LAND ASSESSMENT FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

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by

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As introduction to my topic, I would like to comment on past and current issues that have stimulated me to seek out ways of improving the development of the tourism product. With the great growth of tourism and with changes in several tourism factors, such as energy and demographics, older assumptions may no longer be valid.

At the state level in the United States, we have assumed that all land has equal opportunity. The common attitude is that with ample advertising and promotion, all areas can become tourist areas.

We generally consider tourism by its separate pieces—hotels, airlines, service stations, restaurants. From this we assume that all these pieces function well together and will continue to do so.

We have assumed that tourism has no impact on the environment. This has led to practice of putting development anywhere the owner-manager wants to—either private or governmental.

We have assumed that all tourists are alike and as long as we have volumes of tourists, we are succeeding.

We have assumed that all is well with private enterprise and that it is taking good care of itself and that government is allowing and stimulating private enterprise to succeed.
My observation of tourism, however, leads me to the conclusion that all these assumptions are wrong. All pieces of geography are not the same. All parts of tourism do not automatically function well together. Tourism does have a strong impact upon the physical and social environment. There is great diversity within tourism markets and we know little about this diversity. Finally, all is not well with free enterprise in tourism. Not only are governmental regulations strangling many opportunities for success but frequently governments are competing unfairly with private enterprise.

While I am not presumptuous enough to believe all can be solved with planning or conceptual solutions, I am confident that improvement in the present haphazard and fragmented approach can be made. It is my opinion that greater emphasis upon the tourism product—the things to do and see—holds great opportunity for making tourism better for everyone. Therefore, the following is a description of a concept and how we have applied it in Texas.

THE CONCEPT

Regardless of the fragmentation of tourism, at the regional scale (state, province) a functional system is taking place. Figure 1 illustrates five components important to this system. Certainly all are in strong dynamic relationship.

The most critical component is that of attractions because without attractions the remainder of the system does not even become activated. There must be things to do and see—following this there is a need for travel transportation, services and facilities and informational and directional systems to give knowledge and direction concerning these attractions.

Fundamental to all attraction development are three foundations. First, many attractions are strongly dependent upon natural resource factors: water, wildlife, topography and others. Second, an increasing number of attractions are based on history and prehistory. Third, some attractions, such as the
Disneylands, are less dependent upon these factors and more dependent upon market relationships. However, even with these, natural and cultural resource factors are important.

Conceptually, it should be possible to study a region in such a way that those places with the strongest set of potential development factors can be identified. Figure 2 is a diagram illustrating such a concept. It shows: (a) zones (light areas) where study has revealed development factors to be strong; (b) attraction complexes (stars) where groupings of potential attractions could be developed; (c) service centers (dots) most logically able to provide expanded services to tourists and (d) transportation and access (dash lines) between home and the destinations.

We have experimented with a similar approach in several locations, especially with the province of Ontario in connection with the development of a tourist plan directed by Balmer and Crapo. The study was intentionally called Framework for Opportunity to avoid negative reaction to the word, "planning." The study included three main steps: resource study, study of demand and development of a strategy for development. It produced a series of zones where development held greatest potential. The Sault Ste. Marie-Wawa zone was one of the first to pick up the recommendations and begin its own zone study and implementation.

Further study has revealed the need for classifying total tourism development into two main groups: touring and destination. For touring purposes, a place must depend upon new flows of tourists and development that is not necessarily visited repeatedly. On the other hand, locations for destination tourism must have the resources and the development that can bear repetition. Areas where these overlap provide the strongest support for commercial service development.
A further classification of influential factors is into either physical or program factors. Physical factors are those that relate to the land and its development whereas program factors are those including programs and policies. For convenience in research and mapping, the physical factors have been identified as:

- Water, waterlife
- Vegetative cover, wildlife, pests
- Climate/atmosphere
- Topography, soils, geology
- History, ethnicity, archeology, legends
- Esthetics
- Existing institutions, attractions
- Service centers
- Transportation, access

The key program factors are:

- Market characteristics
- Promotional programs
- Information systems
- Planning bodies, governments
- Socio-economic influences

Study of both groups is important in the research phase in order to develop understandings and bases for concepts and recommendations for action.

Regarding techniques of physical analysis, planners and designers have often used color overlays of individual factors to determine how they aggregate. Recently, much experimenting has been done to improve this with computer techniques. The computer allows much greater flexibility but does require that qualitative information be transformed into quantitative data.

This is accomplished by first creating an index for each factor. Since this is a reflection of the culture as well as the resource base, the index is determined by a panel of professionals who are knowledgeable in the area. For mapping purposes, a scale for each index, ranging from "very weak" to "very strong" is developed. Tables 1 and 2 show the index and scales for touring and destination tourism factors, respectively. Hand maps with zones labeled with appropriate scale figures can then be translated to computer maps and aggregated. Perhaps an example will illustrate the process.
APPLICATION

The region for study was arbitrarily chosen; it does not constitute a definable political or traditional geographic area. The boundaries, primary cities, counties, and main highways are illustrated in Figure 3.

Research

Existing documents were reviewed, the region was given automobile reconnaissance, and several well-informed specialists were consulted. These sources were utilized to prepare statements regarding what characteristics of each factor could be found in the region, where they were located, and how important they appeared to be for tourism.

Mapping

Figure 4—a hand-drawn map showing the location and the rating scale of the index for the "water-waterlife" factor for touring tourism—illustrates the first step used in mapping each of the physical factors. This step is critical, growing out of the research study of each factor in the region. Obviously, it is a subjective evaluation; however, it is based not upon whim or local pride but upon documented facts about the factor.

The next step translated the hand-drawn map into a computer format for aggregation. This is based upon the assumption that the greatest potential lies in those areas where the greatest number and the greatest strength of factors occur. Using a grid overlay, the zones on the hand-drawn map are converted into individual computer cells, each representing 6.25 square miles in the scale being used here. Figure 5 is a computer representation of the map shown in Figure 4.

When all nine factor maps are added together for touring and destination tourism, Figures 6 and 7, respectively, are the result. To highlight the zones,
the five categories of computer symbols are outlined in black line. These maps clearly display areas having reasonably strong potential for future tourism development.

Assessment

The mapping process explained above provides a basis for the final assessment—the identification of zones with greatest expansion potential. Because the entire study was directed toward this objective, it is now possible to make an assessment of the tourism potential, expressed two ways: physical guidelines and program guidelines, for both touring and destination tourism.

Physical Guidelines

Figures 6 and 7 show guidelines logically derived by assessing the tourism development potential of this region. These guidelines include **zones** with highest potential (white), **locations** with high potential for future attraction complexes (stars), key community **service centers** (dots), and **transportation and access** (dash lines).

**Touring Tourism:** Historic sites and artifacts, and natural resource assets appear as the main foundations for touring tourism development, although in many instances there was no utilization of these assets. Developing museums, restoring buildings, adding pageantry nearby, and identifying historic sites and buildings offer several opportunities for loop trails, both foot and car. Interesting land features, such as reservoirs, rivers, isolated forests, beaches, and coastal resources provide opportunities for interesting development of touring tourism.

Illustrated in Figure 8, service centers were chosen on the basis of their existing service capability, potential for expanded service, proximity to potential attraction complexes, and accessibility. Wherever a grouping of attraction complex potentials appeared around a service center and near a circulation corridor,
a zone was identified. A zone is a generalized area in which a number of complexes could be developed and supported 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. These transportation corridors may require very little redevelopment—perhaps only new signage and improved information-direction material. On the other hand, major cleanup, scenic easements, new highway design, expanded service center functions, landscape plantings, and the installation of certain constraints against public trespass along the way may be required. For air travelers, new linkages with ground tour corridors may need to be created.

Although this assessment provides ideas and impetus for new touring tourism development, further refinement is necessary. For example, tour developers could devise separate tours according to tourist interest. The basic routings could remain the same but a "heritage" tour might include stops at different attraction complexes than an "industrial plant" tour or a "scenic" tour.

**Destination Tourism:** A total of five separate destination zones were identified, as shown in Figure 9, each having its own identity and potential. These are generalized areas derived from research and are not contained by hard boundaries. They may need to be modified when development feasibilities are known and implementation takes place. Each zone has good highway linkage with market sources, and two (Austin and Victoria) have regularly scheduled air service. The following discussion includes brief notes on the potential of each zone.

Zone "A" is the largest, encompassing potential for many destination attractions. The hills, lakes, topography, history, and state capital combine
to provide strong foundations. Opportunities for private investment and
greater utilization of public support are abundant. While existing attrac-
tions provide clues to future development, the resources suggest further
potential for developing conference centers, and major sports arenas.

Strong linkages with San Antonio and the Southwest, including Mexico,
as well as with Temple, Waco, the Forth Worth-Dallas complex, and the North
are already available. Expanding markets could be tapped by increasing the
attractions within this zone. Air service linked with ground transportation
could be utilized more fully as the complexes are expanded. Strong service
centers exist, although not all are presently oriented to tourism. However,
research indicated that the social and political climate of a few cities
might limit expanded tourism. Only further study at the local level can
provide the specifics needed for feasibility studies for new projects.

Zone "B" focuses on special qualities inherent in tourism factors of the
coastal area. Little has been done to exploit the abundance of the coastal
natural resource factors--birdlife, waterlife, waterfront forces, biological
production in the estuaries, and geological formation of the barrier islands--
for visitor use. Large nature interpretive complexes could provide this
tourist function, leaving extensive areas in protected zones and preserving
natural ecosystems. Water sports can be developed to a much greater extent,
given support from well-designed and expertly managed development on shore.
Other potential lies in festivals, pageants, and historic restoration, inter-
preting the heritage of the coast. Major immigration took place here during
the period of early settlement of the United States, but relics of this
interesting era remain dormant. On more stable coastal lands (and under
strict controls) resort and vacation home complexes have potential.

Linkages with market sources are not strong, but care should be exer-
cised in developing new access. While no major expressway should slice
directly through the waterfront area, improved highway access to serve the region is needed. Prime markets are Corpus Christi and the West, as well as Houston and the states to the east.

Service centers are not yet fully developed for tourism but do have potential. Local guidance will be required for attraction development. As with all zones, further steps at the local level will be needed to verify and expand upon these concepts.

Zone "C" is a fairly loose-knit zone that has rather uniform physiographic and cultural characteristics and is well-suited to a typical Texas resort development. It has important river resources, lending itself to some water sports. River valleys are wooded and some sites are adapted to camping. The most conspicuous feature is the "Lost Pines" area, a forest relic having esthetic and recreational value. Dude ranches and resorts, capitalizing on the agricultural scene and the German and Czech ethnic background, would be appropriate. The setting is also well-suited to large complexes of group organization camps. The zone is readily accessible from Bryan-College Station, Houston, and other markets to the west. The zone already contains service centers with expansion potential, including LaGrange and Gonzales.

Zone "D" is a coastal plains destination area with Victoria and valleys of the Guadalupe and LaVaca Rivers as prime resource assets. These provide opportunities for organization camping, vacation homes, water recreation, and conference activities. The countryside is picturesque which outside markets would find more interesting and appealing than a typical image of arid and desolate Texas. Victoria has great opportunity for expansion as a service center and historic complex and is readily accessible by both air and highway.

Zone "E", although a relatively small area, contains a base for destination tourism. Camping complexes along the San Saba and Colorado Rivers
could offer interesting vacations for many. The zone offers an appropriate setting for dude ranch clusters with a potential for vacation home complexes. The zone is readily accessible over fine highways from San Antonio, Dallas, and Fort Worth, as well as from surrounding states. This zone represents a more typical "interior" Texas setting as compared to the Gulf Coast.

Program Guidelines

Investigation of the program factors was limited; only general recommendations can be offered. With greater input from local citizens, governments, developers, and potential investors, more definitive program opportunities might emerge.

One realm of opportunity lies in educational programs to stimulate an awareness of tourism within the region. While some of the prime businesses catering directly to tourists are well aware of the impact, tourism does not now enjoy a high level of understanding and commitment by either lay citizenry or governmental leadership. For example, it is not well known in the 20-county region that tourism already has an annual impact of approximately $307,692,700, employs about 2,000 people, and returns some $3,116,800 in local tax revenues (County Travel: 1978).

Both nearby and distant markets might be cultivated through coordinated development-promotion-information programs centered on development zones. This alternative is not available at the present time. These programs might be most productive if established on a stratified market basis--targeted to visitor interest types. Spring and fall offer idyllic vacation setting especially adapted to those interested in natural and cultural resource tours, festivals, and pageants. Market studies of specific regional opportunities could be valuable.

Information and communication elements offer another opportunity for improving tourism. Existing attractions and services are not well communicated
to the visiting public. It is not easy for visitors to learn about points of interest, travel ways, accommodations, and specialty shops. Improving the quality and organization of informational literature requires more attention than increasing the quantity. Upon entering a development zone, the tourist should benefit from literature and information about that zone.

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

Linkage is required between the forces fostering resource protection and restoration and those developing tourism. While there is a functional spinoff from programs such as historic restoration, there is no organized linkage to programs inviting and providing services to visitors. This is an important opportunity for improved regional tourism development.

Coordinated decision-making between the several state agencies that have an impact on tourism could enhance physical development opportunities. If new and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures can be avoided, there is merit in sharing policy decisions among agencies, including Texas Tourist Development Agency, Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Water Rights Commission, Texas Coastal Marine Council, Texas Historical Commission, Texas Historical Resources Development Council, Texas General Land Office, and the Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation.

Another very important level of collaboration is that between counties. Through existing councils of governments, counties can adopt and implement the concept explained in this report. Councils of governments can provide leadership and catalytic action for regional identification and expanded tourism potential, coordinating both touring and destination.
Finally, linkage between public policy for park and recreation programs and commercial development decisions provides a great opportunity for improving tourism. One major public policy of all agencies could be to stimulate innovative and environmentally sensitive private sector development. Closer collaboration and cooperation between public and private sectors promises improved location selection, improved visitor service, and improved resource protection for Texas and this region.

CONCLUSIONS

While this concept is yet to be proven in practice, it identifies key factors and outlines a strategy for making a land assessment for tourism development. Perhaps the following can be concluded from this approach.

1. It is possible, and desirable, to identify how potential varies over large land areas—that some areas have much greater potential than others.

2. Such an approach pulls the many fragments of development together. It integrates the functional tourism system.

3. By making such a study, those areas needing special conservation and preservation can be isolated. Some may hold potential for attraction development. If so, special design and management can reflect their special sensitivity to use.

4. By incorporating characteristics of demand early in the process, those areas selected for potential have greater chances of providing satisfactions when developed.

5. When areas with greatest potential are identified, innovative private entrepreneurs can provide creative and diverse development that reflects the needs of the society, the economy, and the environment.
References


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Figure 1. A model of the functional tourism system including five basic components.

Figure 2. Diagrams showing touring and destination type zones for tourism development and their combination for overall tourism.
Figure 2. The 20-county region of Texas used in this study of tourism development potential.

Figure 3. A hand-drawn map of the location of the physical factor, "water and waterlife," and identification of scale, taken from Table 1.

Figure 4. A map translating Figure 3 into a SYMAP computer printout.
Figure 6. Computer printout showing areas of strong to weak resource support of 
touring tourism development.

Figure 7. Computer printout showing areas of strong to weak resource support of 
destination tourism development.

Figure 8. Potential zones for touring tourism development, containing 
locations of possible attraction complexes, service centers and 
proposed touring routes. Arrows indicate prime entrance points.

Figure 9. Potential zones for destination tourism development, 
containing locations of possible attraction complexes and service 
centers. Arrows indicate prime linkage with market areas.