RESEARCH APPLIED TO PLANNING

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The main mission of this section of the program is to discuss research as it applies to tourism planning — how research has been used in planning. This is an exciting challenge because the terms research and planning represent two quite opposite meanings, especially for tourism. Research states what is and what has been. Planning, however, provides guidelines about what could be and what should be.

For example, planning implies some kind of ideal situation — something new, different, untried. Planning says that tomorrow we should be able to do better than today. Planning, therefore, contains an element of fantasy, of utopianism. The future of tourism depends greatly upon creative ideas by those who seek better tourism. Certainly, this has been proven by the innovations of the past. If we cannot dream, we are bound to keep repeating what we did yesterday — good or bad.

On the other hand, research is the only process upon which we can base good planning. How can we plan ahead if we have made no systematic effort to document the present and past? Both of the introductory speakers emphasized the role of research in planning in their opening remarks. Therefore, planning — if it is to be enlightened planning and not all fantasy — must depend upon facts derived from good research.

It seems to me that there are two types of research very important to tourism planning. One type could be called project research. This is research we do on site analysis, market analysis or perhaps business feasibility. It is the use of systematic approaches for a specific project on a specific site. It is usually proprietary and therefore others in the field will not benefit because the results are not reported to the public. It is a benefit to a specific client for his planning and decision making.

A second type of research, also important to tourism planning, could be called that of building the knowledge base. This research takes on problems that face many businessmen and utilizes the scientific method to produce some worthwhile answers. The results are not proprietary but are available to everyone. For example, the research that Douglas Frechtling and the U.S. Travel Data Center produced for Texas showed the economic and job impact of tourism on a county basis. As a consequence, counties who thought they had no stake in tourism are now stimulated to organize, develop and promote tourism as never before. Another example comes from a student of mine. She found in her research of historic sites that people actually used these sites in ways not anticipated and planned for by either planners-designers or managers.

In my opinion, both types of research are important to tourism planning. If businesses, states and provinces are to plan for new needs, I believe we will have to perform both project and knowledge-building research.

It is not easy to organize a panel such as this because applications of research to planning are not that plentiful. First of all, except for individual business planning, we are just now getting interested in the field of planning. For years, we have believed that development and promotion were the only keys to successful tourism. Now, we increasingly hear about the negative impacts of tourism and how we should plan to avoid them.

Personally, I think there are equally important positive reasons — that we can make more money; that we can provide even more enjoyable tourism experiences; and that we can do an even better job of protecting our resources — if the many segments of tourism could get together when they plan. Furthermore, how often do we go back and research the results of our planning and development, after things are built and after programs are initiated?

The following three presentations have been chosen to represent three levels of scale in the application of research to planning — the regional scale, the community scale, and the site scale.