PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP IN TOURISM

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The purpose of this paper is to alert those in both public and private tourism and recreation in Oklahoma to a problem across the nation—that of lack of broad policies on planning and management. In my opinion businessmen are not as successful as they might be, visitors are not receiving the satisfaction they should and the environment is beginning to suffer from development. Much of this is due to the inability of public and private sectors of tourism and recreation to collaborate on development and on programs. In the following discussion, I would like to raise the question of goals, describe the tourism system, identify the need for collaboration, and offer a scenario—some ideas for possible remedy of the problem.

As I work with tourism, I become more convinced every day that it represents one of the most important happenings of our time. It is active, yet it is passive. It is beautiful, yet it is garish. It is nostalgic, yet it is modern. It depends on work, but offers pleasure. It costs, but it pays. It demonstrates another human right—the right to travel—that may be as important to Americans as all others. Yet, it is developing problems on a large scale.

By way of introduction to the problems of establishing good public-private partnership in tourism in this country, I would like to raise the question of goals. What are our goals and what are we doing to make sure we reach these goals?

A Realignment of Goals

I find in my study of both the public and the private sectors of tourism that the most widely accepted goal is that of economics. The economics of tourism dominates our state funding for tourism throughout the United States. If we entice more visitors to a state, we should be able to increase the employment, the incomes and the taxes. In the state of Texas, in 1974, tourists spent $4,812,860,000; contributing $428,344,000 to state taxes and employing 627,000 people. (Texas Visitor Industry 1974: 1975, 1-3) It was the economics of tourism that compelled us to establish the U.S. Travel Service—a federal agency dedicated to the promotion of more foreign visitors to improve our balance of payments. The economics of tourism is stimulating undeveloped countries throughout the world to look toward tourism as a boost to poor economies. Seeking the
economics of tourism is a very pervasive goal.

But, logical and as important as this is, I would like to challenge economics as the only important goal of tourism. In my opinion there are two other goals that tourism must meet if the economic benefits are to be obtained. Let me give some examples from my files that suggest there may be goals as important as that of economics.

The gasoline crisis squeezed out many small operators of tourist businesses, not because they were poor operators but because they were improperly located in the first place. It has been my observation that state highway departments, public park agencies and state planning departments generally would rather ignore tourist business interests than give them the planning information that would help them make sound decisions on location. I have evidence that some governmental agencies would even prefer that private enterprise would not succeed and make profits.

Throughout the coastal and waterfront development of the United States, I find a general reluctance on the part of tourist businessmen to defend and protect the very waterfront resources that put them in business. The example of the Mississippi coastal pollution problem of 1973-74 comes readily to mind. (Cartee: 1974) Bickering over the jurisdiction of the beaches and over how to define pollution overshadowed the issue of cleaning up the beaches. The main spark of concern did not come from tourism interests but from state health and pollution agencies. The only voice of tourism came from the hotels and motels who objected to posting beach pollution signs in their lobbies as their business dropped about 10 percent.

Many of us have experienced the clutter and congestion along the typical motel row as we approach our cities. Research now shows that the businessman is not necessarily helping himself with his many messages on signs along the street. Ewald states that "the average observer cannot distinguish between more than seven different sights or sounds presented to him simultaneously." (Ewald: 1971, 29) Considering the travel speed along these streets, no wonder that the public is confused with the chaos confronting him.

I commend the state tourist agencies for establishing the many tourist information centers along highways as they enter the states. However, I wonder if other tourists have had the same experience as I did on a 6,000 mile tour of eastern United States. At every information center, I was given some helpful information but also some very disconcerting misguidance. I was directed to highways that were not yet built; to interchanges that did not exist; to streets on the wrong side of town that took me an hour and a half to correct and to other information offices only to discover that they were closed. I was routed 100 miles out of my way to avoid a bridge that was closed due to flooding. By checking my own maps and making a little local inquiry, I found a detour and bridge that took me only 2 miles out of my way.
For several years I have been using Mission Bay Park development in San Diego in my lectures as an excellent example of public-private collaboration. This outstanding recreational complex of 4,600 acres of land and water has had millions of dollars-worth of input on a collaborative basis from many levels of government and private enterprise. However, I was much disappointed to find on my visit there this fall that the information center had been completely taken over by the business interests. In spite of the fact that the entire area is owned and run by the city park department, with fine beaches and other public facilities, you cannot obtain any literature or information on this major part of the park. Only commercial information on the restaurants, hotels and attractions is available.

Zehnder, in his book, *Florida's Disney World*, raises the question about the possibility that some areas in the future may not want tourists. (Zehnder: 1976) This is based upon some of the social and environmental implications and the physical development complications that come when a major attraction is established. The tourism assumption that more and more is better and better may be up for test.

The two common threads within all these examples suggest two goals of tourism that to me are as important as economics.

First, unless all businesses and public agencies in tourism have uppermost in their objectives the satisfaction of visitors—the provision of programs and development that foster satisfactory experiences—they will have difficulty in reaching economic goals.

Second, unless all businesses and public agencies in tourism understand the problems of environmental utilization, they will fail, in the long run, to provide either satisfactions to visitors or economic impact.

These two goals—better visitor satisfaction and better environmental utilization—take precedence over what I now observe to be the stated and operational objectives of most tourist agencies and organizations. So far, I know of no state or federal agency nor any private organization that is directing its efforts toward these two goals. Why is this? What seems to be the major obstacle toward identifying these and working toward their accomplishment?

Fragmentation and the Tourism System

As I see it, the major difficulty comes from fragmentation of tourism into the many parts that are functionally related but have no policies and take no overt action to relate. In the rush to develop land and facilities for tourism, we seem to have forgotten to establish any mechanism, formal or otherwise, to tie tourism together as a viable functioning system. Hence, any weakness or failure of a single part weakens or even kills all the other related parts. Obvious as this truth may be, it has escaped the attention of both public and private sectors of tourism.
throughout the land. This is especially critical at the planning stage.

I need remind no one of the drop in 1974 of Disney World stock from $123.87 to $37.62 a share. (Zehnder: 1975, 327). The action of the tourism leaders of Florida to persuade Congress not to ration gasoline was commendable. But, what have the many segments of tourism across the nation done since to consider the outcome of future threats, no matter the cause? I see no private or government organization taking any leadership in identifying and interrelating the many parts of tourism and seeing to it that the total system of tourism continues to function. My research tells me that there are several main components of the tourism system that must function in a dynamic way if each of the many, many pieces of tourism are to succeed.

This was the lesson we learned long ago in our extension advisory program for tourist operators in Michigan. One time I was asked by planners of the highway department if it would matter if they moved an important interchange one-half mile down the road. Obviously, it would make quite a difference to those who already had invested over 20 million dollars in facilities around the present interchange. There is more to motel or restaurant success, for example, than only the internal operations of motels and restaurants. There are many important externalities.

I would like to suggest that all of tourism can be placed into five major components and that all five have very strong external relationships.

If we look at our present state tourism public agencies we see a part of what might be called an information-direction component. Probably the best known and most heavily subsidized segment of tourism is that of state advertising. But, there are other parts of this component. What we learn from books, news stories, radio and TV is very important to our understandings of tourist destinations. Word-of-mouth information from friends and relatives has much to do with our selection of places to travel. Within our parks, the interpretive programs help us greatly in our understandings of what we are viewing. The entire information-direction component is very comprehensive and important.

Another component of our dynamic tourism system is that which produces the greatest economic impact on communities and states—the services and facilities. Employment, income and taxes are cited often as the treasures to be found at the end of the tourism development rainbow. It is through the motels, hotels, restaurants, shops and entertainment that this impact is made. And, a significant portion of this comes through public agencies as well as private enterprise.

Personally, I like to single out transportation as a third component of the tourism system even though it is similar to other facilities and services. The total transportation of people is a psychological as well as a commodity process. In addition to coordination of the many modes of transportation, consideration must be given to the comfort, convenience and preferences of visitors. For example, it is increasingly
acceptable to take people out of their cars for bus tours, horseback
trails and carriage rides, provided it is done in good quality. Certainly,
both public and private roles are critical to the success of all transport-
ation.

A fourth component is one that also cuts across public and private
lines—attractions. Attractions are the places and activities that give
the traveler satisfaction at his destination and lure him to travel from
home in the first place. In spite of their importance, the powerful force
of attractions, such as national and state parks, is still not well known--
at least not well supported by the prime tourist businesses, such as hotels,
motels and restaurants. The objective of the traveler is not merely to
move about or to stay at a hotel that is just like the one he has at home.
Attractions are made up of many things. They are heavily dependent upon
location and a set of resource characteristics that make them attractive.
While many attractions, such as Six Flags Over Texas and Disney World,
are profitmaking, the majority across the nation are in public ownership
and management.

Finally, and probably the most important component of the tourism
system is that body of people with the ability and desire to travel.
We have become so accustomed to this category that we often take it for
granted. Many of us who travel frequently take air travel for granted
and believe that everyone else is equally interested. However, less than
17 percent of travelers in the United States actually go by air. (1974
National Travel Survey: 1975) Delta Airlines reports that 85 percent
of their business comes from 15 percent of their customers. (Bertino:
1976) Not everyone likes to travel. Not everyone enjoys the same things.
Not everyone has the same amount to spend on travel. Not everyone is lo-
cated within the same reference to the transportation systems and attrac-
tions. Yet, much of our development, advertising and promotion assumes
that all travelers are alike.

My fundamental argument is that each of these five components—a
body of travelers, attractions, transportation, services-facilities and
information-direction—tends to ignore the many pieces of the other com-
ponents with planning and management policies. The motel man does not
feel he has any relationship to the government policies that are used
in the management of a highway except when a policy irritates him.

I wonder how many people directly in the tourist service business
have read the complete findings and recommendations of the National Tour-
ism Resources Review Commission. Many examples are cited regarding the
consequences throughout the country of the lack of integration of a total
tourism system. For example, in the federal government alone, there are
over 100 programs scattered throughout at least 50 agencies dealing with
tourism, including ownership of 85 percent of all outdoor recreation lands--
but they never communicate with one another. (Destination USA: 1973,
4/3) Furthermore, there is little communication with the businesses in
the field. How can we possibly reach the goals of better visitor satis-
faction and better environmental utilization if we are not communicating?
Assuming the Role

Because I believe so completely in private enterprise and realize the critical importance business has had in the development of this country, I would like to see it take the lead. I am convinced that the business interests have everything to gain by insisting upon greater collaboration on planning overall tourist development.

It seems, however, that tourist businesses are preoccupied with other missions. And, instead of collaborating, often oppose government. Recently, for example, I met with a state motel association. The members were proud of the information presented by four speakers from government, describing ongoing programs for promoting and developing tourism. However, in face of this, the president declared to the newcomers in the audience that the main purpose of their organization was to fight government.

If private enterprise aborts this role, government may have to accept it. Perhaps the function of an overall catalyst for collaboration on tourist development is logical at both the state and federal level. It may be that the existing powers of state tourism agencies should be enlarged to take on this responsibility.

Let me give you an example in which this could have been very effective. It took two years and over a million dollars for environmentalists, fishing and oyster interests and owners of a major resort complex in South Carolina, completely on their own, to defeat the enticements of the state industrial development agency to lure a German petro-chemical plant to Hilton Head Island. Ironically, no state tourism business interests nor the state tourism agency came to their aid. They looked the other way. (McCaskey, 1972)

Frankly, I am not so much concerned about who does this job as that it get done. Without the creation of any new agencies or organizations, I am confident that all existing elements of tourism could do a much better job if attention were directed more toward collaboration, especially on planning.

Before I speculate on what might be possible with greater collaboration—a scenario—let me draw some conclusions:

First, from a marketing point of view, the public is looking for security and certainty that they are not getting. When package tours are aborted midstream; when advertising promises tropical temperatures and bikini-clad maidens on the beach and the tourist finds near-freezing temperatures and no other life than a dead crab; when a park is closed after driving 2000 miles to get there—that "set of human activities directed at facilitating and consummating exchanges," a contemporary definition of marketing, completely breaks down. (Kotler: 1972, 12)

Second, tourism as now practiced, violates basic tenets of modern human ecology. As we have exploited our natural resources we have been
more concerned about economics than ethics, property rights than societal amenities, and consumption of resource assets than their protection.

Third, today in 1976 in America, tourism, as a unified system with continuity and integration of its parts, does not exist. Yes, we have tourist businesses; we have state and national advertising agencies; we have tourists. But, if we think of a total functional system of tourism we do not have in this country any organization or agency, public or private, that is concerned with bringing the many parts into harmony and with keeping the system running in harmony.

A Scenario

The following discussion is not a projection of the past but a completely contrived scenario. This is offered not as a plan for adoption but as a collection of possibilities if the entire tourism system were developed and maintained on an integrated basis.

As a beginning, the family is planning a vacation trip. Instead of stumbling upon place names by scanning distorted advertising by only those places wealthy enough to advertise, the family makes contact with the local tourist advisor. Every city has one as part of the local continuing education or local park and recreation department. The advisors are financed jointly by the local community and the state tourism agency. The family is given instant computer video and printout information on the location of attractions, accommodations and highway routings. With refinements, data on alternate routings, the climate of the destination area and the proper clothing to wear could be offered.

This information is backed up, not with a promiscuous scatter of voluntary advertising folders that really provide little help but rather a series of well-written and beautifully illustrated guide books. The writing is not promotional but is an accurate description of the features in terms of responses already obtained from previous visitors.

In addition, a regular daily news column, written by a new breed of journalist—the travel critic—offers insight into the many aspects of tourist travel. Instead of producing saccharine descriptions of utopian resorts, this writer tells it like it is, in exactly the same manner as a drama or music critic.

Because word-of-mouth information has proven to be more influential than advertising upon most travelers a new service capitalizes on this fact. The prospective traveler can obtain from his travel counsellor the names of neighbors who have visited the attraction he wishes to learn more about. The names have been forwarded to the counsellors from the attraction destination.

All information systems are coordinated with highway departments, airlines and advertisers to assist travelers in finding these locations
as they travel. All highway signs are coordinated. Because information is provided primarily by literature, radio, TV and counsellors, the need for billboards is eliminated, maintaining a more attractive roadside.

Each state transportation agency has regular input from the tourism agency, keeping it informed on trends in tourist flows and new land development. As soon as a major attraction or vacation home complex is decided upon, for example, the highway planning office goes into gear to determine if highway changes are needed. Affected communities are alerted before a development takes place so that proper transportation and other services can be developed.

Better mixes of transportation modes are available. Airports are tied to bus lines, mass transit and the interstate highway system. At every node, complete information about related travel is available.

Regarding attractions, all federal and state agencies relating to land for recreation and protection have identified those portions of their lands that serve this tourism function. Guide and interpretive functions have been set up not only for protection of the environment but for the interest of visitors. Sites connected to, but away from, the prime attractions are planned for concentrated services, such as lodging and food service. Instead of exercising antagonistic attitudes toward private enterprise, these agencies collaborate by assisting businesses on location and planning.

Through market research, it has been found that all travelers can be classified into interest clusters. The activity listings of the past—fishermen, hunters, skiers, etc.—were found to be of no value to planning. Instead, interest clusters are useful. For example, those who like symphonies also like superlative scenery as in national parks, fine road plays at vacation playhouses, gourmet restaurants, and nature paintings and photographs.

Attraction development in all states has taken on an entirely new concept. A sophisticated planning system eliminates much of the hodgepodge popular today. The foundation for this is recognition, as in agriculture, that not all lands have equal potential for development. Contrary to the egalitarian "chamber of commerce" approach, each piece of geography is recognized as having a different set of natural and cultural assets and liabilities, different relationships to sources of people, different relationships to service communities and different relationships to access and transportation. Therefore, some areas have great potential for tourism whereas others do not. Federal and state tourism policy provides incentives to those areas with greatest potential, which includes as a prerequisite, least damage to both the social and physical environment.

Each state has been analyzed to lay the base for two types of potential: 1) areas with greatest assets for touring or travel-through types of tourist development and 2) areas with potential for destination-ori-
ented tourists. Where the two types converge, there is greatest po-
tential for private enterprise to provide all the commercial support services--
food, lodging and entertainment. In either case, planning coordination
provides public-private land use and design of the highest quality.

Readily available to both existing elements of tourism and potential
investors is this complete data base and coordinated planning service.
Both natural resource and cultural resource factors, very important to
attractions, have been studied and mapped. Additional factors, such as
transportation routes, existing development, established community centers,
and relationship to prime tourism markets have been identified.

Conclusions

I offer this scenario not as a blueprint for state tourism agencies
or for private enterprise organizations. Rather, I suggest it only for
consideration of new collaboration and cooperation between and among the
many parts of tourism. The lack of attention to the total system and the
lack of desire on the part of both public agencies and private enterprise
to share common goals and work out their own mechanisms for planning to-
gether--for the selfish benefit to each other--is an obstacle that can
be overcome.

Why can't we research markets more completely and more deeply to
see what people really want and do? Why can't we improve our transporta-
tion systems to reflect the real needs of people on vacation and in their
leisure? Why can't we recognize the interests of people in the develop-
ment and operation of both public and private attractions no matter the
jurisdiction? Why can't the service businesses see more clearly the need
for supporting the protection of certain resource assets and the develop-
ment of public and non-profit attractions? When major public recreation
and park areas are established, why can't government agencies see their
responsibility to both visitors and private enterprise? Why can't some
so-called environmental groups recognize that the mass traveling public
as well as ecology buffs have a right to enjoy and gain enriching experi-
ences from contact with natural and cultural resources? Why can't our
information and direction services be more accurately and more clearly
directed to people's needs and interests and at the same time foster both
the social and economic values of tourism? What can't our state and fed-
eral government accept a more comprehensive coordinating and planning
role in concert with private enterprise?

In short, why can't we have joint planning between private enterprise
and government that will be concerned about making the total tourism system
work—for the betterment of the visitors, for the betterment of business
and for the betterment of the environment?
References

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