IDENTITY--A MAJOR TOURISM ISSUE IN TEXAS

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As the Texas Chapter of the Travel Research Association begins to flex its wings as a fledgling organization, it faces many challenges. As it begins to set directions for its objectives, it recognizes, I am sure, the wisdom of building upon the fine work already accomplished by several agencies, organizations and private interests in Texas. There is ample evidence of fine construction of accommodations and eating places, of excellent transportation, of interesting places to see and do things, and of several organizations that do well to promote and advertise the state as a tourist destination.

In a sense, then, we could say that all is well with Texas, tourism-wise. As I see the good work being done by these several components of tourism and recognize the support now being given by some legislators, I am inclined to agree.

However, suppose we had as serious a threat to tourism in Texas as that which happened at the federal level when our national energy policy was being formulated. Tourism was declared as "non-essential." Suppose in a few months the Texas legislature determined that tourism and recreation in Texas were "non-essential" and therefore imposed severe restrictions on all tourism activity and development.

I think we could expect some loud screaming from some of our state leaders in tourism, some of whom are sitting in this very room. I am confident that their arguments would be forcefully and exhaustively presented.

Even so, I believe there would be two major weaknesses exposed—exposed to the embarrassment of those of us who thought we had the answers. These weaknesses would tend to dilute the rhetoric and persuasive arguments presented. One weakness is the lack of adequate facts about tourism in Texas and the other is the lack of identity. In fact, the lack of identity may well stem from the lack of enough facts available to our leaders in order for them to make the kinds of judgements needed to be effective.

These comments are by way of introduction to my next discussion about ways in which I believe that we could improve our identity of tourism in Texas. But, first, I would like to put forth some conclusions that I believe all of us could agree upon. Then, I would like to raise some questions—questions that need research for answers to this pervading question of identity of tourism in Texas. Let's see if we can agree upon some fundamentals. I have just seven I would like to present at this time.

1. The economic impact of tourism derives primarily from the tourist service businesses. I believe that no one disagrees with this statement. The first moneys to pour into a community come through the doors of the motels, restaurants, entertainment and other places of business. As you know, in Texas 24 percent of the tourist dollar is spent for food, 23 percent for automobile travel, 22 percent for lodging, 12 percent for entertainment and a remainder of 19 percent for other retail and service items. (Texas Visitor
2. Of major impact upon an area are the benefits of employment and taxes derived from these business activities. In this country we believe in jobs as the backbone of the economy. Furthermore, taxes provide a means for government to provide many services for the public including many for tourism. The Texas Highway Department reports that in 1974, of the $4.8 billion received in Texas by the tourist industry, $428 m. were received in the form of state taxes. (Texas Visitor Industry, 1974, 3)

3. Service businesses, in turn, depend upon volumes of customers for success. In other words, these benefits of employment and taxes, would not happen if it were not for volumes of visitors to and within Texas. One major factor contributing to volumes of visitors is that of location of attractions.

4. These visitors are of two types: those who have destinations within Texas and those that are reached by passing through Texas. It is the things to see and do that lure people to travel to and through Texas.

5. Visitors get to these attractions only by means of some transportation. The main modes in Texas are by air travel and by automobile transportation on highways.

6. Visitors obtain pre-images of Texas by means of information. A variety of sources, including advertising and word-of-mouth, provide the visitor with information about the state's resources for tourist travel.

7. Visitors depend upon guidance to find their places of destination. Guidebooks, travel literature and signs lead the way for finding their way about in Texas.

I do not sense that there is much argument about the truth of these statements. They are rather obvious and elementary especially to those who work with tourism daily. But, logical as they may seem to many of us, have we really stopped to examine their full meaning and to study fully their implications? In the face of increased competition for tax dollars from many other legitimate sources, how good are our facts about these statements, particularly as they demonstrate the identity of a strong and vital tourism industry in Texas?

I would like to avoid attempting to make a complete laundry list of important topics for research that we might work on in the immediate future. Initially, let me name just five for purposes of discussion.

1. Do we have research in Texas that shows the dependency of the accommodation enterprises upon the attractions of Texas? Do we know why we have so many opportunities for providing motel, hotel and recreation vehicle overnight stays in Texas? Do we know the spatial relationship between the accommodations and the attractions? Do we know who owns and runs these attractions—public and private—and how likely they are to continue and to succeed? If we depend upon attractions in Mexico for our transient business, do we know what these attractions are and who sets their policies?

I have a hunch that the average service station, restaurant or motel operator has little knowledge of his visitors' tourist destinations—the very reasons for their being his customers. More important than this, does he have a role in assuring their success, whether a government, non-profit or commercial enterprise? Perhaps obtaining the specific relationships between segments of the accommodations and the attractions components of the industry is an area worthy of study if we are to gain identity for the tourism industry.

2. Do we have research in Texas that shows the interdependency between public and private investment and development? Do we know the extent to which private enterprise—that segment of business that provides the economic impact—
depends upon the many public establishments? The Corps of Engineers with their recreation reservoirs, the State Parks and Wildlife Department with their park and recreation areas, the River authorities with their recreation and camping areas, the State Highway Department with their highways, rest stops, boat ramps, the State Historical Commission and its historic sites across the state certainly must play an important role in giving private business the opportunity of doing business. But, do we know this? Can we prove it? Could we prove, for example, that the closing of all state parks in Texas would not only deprive local communities of the benefits from the employees working in the parks but may well cost the jobs of thousands of others in service stations, motels and restaurants who cater to park-bound travelers? Perhaps the study of public-private interdependencies is important if we are to gain identity for the tourism industry in Texas.

3. Do we have research in Texas that identifies land areas that are ecologically fragile or strong in support of further development for tourism? The general impression is that anyone anywhere in Texas has an equal chance of success in developing tourism. Personally, I do not believe in this anymore than I believe that every place has an equal chance of succeeding in the cattle or the citrus business. But, do we have research that shows certain especially sensitive ecological areas that would not withstand tourist pressure? Only then should we insist upon closing them off to tourists—not merely on an emotional basis or because we do not like tourists. It was during the preparation of Destination USA for the National Tourism Resources Review Commission that Dr. Stanley Cain made two very important points:

1) The industry generally has a very limited and inadequate concept of its resources, using "resources" to include all the values that motivate this kind of travel; and 2) the industry generally scores low on environmental protection. (Cain:1973, 2)

If we are to get the greatest return from tight money in investments in new attractions, certainly we should choose locations that are sturdy and strong enough, ecologically, to support such development. Many other factors, as well as ecology, important to attractions, have been identified but to my knowledge they have never been researched for Texas as a whole. Perhaps we could have shortcut some failures that damage the identity of tourism, such as the Texas International Speedway, if this information had been available.

4. Do we have research studies that identify methods of providing private enterprise with quick response to state tourist inquiries? Are there mechanisms used by other states or by other industries that could be adapted to Texas? How can the inquirer quickly and easily find out where he can eat, sleep, park a recreation vehicle and buy souvenirs as well as discover things to see and do? Results of this research could provide legislators with additional understandings of the value of state advertising literature as it directly relates to private enterprise and therefore to the economic benefit of Texas.

5. Do we have research that demonstrates the dynamic and cohesive nature of the many fragments of tourism in Texas? How can we expect to have an identity when those people within the tourism industry do not realize they are interdependent? Another quote from Destination USA:
"If the firms of the tourism industry remain as independent
of one another as possible and remain uncooperative or
antagonistic to government, the industry will serve the
public and its own interests less well than it might.
(Cain:1973, 22)

These are just a few of many research areas that, if carried to their
conclusion, I believe would help create a better identity of tourism in Texas.
Now, who's job is it?

My quick answer, of course, it is everybody's. But, this is usually
a good way of saying "nobody's" when it comes to actually initiating projects.
If I were to point the finger of blame to those who should have been doing
this type of research for a long time, it would be toward the business I'm
in--the academic community. If there is anything we believe in and must have
for education, it is facts. Unfortunately, those of us in the academic com-
unity interested in tourism research have been too few and too inconvincing
to others. It was of particular interest to me to watch the reactions to our
students and to ourselves as professors at the recent excellent annual meet-
ing of the Texas Tourist Development Agency. Many times we were viewed with
suspicion. Many times students were asked, "why are you here?" Among bus-
inessmen, many feel that there is little to be studied about tourism--the only
way to learn is by doing. Some said, "you mean you really have university
courses in tourism? Incredible!" I believe that in academia we do have many
of the characteristics needed for good research, such as objectivity, immu-
nity from vested interests and familiarity with many research tools. Just now
we are beginning to see more and more researchers in the several disciplines
taking an active interest. Those fields particularly ripe for research effort
are those of geography, economics, history, sociology, business, transporta-
tion, management, parks, recreation, planning, land use, advertising and mar-
keting. Perhaps, through promptings of more TTRA members, those of us in aca-
demia can come alive and be more productive.

Another area of interest beginning to take on heavier responsibility is
that of the members of the tourist industry themselves. Just the other day,
Dr. Van Doren and I received word from Peggy Bainbridge, market researcher
of Best Western Motels that her organization was giving top priority to re-
search to improve the tourist industry's identity. Best Western now is the
world's largest lodging organization with 1,711 hotels, motels and resorts
in 1,150 cities.

In a recent address delivered to 1,800 lodging executives
at Best Western's Annual convention, President Ken Hickel
urged members to actively support and participate in efforts
undertaken by their state departments of tourism, their
regional lodging associations and the academic community
involved in tourism and travel research.
The support was urged as a strong combatant against the
lodging industry's current "non-essential" image as a
viable contributor to the world economy. (Bainbridge:
1975)

Finally, because of my work in Canada last year I would be remiss if I
did not comment briefly on some of the work being done in Canada and why its
people may have a stronger identity of tourism.

First of all, Canada has strong tourism research bodies in government. Each province and the federal government has research activity that not only produces annual statistical information but also special research reports from time to time.

Second, their research scope is very broad. Their studies range from basic economic studies to reorganization of the government agencies for tourism.

Third, even though they have budgeted research positions in government, a great deal of their work is let out to private consultants. Personally, I am now participating in two studies through a consulting firm in Kitchener, Ontario. One concerns the development of tourist zones in Saskatchewan and the other is a tourism development plan for the province of Ontario.

And, finally, I saw a greater amount of collaboration, especially at the provincial level, between recreation and tourism--both for research and for operations--than I see in the states. Several provinces have agencies with both recreation and tourism functions.

Conclusion

If my comments today have any major thrust, it is that of gaining tourism identity for the state of Texas. The more we are able to foster research--research which produces more and more usable information about tourism in Texas--the more clearly everyone will be able to understand it and how to deal with it intelligently.

This is why I am so enthusiastic about the Texas Chapter of TTRA and hope that it can provide the catalyst for moving ahead on many important issues in the years ahead.

References

