SHOULD FUNCTION OR POLICY DICTATE PLANNING?

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As millions more acres of land are regularly pressed into service for tourism and parks, the problems of planning are compounded greatly. Clues can be found not only in the increased conflict between public agencies and between the public and private sector but between all developers and the new breed of protectionists. The purpose of this discussion is to suggest that through functional planning many problems can be avoided. The concept of function offers much greater hope than that of individualized policy if we are to have the advantages of well-planned environments.

For planning purposes, the two major leisure modes--tourism and parks--should be considered together even though they are different. Both cater to people who travel, who spend money and who gain some satisfactions from investments in land, facilities and programs.

This discussion is developed in three parts: some functional fundamentals important to both public and private development, some problems arising from a policy-only planning approach and a suggested functional concept for consideration. (Much of this material is drawn from Vacationscape, by the author.)

Functional Fundamentals

Threaded through all tourism and park development are at least five fundamentals that are critical to planning. Our present system of planning
is so tightly linked with policy within both the public and private sectors that these fundamentals are not always clear.

1. **Attractions come first.** Although many components are important, the attracting forces seem to have priority over all others. Visitors do not come to parks and commercial facilities because they must in order to make a living, because they are coerced by a public power or because they feel obligated to make either Hilton or the National Park Service succeed. They go because they are lured by some attracting force. No commercial or public service for tourism or recreation can succeed if visitors are not lured to attraction destinations. Hotel rooms and interpretive educational programs are not needed if there is no one there to use them.

Functionally, attractions can be defined as developed physical entities that provide for activities desired by people at leisure. This definition, of course, cuts across many separate policy-making bodies.

In the United States, attractions are planned, owned and operated by members of all three economic sectors: First, governments—federal to local—perform an investment and operational role for tourism and recreation as well as one of control and regulation. Governments, through ownership and management of parks, reserves, reservoirs, forests and scenic highways provide many attractions. Second, most of the historic sites, festivals, pageants and youth camps are run by non-profit organizations. Third, private enterprise provides attractions ranging in kind all the way from the Navajo rug-weaver to the Disneyland complex.

Furthermore, attractions vary depending upon the objective of the traveler. Planning by policy, rather than by function, tends to ignore this fundamental. All attractions could be grouped into five broad categories of traveler objectives.
a. Undoubtedly the most popularly attended category throughout the United States is that of **sightseeing attractions**. By the millions, we love to view and photograph scenery, visit historic sites and buildings and investigate exotic lands.

b. **Resort and convention attractions**, with golf courses, health-building facilities and entertainment, are growing in many regions. Conventions and conferences are being held increasingly where a variety of tourist and recreation attractions can be found.

c. **Outdoor recreation attractions** encompass a wide variety of activities of growing popularity and are offered by both public and private interests.

d. Exploding across the country are **vacation home subdivisions and complexes**, ranging from palatial estates to mobile home clusters. While most of these are private ventures, some public park agencies include them in their offerings of attractions.

e. Many people are interested in traveling to and participating in festivals, races, rodeos, celebrations, pageants and other **event attractions**.

No matter how classified, the concept of attraction is an important one--important because of its basic function for all tourism and recreation activity.

At the same time, the concept of attraction is a very complicated phenomenon. Some attractions, such as Waikiki Beach, can be treated as a commodity and therefore merchandised through common marketing channels. Attractions are also subject to cultural and psychological factors less easily manipulated. The decision to travel and visit a Liberty Bell is as much a factor of the culture of America and the collective perception of people in Los Angeles, Chicago or Dallas as it is a factor under the control of resource managers. The right to travel and experience new or familiar activities is strongly cherished by most Americans. In any case, for governments and the private sectors, attractions
offer the power-generating force for recreation interest, movement and rewards to resource owners and managers.

2. **Clusters are superior to single attractions.** A second functional fundamental of importance to all policy-makers is that of clustering. Visitors, more and more, seek groupings of attractions into clusters large enough to satisfy a variety of interests rather than a single desire.

Some attraction clusters are under the control of several owner-managers. For example, New London, Connecticut, and vicinity make up an important cluster—far more effective than its parts taken separately. The cluster includes many features including the first site of the United States Navy. Not far is Mystic Seaport, a whaling museum that was planned and developed to include a collection of buildings, ships and artifacts depicting the whaling era of America. Nearby are several interesting Revolutionary War villages that have been restored for visitor inspection. These, together with many other attraction features such as the coastal beaches produce an attraction cluster focused on history and water.

Other significant attraction clusters are under one overall owner-manager-ship and therefore one set of policies, such as Yosemite National Park. It includes massive granite-walled canyons and waterfalls reaching 3,000 feet above a meadow-and-forest valley floor. It contains interesting flora and fauna including the spectacular Mariposa Grove of ancient sequoia trees.

Many other examples throughout the nation and the world demonstrate the principle of clustering as a fundamental of tourism-recreation function.

3. **Circulation corridors are important.** Functionally, our transportation systems are made up of much more than just the travelways. The entire visual sweep is activated during pleasure travel. Actually, this is ascribing an attraction as well as a transport function to the movement of people. It admits that travel is as much a psychological activity as a physical one,
The traveler often puts into play a number of separate transportation policy-making bodies. It is not unusual for a traveler to start from home by car or taxi and then travel by a 747, by a bus and then by an aerial gondola at a sightseeing destination or a ski resort. Nor is it unusual to travel by steamship, ferry or pack team. But, the traveler well knows that his transportation corridors were not planned for his total function but for the goals set by scattered policy.

4. Cities are critical to all tourism and recreation. Cities, as well as remote resource areas, are functionally important for tourism and parks in several ways.

Cities serve as transportation nodes. They supply the exchange and terminal points for rail lines, highways, airlines and steamship routes.

Cities provide the traveler an opportunity to shop. Shopping is one of the most important activities of tourists and some park administrators have included shopping areas near or within their attraction areas. Frequently, however, this important function is against park policy.

Cities serve as centers of culture. Many visitors are curious about the culture of other locations and want to see it first hand. Many capital cities are visited by millions of travelers each year. Each capital has its own personality and tends to reflect the differing characteristics of its people, land and historic background such as Salt Lake City with its monument to the seagull.

Urban parks, such as the San Antonio River Walk, are popular with visitors as well as local citizens. Our survey of voters of San Antonio indicated that they were very proud and defensive of their River Walk in spite of the fact that over 70 percent of the visitors come from out of town (Gunn, Reed and Couch, 1972: 60).
Most history was written in the cities; therefore, many cities are now engaged in the restoration of their heritage and artifacts. Those responsible for restoration, however, seldom believe that they are fostering the functions of tourism and park activity.

Cities are the places for many cultural events, popular with both local citizens and visitors. The local government of Ottawa, Canada, was forced by tourists and public opinion to continue the Changing of the Guard ceremony after dropping it a few years as an economy measure.

Cities provide other important functions for tourism and parks—entertainment and the homes of friends and relatives. Frequently, visits to friends and relatives are combined with visits to parks and extensive resource attractions.

The functional role of cities is important but seldom incorporated into policy and planning of tourist businesses and parks.

5. Functionally, all attractions depend upon natural and cultural resources. The special resource characteristics of places have much to do with tourism and park functions.

For many attractions, natural resource assets are important. For some, water and waterlife characteristics are critical. For others, the vegetative cover is especially important. We know that climate has something to do with certain types of touristic activities but we are not sure about its many ramifications. Air conditioning has altered the significance of natural climate in some locations. The quality of air is critical in many attraction destinations. Topographic change, soils, wildlife and geologic conditions can play a very important role in development. The esthetic qualities of natural resources, such as wildlife, are increasingly important.

Overlooked by many policymakers in the park and tourist field are the cultural resources. As a country we are just now maturing sufficiently to
take a stronger interest in our past and therefore historic restoration and interpretation are becoming important, functionally. Cultural institutions, such as the Woods Hole oceanographic complex in Massachusetts or NASA installations in Florida and Texas, become targets for a great amount of pleasure and educational travel. Although many of us are critical of industry these days we forget that functionally thousands of tourists seek industrial attractions. The United States Travel Service furnishes guidebooks to foreign travelers listing over 6,000 plant tours in this country. Cultural events, such as festivals, pageants, parades and ceremonials frequently are of as much interest to the outsider as to the native.

The discussion thus far has emphasized that attractions are extremely important; that they thrive best when clustered; that circulation corridors are more than travel ways; that cities perform many critical functions and that attractions depend heavily upon natural and cultural resources. However, seldom do we plan according to these functional principles. We go by policy. And, this causes us some problems.

Planning Problems

The emphasis upon policy rather than function has resulted in many difficulties that not only hinder the user and the developer but also cause environmental deterioration.

We often preempt sites by virtue of first-come-first-serve policies. Sometimes beaches are taken over by non-recreation users, not because they need them but because beaches happened to come with the land they needed for their main purposes. Some beaches are preempted by industry; other lands are frequently preempted by highways. An example is removal of a street and excavation of soil to a depth of thirty-five feet to recover important artifacts in the restoration of the Saugus Iron Works attraction, located above
Boston. Industrial preemption sometimes reaches beyond the individual site by pumping out noxious fumes damaging to campground and recreational uses some distance away.

Resources are frequently eroded because we haven't taken a functional approach. Forest trees were killed when intensive recreational areas such as campgrounds and playgrounds were built directly beneath them. Flood plains are not suited to motel and restaurant building as Agnes well demonstrated last summer. Sometimes, erosion of resources is caused by well-meaning acts. For example, new "open beach" legislation in Texas fosters promiscuous use, conflict and abuse by mixing too many automobiles, people, dogs and recreation vehicles on a narrow and environmentally fragile strand of beach along the Gulf coast. A logical sorting of recreational functions has given way to policy.

Our fragmented approach allows some very bad juxtapositions of development. Many historic buildings are obscured by the bad esthetics of signs and decadent structures. Highrise construction on beaches violates the rights of others to free and open visual and physical access to the water's edge. Otherwise beautiful vistas are often spoiled by shoddy or badly designed supporting structures. Frequently, the entrances to our most highly-prized park attractions thread the public through a garish tunnel of cluttered huckstering. Not all fragmentation is carried on by private enterprise. Often, differing design policies by different public agencies create startling contrasts of landscapes, signs and buildings at points where their jurisdictions meet.

Many other problems that contribute to reduced profits for private enterprise, reduced rewards to public agencies, reduced visitor satisfactions and certainly depredation of environments could be cited. The end result of giving policy priority over function may be greater diversity but most often
it results in a chaotic mass of unrelated development. Needed are the mechanisms that can foster a functional approach at the same time that the integrity of individual policy can be maintained.

A Concept

If the above observations are correct, the logical next step is to devise ways of planning for tourism and recreation development that will protect basic resource assets and yet offer all the functional elements needed for a viable and integrated system. Through collaboration of the separate policy-making bodies at an early stage of development it may be possible to meet all goals: increased visitor satisfaction, increased success for developers and better opportunities for protecting unique resource areas.

Suppose, for example, that appropriate representatives of the federal government (Interior, Agriculture, Corps of Engineers, Transportation) and a local city government, along with county and state representation, sat down together and agreed to view the future of tourism and recreation development and non-development in a given area. Without great effort and even without complicated processing, they could identify logical functional elements that could help them in all their policymaking, but especially for tourism and recreation.

A first step would be the identification of the functional position of the city with relation to transportation access and to the resources—both natural and cultural—within a radius of influence of that city.

Through study of the resource characteristics—their location, importance, uniqueness, and relation to the city services—new attraction cluster potential could be identified. By ignoring land price, ownership, and legal controls at this stage, the true strengths and weaknesses of the area could be determined.
The factual understanding of the land is not colored by political or economic pressures.

Armed with such a view of the area, those who seek protection or development can begin to evaluate individual policy. Park interests can look toward those lands that functionally should be considered for their development or protection. It is then that ownership constraints can be investigated. Private interests can view potential development based upon tourism functions and then look into costs, controls and related factors.

Truly creative and artistic design concepts for beautiful, orderly and functional development—both new and remodeled—can grow from such a systematic approach. No individual owner need be robbed of his initiative. On the contrary, he has even greater ability for innovation because his development is predicated upon a broader functional matrix. Personally, I am convinced that such an approach is feasible and capable of meeting many desirable goals. However, it now lacks credibility on the part of those who push for policy before function.

Several years ago, we experimented with this concept in Michigan's Upper Peninsula (Blank, et al., 1966). Its success was dependent upon how seriously the area's leaders would consider function before policy. There is now evidence that to the degree the investors, developers and land management agencies considered function before policy, much progress has been made. Many lands have been planned and in several locations legal zoning controls have been initiated. New investment has been made on lands that were identified as having growth potential. Certain unique resource areas have been placed under federal and state protection.

The process of our analysis followed a course of steps that led to conclusions and overall recommendations for the entire region:
1. A first step was the study of the geographic position of the region identifying such facts as being within one day's drive of 40 million people.

2. We studied the natural and cultural resources of the region. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed for clues to tourist and recreation implications. By generalizing the data, broad groupings of characteristics became clear. For example, the distribution of the cities and transportation routes around the periphery left the interior open and relatively undeveloped. On the other hand, the relatively uniform distribution of forests throughout the region gave no area competitive advantage over another.

3. A third step was synthesis of research findings. Markets were identified. Surveys of traveler behavior were made. These, together with the resource analysis, were then synthesized to derive characteristics, meaning and conclusions. We could then graphically show the distribution of areas having special functional relationship to tourism and park potential.

4. From this grew a concept for development and general functional recommendations. A hierarchy of travelways was proposed. A total of 100 potential attraction clusters were identified. Based upon the location of the cities and the potential attraction clusters, ten development zones were identified. Finally, a vast area was identified as a conservation zone from which touristic development should be withheld but in which other land uses may be appropriate: agriculture, mining, wildlife propagation.

Private investors were given guidance for types and locations of development; park agencies were given support for locating new park areas; community leaders were given programs for expansion; highway agencies were supplied basic information for future planning. All were based upon regional functional analysis.
Conclusions

From this discussion, based upon observation and research, it may be concluded that many of our planning and development problems could be avoided if the concept of tourist and park functions were collectively considered before making individual policy. Additional conclusions:

1. Consideration of function before policy can provide the base for identifying areas that should be either withheld from development or could be developed for tourism and parks;

2. Functional planning demands collaboration and cooperation to a much higher degree than we have been able to demonstrate to date;

3. Functional planning allows for profitmaking and conservation as compatible goals;

4. Implementation of functional planning may demand new governmental approaches above and beyond present agency structure.

References


Gunn, Clare A., David Reed and Robert Couch. 1972. Cultural Benefits from Metropolitan River Recreation--San Antonio Prototype. College Station, Texas: Texas Agricultural Experiment Station, Texas A&M University.