PHYSICAL NEEDS: LAND USE PLANNING FOR TOURISM

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Little did I realize, 15 years ago, when I took this view of the Whaling Museum, that I would be back, not as a tourist, but to discuss coastal tourism and land use. At the outset, I want to commend the organizers of this conference for their foresight in bringing together the right combination of interests. By "right" I refer to the mix of interests that so seldom have such an opportunity to share experiences and work together toward mutual goals. I must explain that my comments today are not based upon years of research specifically directed toward the New England coast. Even though I did have a very pleasant year teaching at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, many years ago, my concern over coastal tourism land use is based on study and observation generally both here and abroad.

Generally, today I find that people want to do a better job of development along the coast. We have some very talented and experienced landscape architects, architects and engineers. We now have more legislation and political backing than ever before. Certainly, the Coastal Zone Management Act provides explicit support for the objectives of this conference. We also have a much more enlightened public who is much more aware of this precious resource—the coastal zone.

Even so, I keep running into several obstacles—misconceptions, that get in our way for better understanding and better land use. Let's examine just five of these:

MISCONCEPTIONS

1. Tourism is incompatible with resource protection.

There is a prevailing feeling, especially among environmentalists, protectionists and conservationists, that tourism must be stopped. The only way in their view, to protect fragile, cultural and natural resource assets of the coastal zone is to stop tourism development. While I grant that there have been some abuses of the coastal assets in the past, I would argue that it is not because of tourism, per se, but the manner in which tourism, as well as many other land uses, has been developed.

I doubt if anyone has the power to stop the human desire to visit, enjoy, and become enriched by the many natural and cultural features of the coast. I would like to make the point that because of tourism demand, many coastal areas have become much more aware of their natural and cultural assets and therefore have made greater concerted effort toward establishing both protection and use areas along the coast. Because coastal archeology, history, ethnicity, ports and beaches are basic for much of tourism development, it is incumbent upon tourism to protect, perpetuate and interpret these resources.
Resource protection is not only compatible; it is inherent in coastal tourism development. Our need is not to stop tourism (even if we could), but to bring about better interaction between resource protectionists and tourism developers for their mutual benefit.

2. Because of limited publicly-owned shoreline, the public has limited access.

The fallacy of this statement lies in a narrow definition of the public. The total public has a multiplicity of access. In spite of some opinion to the contrary, there is no empirical evidence that inaccessability is even a minor deterrent to coastal tourism and recreation.

Because public agencies make most of the inventories, they conveniently forget the thousands of establishments developed by the two components of the private sector: private enterprise and non-profit organizations. Think of the millions who now enjoy vacation homes, resorts, marinas, historic sites, archeological sites, pageants, water festivals, fishing and boating contests, and many other opportunities supplied by the private sector. Actually, a strong case could be made that a much greater diversity of segments of the public are adequately served by the private than by the public sector.

The point I wish to make is that the coastal land use decision-makers in this country are from all three sectors--government (as a developer), private enterprise and non-profit organizations--and that therefore we have the best opportunities for development of the coast when all three sectors interact.

The need is to provide the total recreating and vacationing public with better opportunities by all three sectors.

3. Public ownership provides preferred land use.

There is a widespread opinion that development for leisure that is not planned, owned and managed by the public sector is inferior. The fallacy of this is dramatised in a coastal state where I have observed a worsening of beach quality ever since an "open beach" law was passed. Public ownership does not, of and by itself, guarantee good land use. Only good design and superior management can do this. The Williamsburgs and the Sea Pines Plantations provide ample evidence that quality land use can be accomplished by the private sector.

At this point, I wish to make one argument against government as a competitive participant in recreation and tourism development. There are increasing instances where governmental agencies, with all good intent, actually build competitive hotels, marinas and campgrounds. The outcome is an economic drain rather than an economic input. Such development, often done on the premise that it will stimulate business, actually depresses it. No business can compete with governmental pricing. This is not only unfair competition, in my opinion, it is improper government.
Our need is to improve land use but I am not convinced that government is the one to do it.

4. Tourism development is not a community affair.

The dominant attitude within most communities is that tourism involves only the buyers and sellers of travel. Most things we do for our communities are equally important for tourism. In fact, if it were not for attractive communities, especially along the coastal zone, tourism would be greatly impaired. The decisions we make for our museums, parks, protected ecological zones, arts, crafts, parkways, recreation areas, streets, residential areas, convention facilities, shopping centers, theaters and, yes, even our churches, are very important for tourism.

The community policies we maintain regarding treatment and hosting of visitors are critical to tourism. No, tourism is not the exclusive role of the chamber of commerce or the visitor's bureau.

Our need is to enlighten all sectors of coastal communities regarding their important role in tourism.

5. Plans are forever.

If there is any lesson in observing past tourism development on the coast, it is that both the noun, "plan" and the verb, "planning" are equally important. By this, I mean that the capricious nature of markets demands a continuing revision of plans and a disposable array of development rather than long-lasting monuments to designers. How often do we bring designers back to re-evaluate what they have designed and built?

One powerful force that has shortened the life span of buildings is finance. Most buildings today must be paid off in 5 to 10 years rather than 30 or 40, as they used to be. While we may not like the thought of disposable development that we flush down the drain every so many years, neither can we afford such monumental works that they outlive their utility.

Perhaps the concept of cybernetics can help us. Perhaps we can build into our planning of tourism some annual self-correcting contingencies to allow for shifts in social and economic conditions.

I cite just these few misconceptions to suggest that our main problems of tourism land use, especially along our coasts, are soluble once we gain understanding and greater commitment.

TOURISM AS A SYSTEM

Let me try now to bring some order into the tourism system so that we can better understand some land use needs of tourism.

We are learning that it seems to be increasingly difficult to develop tourism in isolated spots. In other words, we, as tourists, seek out specific regions—perhaps because they are more easily identified; maybe they are easier to get to with modern transportation and access; or maybe they offer more to
the traveler. Regions, such as the Coast, Florida, or New England, become very important for land use considerations.

Within the region, it is the attraction complexes that are the generators of tourism. By attraction complexes, I refer to developed places that provide two very important functions. 1) They provide the enticement, the appeal, the attracting force; 2) they provide for the personal satisfactions, the enrichments, the relaxation, the challenge, the repose and many other values that we enjoy from participation.

The next step was to discover that tourism is much more complicated than just the businesses associated with travel. But, in spite of its being complicated, there is a very definite functional system. And, the major components of this system are always in a very dynamic and delicate balance.

1. We could start with the component people--where they live; their propensity to travel; their leisure interests; how they are influenced by cultural and economic change.

2. In my opinion, the most critical component directly related to people, is that of attractions. The things to see and do provide the engine power that drives the entire tourism system.

3. Lines should be drawn directly between people and attractions, except that transportation is required for this linkage.

4. It is only when people travel to attractions is there need for services and facilities, such as hotels, food service and entertainment.

5. Finally, we are influenced by many forms of information and direction.

Interpreting this for the coast raises many questions about how we could improve coastal tourism and land use. For example, are local people fully aware of their potential coastal attractions and are they willing to plan for their development that also protects rare and fragile resources? Are we anticipating the impact of changes in transportation and the very critical relationship this has with markets? Are we willing to plan for the services and facilities that publics need and want as they travel to and participate in the coastal zone? And, of increasing importance, are we promising, with our slick and convincing media presentations, more than can be delivered when the tourists arrive?

In addition to knowing the functional system, our land use planning task will be assisted greatly by understanding the difference between two types of tourism: touring and destination. Tourists who move from place to place on touring circuits need land use and attractions that can satisfy their special needs. As we turn, more and more, to package tours, both to satisfy the demand and to save energy, we will need to be aware of the
special needs of the touring tourists.

At the same time, the needs and special values of those who desire most of their entire leisure and vacation activity in and around one place deserve special planning. Their activities, and therefore the resources, must withstand repetitive use by the same people. And, not always are these two types completely compatible. Special land use planning is required for each type.

THE COAST AS A SPECIAL TOURIST PLACE

And now, for the third part of my comments, I would like to remind us of the special qualities of the coast that are so fundamental to tourism.

For a thousand years or more, coastal harbors, such as Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia, have provided refuge and settlement and have demonstrated our long-time affinity for this special land-water interface.

Some would describe our appreciation of such vistas toward the sea as based upon our biological origin from the sea cucumber.

Others would say that, burned into our psyche, is our historic dependence upon the products of the sea and the transportation it has offered for thousands of years. The waterfront continues to offer fascination as we visit harbor and shipping activities.

New England seaports, as with most in the United States, now look both back and ahead--back to the struggle to become established, and ahead toward the challenges of the future.

For many of us, we don't know why we are drawn to the coast but know that we are. The strength of esthetic appeal seems to be enough. Building upon these facts of the coastal drawing power, how can we refine this into better foundations for tourism land use?

One way of analyzing this very special zone is to divide it into these four zones. The coast is neither completely terrestrial nor is it oceanic. It is a special amalgam of both.

We could identify the near shore zone, spreading from the continental shelf to the beach, as the neritic zone. It is the richest zone for fishing and often contains interesting bars and reefs. It is well suited to cruising, sailing, and sometimes is used for travel to nearby islands. Visual contact with the sea is most important here; linkage with the land is only that of access.

The term, beach, could be applied to the next zone, that area where the land and water meet. This zone tends to support the most popular of coastal recreations. It means relaxation, building sandcastles, shore fishing, lounging, and a variety of active water sports. Watching and photographing people, the surf, shorebirds, sunrises and sunsets, are very popular in this zone.

The ribbon of land lying back of the beach, the shoreland, also has its special assets for recreation and tourism. It provides for many supporting
marine recreations, such as camping, picnicking, hiking and sometimes hotels and other service businesses. An important aspect is visual contact with the sea.

Only recently being discovered is the backland zone that others have labeled vicinage. For some people, this is preferred for development because it is protected from coastal storms, and generally is free from waterfront congestion. The sense of the coast remains and yet the water may not even be visible. Vacation homes, many recreation activities, resorts and coastal urban entertainment as well as service businesses are suitable uses for this zone.

It would appear that there is logic in sorting out the coastal zone into such linear segments. Historically, we have tended to follow a similar pattern for coastal development. With relatively low usage in the past it was convenient to bring circulation tight to the beach for quick access. However, enlarging this to expressway proportions, like that once proposed for New Orleans, and with high intensity use, such as at Miami Beach, the very esthetic and recreational utility of this rare resource is defeated.

Actually, our waterfront use pressures come from inland, perpendicular to the coastline. It is from the land that most of us arrive at the waterfront and we approach it in different contexts. So, in reality we need to overlay the linear system with a perpendicular system. And, the greatest pressure is at and near coastal cities. Cities are focal points for tourism. Therefore, our coastal tourism problems cannot usually be solved by looking toward the more remote intercity shoreline.

From this, I would like to suggest that we conceive of coastal tourism development in a manner of concentrated dispersal. By this I mean that we intentionally design clusters of concentration. Of course this requires attention to adequate infrastructure and management control. Each cluster could be based upon a logical theme for its setting—history, beautiful beach, industry, boat harbor. But, mass circulation would be removed from this area and placed outside all four tourism development zones. Short access links could tie these clusters with the main circulation system.

In our coastal redevelopment plans we could think of "building envelopes," even with highrise development. Open, park-like spaces between would provide vistas, access and enhance property values, both for the immediate building masses and those back from the shoreline. While I realize that this is based upon hindsight, I see no reason for repeating our mistakes when we continue to develop.

Why not actually design pleasant visitor places in between coastal industry and shipping? These could give us views and access at the same time giving us enlightenment regarding necessary uses of the coast. Perhaps we would all have greater sympathy and foster greater interaction between the many coastal decision-makers.

COASTAL TOURISM IN THE 1980s

The final segment of my comments is directed toward a brief look to the 1980s with the challenge that coastal tourism offers. Even though we are
now in a very dynamic adjustment period in tourism, I believe there are some special opportunities for tourism development. Let me just highlight a few.

By better use of water I am suggesting that we reach beyond the typical swimming, boating, fishing and vacation home use into more creative opportunities. For example, it took a TV series, not coastal planners, to stimulate an entirely new and innovative use of the dying cruise industry. This year, over 800,000 more people from North America took cruises than the year before. By using greater imagination and greater sensitivity to the assets of the coast, I am sure that we can make better leisure development in the future.

By better use of history I suggest that we move beyond the present phase of historic protection into historic interpretation and dramatization. Too often our museums are stuffed full of collections of the offal of life rather than the vibrant stories of their meaning of past life.

Fortunately, there is an upswell of activity in the performing arts, graphic arts, painting, sculpture, music and poetry as well as ancient crafts. But, as yet we have not understood and interpreted how these relate to place, especially on the coast. How can we better identify, describe and foster visitor contact with the places where arts and crafts are developing?

Obviously, with greater energy constraint, we will be seeking greater leisure opportunity nearer home. But, have we made the analysis of our local area potential for tourism development? Generally, I find that local people know the least about their own assets and need new leadership to stimulate local and area development for tourism.

My final point is perhaps the most critical of all. In spite of television and computer techniques and new organizations, I find that our tourism communication has not advanced very much over the last 50 years. Certainly, we need better interaction between the many tourism development actors. When this happens, the visitor is better satisfied, local people have a voice, the resource is protected and the economy gains. We need not wait for a federal grant or some new legislation. When the historic preservationists, businessmen, local people and developers sit down together and work out coastal plans for tourism, positive things happen.

Let me emphasize again that tourism is a community affair. It should have equal priority with other socio-economic issues when major community decisions are made.

Finally, we still have a long way to go to improve our communication between tourists and hosts. We still have poor maps, poor guidebooks, and poor tour guiding. The public is increasingly frustrated with lavish promotion but little guidance on:

- how to get to destinations,
- when they are open,
- what they will cost,
- what to wear,
- what the weather will be like,
- what travel etiquette is important,
- and how to fight back if things go wrong.
Let me conclude by raising some pertinent questions. Are we willing to put aside some of our prejudices and misconceptions of coastal development? Are we then willing to bring together all the components of the tourism system to work out our plans for the future? Are we willing to accept the principle that all three goals can be met at the same time: better satisfactions for visitors; better economic impact of tourism; and better protection of resources? If we can do these things I am confident that we could double or even triple the volume of tourist use without destroying our basic resources. I trust that I can come back in much less than 15 years and see great progress in tourism land use.

SELECTED SOURCES


