Industry Pragmatism vs Tourism Planning

Clare A. Gunn
Professor, Recreation and Parks Department
Texas Agricultural Experiment Station
Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas

In this year of the nation's bicentennial, it is well to reflect on the development of tourism—a phenomenon that was not of much concern in either 1776 or even in 1876. The purpose of this paper is to identify some problems that have arisen from the fragmented growth of tourism and to suggest that overall planning of the total tourism system is long overdue.

Growth Accomplishment

The present problems of fragmentation of tourism have grown out of its overwhelming success. The world's finest hotels, motels, resorts, restaurants and other attractions have been developed through a functioning and flourishing free enterprise system. Individual initiative spurred the entrepreneurs of the Holiday Inns, MacDonalds, and Disneyworlds as well as the hordes of small independent hostelry, restaurant and resort operators to develop new generations of tourist services and facilities. The everyday competition in these industries continues to tap new markets and weed out marginal services.

At the same time public awareness of social need has pushed government into the role of tourism investor, developer, and manager. Increasingly, natural and cultural resource areas have been established by legislation and public funds have been provided for their development and operation. Our many parks and reserves are now the envy of nations everywhere and firmly support the operation of outdoor recreation functions as a logical and appropriate activity for governments at all levels.

Leisure Sciences, Volume 1, Number 1
Copyright © 1977 Crane, Russak & Company, Inc.
patterns and lack of overall planning foresight, limited beach assets have
been stripped of much of their original beauty and accessibility. As Young
(1973) has written:

Hundreds of miles of coastline have been ruined irremediably by vir-
tually uncontrolled building of hotels, restaurants, bars and houses.
Beaches have been divided into unsightly allotments, and noise from
juke-boxes, fumes from traffic and sheer human overpopulation pay
witness to the chaos man has made of the organization of his leisure.
These evil consequences are not inherent in the development of tour-
ism; they just happen when tourism is developed in a thoughtless and
casual way.

Another example of tourism’s lack of coordination between the
public and private sector was the Mississippi coastal pollution problem
of 1973-74. Here, bickering about jurisdiction over the beaches and about
how to define pollution overshadowed the issue of cleaning up the
beaches. The main concern for this central issue did not come from
tourism interests but from the state health and pollution agencies. The
only voice of tourism came from the hotel and motel interests who ob-
jected to posting beach pollution signs in their lobbies as their business
dropped about 10 percent (Cartee, 1975). Such examples of the lack of
integration of public agency management with operation of tourism de-
velopment projects are plentiful. At present, for instance, there is no
mechanism whereby the National Park Service, developer of extremely
popular and worthwhile scenic parkways, can obtain any of the tax
revenues that go directly to the highway departments. Furthermore the
scenic parkways are being threatened by unesthetic and poorly planned
commercial development nearby (Freeman, 1975).

The lack of integration of public and private development for tour-
ism is commonplace. Christenson (1974) states:

The national government designates a park and makes it clear that it
will accept responsibility for only the area inside the boundaries. State
governments generally have said the area around the park is not our
responsibility—that is a local matter. Most often the local units of gov-
ernment have not been equipped to meet the inordinate pressures put
upon them by these developments.

Millions of tourists are attracted to our inland and sea waters by
the sport of fishing. After abusing our waters for many years we are now
showing improvement, especially with the introduction of salmon in the
Great Lakes. These fish are worth about 350 million dollars annually to
Great Lakes states and the province of Ontario. Yet they may not be
harvested in the next few years because of the increasing threat of Great
Alternative Solutions

As those concerned with tourism development become increasingly aware of its lack of planning and coordination, many alternative solutions will probably be offered. For purposes of stimulating interest in this topic, two alternatives are discussed here: government takeover and voluntary collaboration.

One might consider that if fragmentation of tourism is a problem the most straight-forward solution is government takeover. Proponents of this approach could devise several arguments in their favor.

It could be argued, for example, that tourism development could be speeded by having only one, central, decision-making body. The many local, state and federal regulations on land use and planning could be bypassed by making all development decisions in such a central office. Supporters could say that this eliminates much delay and overlap.

Proponents of government takeover could also say that the problems of interrelating its parts are eliminated by government control of all segments of tourism—transportation, attractions, promotion, services and facilities. Gaps in linking these together would be eliminated.

On the other hand, opponents of government control would object on the grounds that private enterprise has been the economic and social backbone of the nation. Its elimination would, therefore, represent the antithesis of the country's tradition and national ethic.

Furthermore, proponents of private enterprise could cite the many innovations and creative developments within tourism that, in their opinion, would not have taken place without private enterprise. They could also document that efficiencies are not necessarily obtained by centralizing control. Considering the hundreds of thousands of individual parts of the total tourism system across this nation, the complications of developing and managing them all from Washington present a formidable specter.

Other objectors to government takeover could argue that there is risk in making decisions on planning and management of tourism in only one location. The greater the magnitude of responsibility, the greater the risk of a bad judgment.

Finally, the farther removed from a tourism location that decisions concerning it are made, the greater is the chance of having incomplete land use data upon which to make such decisions.

The second alternative to be discussed here, that of voluntary collaboration, seems to hold greater promise. The following situations provide the basic elements of a system that could result from broad planning on such a voluntary collaborative basis.
where special natural resource characteristics are very important and need to be protected. But, at the same time, they engage in the design and management of programs and services that will provide interpretation of resources to the greatest number of people. This allows the populace to gain greater insight into the workings of natural forces and the value of respecting natural functions when land development takes place.

Ninth, the entire array of private enterprise in tourism has regular input to state, regional and local planning departments, the state highway department and the state parks department. Then, when decisions are made on changes or additions, they can reflect the needs of tourists and tourist businessmen.

If such overall collaborative planning were to take place, within and between the segments of private enterprise and government, it would offer many advantages. If done properly and sincerely, the people who come to visit a tourism area will receive better treatment, will find it easier to get around and will return with richer memories of highly satisfying experiences. If done in a studied and businesslike manner, commercial interests will be able to be more successful because they are better located with reference to all external factors, both public and private. If carried out with full recognition of the natural and cultural resource characteristics of the area, there will be less damage to the environment, both socially and physically.

**Obstacles to Voluntary Collaborative Planning**

Those who might wish to espouse greater voluntary collaborative planning in tourism would undoubtedly encounter several obstacles. Even though the advantages may seem to be clearly in favor of this type of planning, reality reveals some barriers.

First, it seems that there is a major semantic obstacle. Park planners and administrators do not see their visitors as tourists. They therefore do not relate to programs and agencies that support tourism. Conversely, tourism interests generally do not include anyone not in private enterprise. Their definition of tourism excludes the many government parks, reserves and reservoirs, as well as nonprofit historic sites. The people who travel for pleasure could not care less about how they are defined—they are interested only in their ability to travel and to obtain satisfaction from the experience.

Second, there seems to be a philosophical and ideological obstacle to voluntary collaborative planning. Those who support government parks are often conservation-preservation oriented; they align themselves
appear to be the most desirable but are fraught with many obstacles.

Perhaps there is now a need for emphasis on catalytic action to stimulate collaborative planning. Perhaps this should be the major role of a new office of tourism now being contemplated at the national level. In the face of existing promotional efforts by private enterprise and by the several states, it would not seem that any such new agency would need to give priority to the promotion of tourism. On the other hand, a domestic tourism agency at the national level could be just the necessary catalyst for voluntary cooperation, by supporting education, by providing incentives, by fostering changes in legal mandates, by offering professional guidance on planning and by establishing a national focal point for tourism. Perhaps such a catalyst could stimulate collaborative planning at the same time that the integrity of the many segments and contributing parts of tourism is maintained.

Acknowledgment

This paper is adapted from a presentation at the 1976 Annual Conference of the Travel Research Association in Boca Raton, Florida, on June 21, 1976.

References


Christenson, G. *Voyageurs*. Duluth News-Tribune, June 23, 1974


Freeman, R. L. Preserving the parkways. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, July 22, 1975


Herrmann, C. C. Tourism forces master planning. Boulder: Business Re-