Attractions provide the pulling power for travel and also the provision of satisfaction to visitors. Most of the attractions in this country are owned and managed by governmental and non-profit organizations whose primary purposes are not tourism or recreation oriented. Looking to the future, one can well understand that trends in behavior and society as a whole will have great impact upon what can be and should be developed as attractions.

Highly dependent upon attractions are the many services and facilities, made up mostly of commercial enterprise. Some services and facilities are needed at the attraction sites but most thrive best at service communities where they can obtain other than tourist business. While the greatest economic return comes from those businesses, they depend upon markets seeking attractions.

Of course, all transportation modes are important for travel; both to destinations as well as within attraction complexes. Unfortunately for tourism, most of these modes are engineered and managed primarily for each mode rather than an integrated visitor travel flow. Few travel systems are integrated with either the service businesses or with the attractions.

Finally, the many ways in which people are informed and directed regarding their travels are important to the tourism system. Most states have mandated stronger advertising than informational roles to their tourism agencies. Anyone who has traveled very much realizes the many gaps in understanding what is available in any locale and how one can reach the attractions, accommodations and other services. The increase in package tours is evidence of the desire by tourists to be relieved of many of the arrangements because they are increasingly complicated.

This is an extremely dynamic and delicately balanced system subject to great change from many sources. But, it is also a system that has no
guidance. It has been left to drift on its own. The energy issue now demonstrates need for concern over the interrelationships of the many parts of the system. Dr. Douglas Frechtling, director of the U.S. Travel Data Center has estimated that the proposed government plan for closing gasoline stations on weekends would cost the travel industry $13 billion in sales and 421 thousand jobs. (Travel Printout: 1979)

Another fundamental concerns the grouping of attractions and the clustering of businesses related to tourism. At one time, competition suggested that establishments should intentionally separate themselves geographically. Experience has demonstrated otherwise. Motels and restaurants are now clustering as never before on the theory that it is better to be located in an area where the market thinks about these services. The isolated attraction, unless as huge as Walt Disney World (even that is a cluster) has great difficulty to succeed. But, many entrepreneurs are not aware of this fundamental. For example, a survey of users, performed by Dr. John Crompton at Texas A&M University showed that the two major attractions of Arlington, Texas--Six Flags Over Texas and the Arlington Stadium (home of the Texas Rangers Baseball Club)--are highly compatible. Yet, neither firm was aware of this and no joint marketing or concern over transportation and services is taking place. (Crompton: 1979)

A basic fundamental, important at the regional scale is the difference between the resource and development required for touring as compared to destination tourism. Those who are traveling through make one contact at each attraction location whereas those vacationing at destination areas require attractions that can be repeated many times.
A REGIONAL PROJECT

In recent years I have become convinced that much progress could be made in alleviating tourism development confusion and fragmentation by making regional assessment of potential. The remainder of this presentation concerns the process that Extension might use and an example of its application in Texas.

The overall objective of such as assessment would be to find those locations that have the greatest promise, provided that there is local interest and ability to develop for tourism. In identifying such areas, or zones, it is then easier to know where new investment could be most productive and where tourism impacts can be planned.

Figure 2 illustrates this concept. For both touring and destination tourism, those areas most suited to tourism development (because of research study) are roughly defined. This does not describe specific projects at attractions nor their financial feasibility. It provides foundations for such studies. Not long ago we experimented with this concept in Ontario and several zones are now carrying out local assessments of potential. (Tourism Development: 1976)

The process that a state or portion of a state could follow in developing a regional assessment of potential would be as follows:

1. Setting objectives
2. Research
3. Synthesis and Conclusions
4. Concepts for development
5. Recommendations

In order to make an assessment of potential it is important to investigate those factors that seem to be most important to future development.
Past study has shown that these factors can be grouped into two categories. Program factors are those that deal with policy, organization and social action:

1. Markets, promotion
2. Information, direction
3. Socio-environmental
4. Implementing agents

Physical factors include the foundations upon which future potential depends:

1. Water, waterlife
2. Vegetative cover, wildlife, pests
3. Climate, atmosphere
4. Topography, soils, geology
5. History, ethnicity archeology, legends
6. Esthetics
7. Existing institutions, attractions
8. Service centers
9. Transportation, access

Recently, we experimented with portions of this concept in a 20-county region of south central Texas (Figure 3). This is not a geographic or economic region but was large enough to demonstrate the principles of the concept.

Our research of both program and physical factors included reconnaissance of the region, study of documents, and interviews within the region. From this, both narrative statements and maps of physical factors were produced. Of special interest is the mapping procedure using the computer.

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 tourism development. Nor are they the same for touring
and destination development. These weights were developed by a panel. 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.

The several hand-drawn maps were then translated into computer maps so that they could be aggregated. Aggregated maps for touring tourism potential and destination tourism potential are shown in Figures 3 and 4 respectively. 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.

Study of both the research information about all factors and the results of 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 5 and 6. Graphically, four main elements are illustrated: zones with highest potential (white areas); locations with high potential for future attraction complexes (stars); key community service centers (dots) and transportation and access (arrows and dash lines).

CONCLUSIONS

This concept and application are shown only to stimulate interest among Extension specialists to direct their attention to the larger-than-site scale. By using such a concept, or any other similar approach, I believe that several things could be accomplished:
*Serve as a medium to bring many of the actors together;
*Dramatize the uniqueness and diversity of land resources;
*Assist local areas in their future plans;
*Raise many questions about government land development policy;
*Raise many questions about land use policy;
*Establish a foundation for individual development feasibilities.

In my opinion, Extension has a much greater commitment to recreation and tourism than ever before and it has many more staff dedicated to this subject matter. Therefore, a major challenge to Extension is to provide a state-wide catalytic role in bringing the state's developers, governmental agencies and planners together to attack the statewide development problems. By so doing, I am convinced that three goals could be accomplished: (a) Improve the satisfactions to users by encouraging the provision of what is promised by advertising and promotion. Satisfaction is measured by the users and not by an outside elite. (b) Improve the business success of private enterprise, primarily through removal of government constraint and the fostering of innovation, competition and diversity. (c) Better environmental protection by awareness of resources needed for tourism and the need for extending their utility for a long time.

Finally, I believe that a healthy discontent on your part at the regional scale can stimulate you to work toward new state and national policy, toward a better world of tourism and recreation.


