PARKISM VERSUS TOURISM

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The topic assigned to me is "Recreation and Tourism." Because of the overall theme of your conference, I sense an inference that tourism may offer those of you in parks a new gold mine of revenues. Whether tourism offers a panacea for the present difficulties of park financing depends greatly upon your point of view.

Frankly, based upon past performance by both park and tourism interests, I would retitle this topic "Parkism Versus Tourism." The purpose of this change is not to widen the gap between these two forces. Quite the contrary. I consider it my good fortune to have studied and worked closely with both of these very powerful leisure forces. For the moment, I would like to plead neutrality and believe that a whole new world of opportunity and accomplishment lies before us if we can understand better these two very important forces and can increase the collaboration between the two.

However, as I go to park meetings, generally no one talks about tourism. As I go to tourism meetings, usually no one talks about parks. And so I ask myself the question, why is this true? In spite of the fact that both depend upon similar environmental resources and both are the result of people seeking satisfactions through leisure, there is little communication and therefore little design and development integration between the two. Parkism does appear to be opposed to tourism. What are some of the reasons for this?

First, let's look at the subject of tourism.

Tourism people, particularly in the past, have been preoccupied with private enterprise idealism. They have espoused commercialism with the zeal of a General Motors or an ITT, believing that the backbone of the nation's leisure depends upon profitmaking enterprise. There is enough truth in this to continue to fan the flames of the private enterprise ethic and, at the same time to automatically polarize themselves against government.

Ample evidence can be found in any tourism-focused organization or activity. For example, in the most recent conference of the major tourism organization in this country, Discover America Travel Organizations, Inc., (better known as DATO) held in Houston two weeks ago, virtually every presentation spoke to profitmaking and not one included the environment. Present were the anticipated exponents of tourism, such as the airlines and hotels. In addition, new interests appeared. Better Homes and Gardens, once oriented only to the home back yard, has taken on wheels and wings and is attempting to shift into the lucrative travel market. Their researcher,
Theodore Standish, stated, "Our efforts to examine, report, and analyze the size and characteristics of the ever-growing and changing family travel market, along with our editorial coverage, constitute a major contribution to the travel industry."

Tourism-oriented businesses see government as unfair competition. In this same DATO meeting, Stanley Hamilton, National Association of Motor Bus Owners, decried as "unfair" the present tactics of AMTRAK, especially the alleged trend toward filling all train seats, no matter what the cost to the taxpayer. The emphasis of the Recreational Vehicle Institute's presentation by Paul Dupre, was upon the fact that "recreation vehicles are big business. Last year the industry sold more than 1 1/2 billion dollars worth. By 1978 we conservatively estimate at least 3 billion dollars annually." But, "our biggest problem at this time is that of creeping legislation on both the federal and state levels." He cited the newly released publication, National Parks for the Future, by the Conservation Foundation as threatening to the freedoms of Americans.

However, even government agencies are caught up in the economics of tourism as evidenced by the fact that nearly every state has an agency promoting tourism, primarily for economic reasons. This last weekend, Mr. Will Mangham, director of the Louisiana Tourism Development Commission stated that tourist dollars are the easiest to get--tourists always expect to spend money. At the national level, Senator Jacob Javits reports that "each tourist from abroad represents an export item worth $400. Each $20,000 by foreign tourists in the United States creates one job, and last year this meant 122,580 new jobs for Americans."

Whenever the word, tourism, is used--in government, in commerce, or in professional and lay terms--the corollaries of jobs, incomes and increased tax revenues (all components of private enterprise idealism) are commonly used. Until just recently social costs, environmental impact, and social impact have never been part of the jargon of tourism.

Tourism interests have been heavily involved with buildings and physical development as just one side of a costs-and-returns ledger. Generally, when tourism development is considered, the first items of business are hotels and related service businesses. In the 1960's, plans for expanding tourism in the Pacific, for example, first identified the need for building hotels. The first emphasis in Hawaii, as air travel became more readily available, was the construction of millions of dollars-worth of hotels. In the peak period of this boom, it was not uncommon for travel agents to be booking conventions two years in advance in hotels that were not yet built. In fact, advance payments often served as down payments for their construction.

Once captured primarily by small "mom-and-pop" businesses, tourism investment in land and facilities is now attracting big business. Here are some examples. Atlas Chemical Industries of Philadelphia is developing a resort community in Northeast Pennsylvania. Cherry Burrell Rivet Company, a Chicago manufacturer, has bought an island in the Turk group in the Caribbean. Chrysler Corporation recently bought 650 feet of ocean front at Fort Lauderdale. Consolidated Foods, one of the largest food distribution companies in North America, has bought a string of 25 restaurants in California
and another string at Ohio, and they are going into the motel business, besides. Hallmark Cards, McCullough Motors, North American-Rockwell, Owens-Illinois, Westinghouse and many other big names are involved in huge land and building programs oriented to leisure. (Conway, 169, 170)

Tourism interests, generally, have taken a parasitic approach. The great maxim of tourism has been that it is already freeze-dried and boxed—all you add is a little investment in facilities and a lot in promotion.

The evidence is clear. State tourism agencies spend millions on advertising but virtually nothing on understanding the relative potential of areas within states. The dominant attitude is to merely promote what is already made available by someone else.

Chambers of commerce are often spokesmen for tourism and can be credited for the encouragement of many fine programs and development. Sometimes, however, their perception is shallow and self-destructive. For example, the greatest tourist lure of Louisiana is the French Quarter at New Orleans. Yet, the local chamber supported an expressway proposal that would have destroyed it, prompting the noted writer, Harnett Kane, to call them "the Chamber Pot."

The parasitic history of motels is clearly written on the land for all to observe. The prime consideration for locating motels in the past was location on a highway. It was as if motel owners gave away their decision-making powers to highway bureaucrats. Little did they consider the real geographical needs of travelers and therefore omitted many factors equally as important as highways.

Tourism interests have so ignored the prime reasons for travel and tourism that they have often smothered the source with their own facilities. When developers discovered that water was a prime resource, for example, they smothered the water's edge with buildings, thereby killing future chances of enjoying the water in a more lasting manner from other vantage points. I now find the same lakeshore clutter appearing along Texas reservoirs that has made slums out of many lakeshores in the North. The "concrete jungles" of Waikiki and Miami Beach are being repeated along the Adriatic and elsewhere in the world.

Private enterprise in tourism has generally let government take the lead in identifying resource areas with appeal. As soon as the site of a new national park is discussed, for example, land prices escalate. Business exercises its parasitic attitude by leaning upon others who really create the markets in the first place.

Tourism interests frequently believe parks to be outside their scope of interest—or if within, they are competitive. The word "park" in this country is generally associated with governments and therefore automatically polarized against private enterprise. Especially in recent years the government has escalated park and recreation spending to such high figures as to shock even the most adventuresome risk capitalist. It is not so much that private interests oppose the park philosophies. The argument flames when government facilities and services are built and the rates charged are not expected to pay for the capital investment in land and buildings. By covering only operating costs, the fees can be offered at lower than competitive
rates. Private interests winces when they see their tax moneys go to agencies such as the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation who has, since 1963, dispersed $251.2 million on park land and facilities. (Conservation Foundation, 217)

Last month I met with the East Michigan Tourist Association to discuss problems of development. The members of this association cited vast government holdings of land as one obstacle to progress. They indicated that the best lands for expansion were tied up in federal or state ownership and that on these lands little provision was being made for recreation visitors.

Now, let's look at the park side of the picture.

First, there is ample evidence that most park and recreation interests, particularly at the federal level, have been preoccupied with their own philosophies and ideologies of leisure and resource protection. Sometimes this has been at odds with the user's perception of parks. For example, at all government levels, lands have been identified as preserves or parks ostensibly for the purposes of protecting the resource. These have included both historical and natural resources. At the same time, the conservation movement provided such convincing arguments that a major segment of the public became curious about these resources and just as soon as the opportunity presented itself, took a trip to see them first hand. Many conservation and protection organizations developed colorful and enticing literature and gained paid members on the expanding interest in the out-of-doors.

The spectacular growth of visitation to our National Parks is old history to all of you. However, the preoccupation with the preservation ethic has blinded the managers to the many problems of mass visitation. For example, I was shocked recently to observe the traffic and trash along our newly "preserved" seashore, Padre Island. The National Park Service admits that it cannot cope with the problem but continues to invite it by building a four-lane highway to the park that will spill even more cars and trash upon this very fragile shoreline.

At a Congressional hearing in Texas for the establishment of a new National Park, there were only two groups represented: 1) opponents, consisting primarily of timber interests who own the land, and 2) proponents, made up only of those espousing ecology and environmental protection. When I proposed that the area be developed with properly designed facilities, transportation and interpretive centers in order to teach millions of visitors the uniqueness of the area, I was opposed by both groups. Neither one wished to address themselves to people as park users. Catton, a sociologist summarizes this phenomenon in this manner: "Impetus for the preservation of wilderness comes partly from a quasi-religious ecological conscience contending that human societies are obliged to provide special opportunities for existing ecosystems of plants and animals to survive in places insulated from human contact." (Catton, 339)

In contrast to the clarity of the profitmaking goals of commercialism, public park agencies are not quite as clear regarding their goals. They spend a great deal of money and energy to promote parks and the use of them but appear to be dissatisfied with the numbers who respond--either too large
or too small. For example, it was at this very institute one year ago that Seymour Gold pointed out that non-use of parks was as serious a problem as over-use, especially in the urban areas. When compared with the increased volume of free time and ability to travel, he contends that "outdoor recreation is relatively insignificant, and that part of outdoor recreation now spent in local public parks is minuscule and decreasing at an increasing rate." However, because of this orientation, park interests have narrow use prescriptions. Because the free and open market system is not allowed to operate, many conflicts arise between users and managers. For example, from this region about a year ago came the report that deprecative acts by visitors in forest campgrounds were primarily rule violations and not necessarily destructive or harmful acts in themselves. (Clark, 11) Nor were they performed only by teenagers. This suggests that what the visitors expected from the environment and what the providers believed they should offer may be two different things.

The riots and user-congestion in Yosemite National Park were fundamentally caused by "inaction by the National Park Service for a number of years, not just the month of the riots," and not by too many people in the park, according to deputy director of Yosemite, William Whalen. With staff reorganization, with transportation innovation and with people-oriented design, planning and management, he anticipates even greater usage in the future but with even fewer problems.

The narrow approach exercised by park interests in the past is obsolete in a modern leisure-oriented and environmentally conscious world. Dr. Leslie Glasgow, eminent ecologist and one-time member of the Interior Department, stated to my class at a seminar in Louisiana last week, "parks, recreation, and wildlife can no longer isolate themselves from the real world."

In addition to this brief review, I am confident that you can think of other reasons for tourism and parkism to oppose one another. But, as I mentioned at the start, my mission today is not to widen the wedge between the two but just the opposite. So, for the next few minutes let me review some common elements—those upon which we can build better tourism and recreation. Let me list at least 7 ways in which both tourism and parkism share common concerns.

1. Both tourism and parkism depend upon satisfied users.

While tourism and its commercialism tout profitmaking as their goal they cannot survive for long unless the users generally like the products and services. Neither can park agencies survive unless their visitors and supporters are satisfied. And, whether we wish to admit it or not, in most instances, the visitors to both parks and tourist destinations are one and the same. Both parkism and tourism interests must be aware of people as visitors and consumers—not only as statistical averages but as individuals with personality differences. How often have tourist agencies and park agencies worked together on leisure behavior studies?

2. Both tourism and parkism require unique recreational resources.

The beaches, mountains, historic sites, forests, and unusual features of the land and sea provide a common denominator for tourism and parkism.
Yet, how many times have both interests collaborated on land acquisition, planning and management in order to provide the opportunities for people to gain the best values from travel and outdoor recreation? How often have park interests considered themselves as providing attractions to tourists?

3. Both tourism and parkism depend upon the same transportation systems.

Except for the totlot within the block and nearby neighborhood playground (which are very scarce in suburbia) nearly all parks demand the use of transportation systems. Obvious as this may be, how often have either the park interests or the tourism interests collaborated with highway departments or airline companies in the establishment of new routes? For example, in Texas over the last 50 years there has been no collaboration between park, tourism and highway interests and the establishment of some 138 new reservoirs, all of which have become major recreational magnets. Nor is there now any machinery for correcting this for the 66 new reservoirs to be built in the near future.

4. Both tourism and parkism depend upon an infrastructure of services and facilities.

The recognition that hotels, restaurants, service stations, --yes, and even hospitals, libraries, and police stations--are an integral part of both parks and tourism is long overdue. The creature comforts and needs of travelers to parks cannot be denied. The development of Gatlinburg or Estes Park is as essential to the nearby national parks as are the resources within the park. How often have park interests collaborated with private enterprise for the establishment of services and facilities needed by travelers?

5. Both parkism and tourism depend upon information-direction systems.

Because both tourism and park interests offer attractions to travelers, they have an obligation to inform people about the attractions, how to get there and how to enjoy them. The increasing popularity of interpretive programs and package tours bears testimony to the desire by the public for greater information and guidance. However, to what extent have tourism and park agencies and organizations collaborated on literature preparation, son-et-lumier programs, pageants, and historic interpretation?

6. Both tourism and parkism require competent management and well-trained staffs.

Problems of managing tourist and park facilities are more similar than different. Both must maintain physical plants and land development. Both must purchase supplies and equipment for regular upkeep. Both must be able to handle volumes of visitors with courtesy, guidance and security. Within staff training, both must understand problems of budgeting, personnel and human relations. Yet, how often are such management programs combined or even related to one another within our educational institutions?

7. Both tourism and parkism are important and allied elements of the social and economic life of the country.

Although tourism and parkism are not identical, they combine to form a powerful economic and social force throughout this country and the free world.
The right to travel freely and to participate in recreation activity is probably as important to most people of the world as any other human right. Actual visitation and participation provide experience inputs not obtainable in any other way. Governor Nelson Rockefeller in his recent talk to tourism leaders of the country told them that they were "champions of a Fifth Freedom—the freedom to move." (McInerney, 1)

The fulfillment of this right requires land development and people in staggering proportions. It is estimated that 7% of all the U.S. employment is due to tourism (Waters) and that 169,188 persons are employed in our parks. (Parks and Recreation, 23) The total impact of tourism and parkism is dramatized if one imagines what would happen to the welfare of our citizens and to the economy of the country if for some catastrophic reason, it should be withdrawn.

In the beginning of my talk I said my purpose was to project opportunities for both tourism and parkism. I would hope that my remarks so far already have suggested many such opportunities. In my opinion, supporters and managers of both have failed to respond to two very important issues: 1) the need for environmental responsibility and 2) the needs of people in their leisure. These are the real challenges. As far as the environment is concerned, and as far as users are concerned, the manner in which leisure development is accomplished is of much greater importance than who does it.

From all this, I have drawn just four conclusions that I believe are critical in our look toward the future of both tourism and parkism:

1. that joint studies be performed regarding people's habits, desires and interests in their leisure;
2. that joint studies be made regarding environmental characteristics so that all understand the base upon which development takes place;
3. that joint efforts in planning and design take place so that the common objectives of tourism and parkism can be served and also so that their individuality can be enhanced;
4. that management policies be put into practice that coordinate rather than alienate—at all levels, local to national.

I would like to close by giving a brief review of three examples that are different in character and in location but collectively reflect these opportunities for development.

(Color slides, illustrating Mission Bay Park, San Diego; Sea Pines Plantation, Hilton Head; The River Walk, San Antonio.)
REFERENCES


Whalen, William. Talk presented at seminar, Recreation and Parks Department, Texas A&M University, November 7, 1972.