TOURISM DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES

Current jitters of inflation, international currency uncertainty, political instability, energy constraint and terrorism would seem to force strong curtailment of tourism. While these factors are exerting reductions of travel in some localities, on a world-wide basis they are outweighed elsewhere by expanding growth of tourism development. The creation of new nations, the growth of populations, the need for new economic expansion and the search for higher human values are forcing even greater tourism development. Development is the dominant theme for undeveloped and developing countries.

But, contrary to popular belief, tourism development is far more complicated than any other form of economic expansion. Misunderstanding this important fact is misleading many regions into not only disappointment but also tragedy. In some locations, tourism development has caused severe social conflict, costing both loss of lives and damage to property. Tourism development is more susceptible to international shifts in monetary exchange, conflict of government ideologies, and clash of cultures. It can change more drastically within only a few months time, boom or bust. And, it involves a much greater network of independent and yet interrelated segments of business and public development. Yet, tourism holds greater promise for cultural and economic interchange, even for peace and understanding, than does any other form of economic development.

Without greater understanding of the complexity of tourism, undeveloped and developing countries may never reach the potential they seek from tourism. Narrow perspectives, such as "give us your millions of dollars," "train our waiters and roommaids," "build us some airports," are not only naive tourism development solutions; they can be damaging. Such comments dangerously place
responsibility for development upon outsiders. They also oversimplify the complexity of tourism. Yes, it is important to have adequate investment moneys. Yes, it is essential to have hotels, airports, airlines, and trained staffs. But, of what value are hotels and airlines if the scenery, the beaches, the wildlife and the soils are eroded or polluted? Of what value are these tourist services if the cultural resources—historic sites, buildings, shrines, archeological rarities—are vandalized or destroyed by the new tourist development and the influx of the visitors? Of what value are hotels and airlines if dumped upon a local society that goes into culture shock from invasions of tourists and new economic standards? Of what value is tourism, economically and socially, to a local area if visitors are angry with what they found (or did not find) and vow never to return?

All tourism development will fail if the ultimate social goals are minimized or forgotten. Unless every individual traveler gains—mentally, physically—from his travel experience, tourism development will have failed. While a degree of travel difficulty is accepted as adventure, some rewards must be evident or tourists will no longer invest the time, money and effort in travel. For some, it is a mental thrust back into ancient time, standing before the temples of Peking, Bankok or India. Others are fascinated by the inns of Scotland, Paradores of Spain or the pensions of Paris. Deeper roots are stirred when experiencing the archeological wonders of Tikal, Jerusalem or the Incas of Peru. For some, the visit to friends and relatives in another land is sufficient cause for travel. Many are awed by the grace, beauty and power of animal life of Africa, Australia or the Rocky Mountaines. For generations, the sea has had special appeal: nearby at a resort, on the surface in a cruise ship, scuba diving under the surface. Elusive and ill-defined are the esthetic pleasures of spectacular scenery, remaining for years in the mind or in the photo albums of travelers. For many, the physical activities in foreign or domestic destinations offer greatest rewards: skiing, swimming,
golfing, hunting, hiking, mountain climbing, hang gliding. But, for many, satisfactions gained from experiencing exotic cultures and visiting the great cities of the world are worth the travel. And, of importance to nearly all tourists is sharing the experience with others.

All these, and more, are evidence of great importance of the tourism experience. Some observers believe that pleasure travel is one of the few remaining creative acts yet open to man. In many countries the freedom to travel is considered a prime right of citizenship. While no one can guarantee or force personal satisfaction, tourism planners and developers must be aware of establishing and protecting those environments most likely to bring desired rewards to visitors, not what the administrators of tourism believe should be developed.

Tourism development is complicated. It involves many actors (developers, managers, governments). It utilizes many of the same social and economic elements that we have created for other forms of trade and cultural life. It depends upon a great many natural and cultural resource assets of geographic settings.

From the geographical and operational standpoints (equally important to the political and economic aspects) it may be useful to view tourism development from three separate levels or scales: (1) region—perhaps the size of a small country or a state in the United States, (2) area—large enough to contain one or more communities and their galaxies of attractions, and (3) site—the individual property occupied by a hotel, resort, theme park, transportation corridor or other element of tourism development. Each of these levels demands the very best technical, professional, scientific and political input possible. The best of older establishments should be emulated and their errors should be understood and avoided. The best of new and innovative solutions should be encouraged. Now is the time for the most fluid and inventive approaches to tourism development, and at all levels of scale.
SITE

The most commonly perceived, and yet misunderstood, development scale today is the site level. Reasonably well understood is the need for developing individual sites for hotels, restaurants and highways. Popularly known is the high economic input from these services—employment, income, taxes. Increasingly, professional designers have influenced both site and structural development for tourism. Generally, these facilities are more attractive and better adapted to site conditions than ever before.

But, there are many problems at the site scale that must be overcome. For example, specialization among designers has often led to poorly integrated functioning. The client-designer relationship often omits concern over the real user—the tourist. And, almost never are evaluative studies made of designed and built sites to see how well they function, either for management or for tourists.

Overemphasis upon economies of scale has favored the large versus the small. As a consequence, tourists are increasingly dissatisfied with service from too-large and too-impersonal facilities and services. Along with a few increased efficiencies, bigness also brings more complicated and more distant management, increased safety hazards for guests, and greater impact when the business fails. Developing countries and their tourist localities need to seek out a mix of both the small and the large in determining the best scale adapted to their local conditions. In many instances, the small scale can better reflect indigenous site and building conditions, utilize local labor management more effectively and provide much more personal service to the tourist.

In some countries, over-regulation of site-scale development is hampering adaptation to changing tourist markets. Excessive governmental control and regulation tends to deny the individual site the freedom to respond to changing markets. No matter the political ideology, (planned-economies,
free-enterprise) it is essential for best service to tourists that the site-scale unit be allowed ample freedom to provide the kind of service desired by the travelers. No high-level bureau of government can possibly conceive of the diversity of need at the site scale.

At the site scale, many developing countries cannot fully enter into tourism development without greater training of entrepreneurship. Unless this element has been prominent in the past cultural development, it must be created. While it may be necessary to import foreign entrepreneurs to get started, the greatest local and national benefits can be derived only when tourism is developed by a country's own people. To get started, it may be necessary for government to establish training and development programs directed toward the creation of new entrepreneurs.

It is essential for all tourism development at the site scale to be established and to operate within an area perspective, recognizing that the site is an integral part of overall community and area development.

AREA

At the area development level, tourism issues beyond sites are introduced. The collection of tourist-oriented sites, cities and communities, and the surrounding area with its attractions, pose new development relationships not of concern at the site scale.

Increasingly, we are recognizing the significance in overall tourism functioning of the role of cities, communities and villages. Misguided tourism development has sometimes created facilities (hotels, airports) at outlying attraction sites, where they have eventually failed. This is lack of recognition of the need for facilities and services to be located generally at thriving cities within a reasonable access distance from the attractions. The reasons are simple. Cities provide the main travel termini, the basic infrastructure, and communications as well as the labor, management and finance
needed for development. Many of the services used by tourists—food service, shopping, entertainment, tours—are also used by local people and depend upon business from both to succeed. Cities most often contain basic attractions, originally established for local cultural reasons, such as museums, historic sites, archeological sites, shrines, theaters, entertainment and specialty food places.

Radiating from cities and within a reasonable travel distance, lies the greatest potential for tourism development. Remote locations are extremely costly and are difficult to manage. Even though natural and cultural resource assets may not be as plentiful nearer cities, they have greater potential than do the same kinds of resources at remote sites.

Special resource-oriented sites, such as national parks, would seem to violate the principle of development within a radius of cities. The apparent conflict comes from the dual role of national parks: protection of the resource assets and use by visitors. While one national policy may serve to identify areas for protection, their use by visitors demands another policy which must vary with proximity of cities. For example, it is much more practical (desired by visitors and more profitable for entrepreneurs) to locate services (hotels, entertainment, shopping) in the city, shuttling visitors to the national park to enjoy its resources. Better protection of the resource can be obtained and the urbanized concentration of facilities, often esthetically objectionable within a park, is better adapted to the nearest city.

Therefore, for future tourism development, a viable strategy is the search of area sites, within a feasible radius of cities, for their potential for attraction development. By utilizing these area sites, the most efficient development of both transportation and other services can be created and managed.

The main advantage of this area approach is capitalizing upon the uniqueness of each area. By developing tourism upon area themes and upon special
area resources, there is much less likelihood of duplicating some other area's tourism appeal. The special placeness, so important to tourists, is utilized rather than using some artificial foundation for development.

But, area development for tourism requires cooperation between the several jurisdictions involved. Linear development, such as for river or scenic corridors, crosses many jurisdictions. If tourism is to be developed as an overall system, best suited to the trade, a great amount of cooperation is required. With such cooperation, area assessments of resource potential can be made and stimulation for site development best suited to the area conditions can be encouraged.

After development, tourist areas are more promontable than are isolated spots or single sites. Because of increasing costs of travel, tourists are becoming more selective and seek a greater number of opportunities within a reasonable radius. Therefore, a cluster of attractions and services that are most accessible are more functional today than are smaller and scattered tourist places.

Both developed and undeveloped countries need to consider training of local area leaders, planners, developers, and citizens, regarding suitable area development for tourism. And, with increased nationalism and increased transportation and currency problems, area development for tourism must also be coordinated at the regional level.

REGION

World-wide, it is becoming more and more evident that all of tourism development cannot be accomplished solely by developers of the separate segments. This past approach has exposed deficiencies, especially at the regional (state, provincial, country) scale.

1 A more scholarly approach to tourism development at the regional scale can be found in Dr. Gunn's recent book, Tourism Planning, Crane, Russak, publishers.
The two-way impacts of policy and decision-making at the regional level are increasingly critical to both international and domestic tourism development. Mass tourism development alters the balance of national economics and society. The introduction of new ideas, new customs, new wear and tear on resources and new competition for existing facilities have an impact on political decision-making at all levels. Conversely, national policy on overall economic and social matters impacts tourism—housing, settlement, environmental use and protection, defense, and extent of regulation.

In spite of the logic of these relationships, very few countries, even developed ones, have elevated tourism to this level of understanding and policy. Even in countries, states or provinces with tourism agencies, seldom do they entertain this two-way relationship with independent functions. For example, national park agencies frequently are antagonistic to and isolated from agencies of tourism and transportation. While this may be due to logical historic background and tradition, it is a barrier to smooth operation of tourism at all levels.

While tourism may be viewed regionally by examining the organizations at this level, it may be more useful to regard it functionally. At the regional scale, at least five basic components appear to make up the functioning tourism system. The better that regional-scale organizations and agencies understand these and their interrelationships, the better will be the operation of tourism development.

1. Attractions. A wide variety of physical settings and establishments provide an enticement for travelers to visit destinations and offer the personal satisfaction so important to all tourism. While almost anything at one time or another may become an attraction, the functional system requires identification, planning and management of physical places. The tourism "product" is really that set of experiences obtained by visitors participating in attractions.

2. Services-Facilities. For all tourists seeking and enjoying developed
attractions, an important array of support services and facilities is needed. Hotels, food services, shops for purchases of souvenirs, gifts and supplies, and places of entertainment are neccessary adjuncts of the attractions and also the places where most money is spent by the tourist. Therefore, these are the greatest economic producers for regions.

3. Transportation. All attractions, services and facilities must be accessible. Perhaps no other component requires as much regional consideration because transportation networks serve both non-tourism and tourism needs and must be planned on a large as well as a small scale. Interlacings between modes is imperative for tourism travel.

4. Information-Direction. Key to contemporary tourism are the many ways in which tourists learn about travel destinations and are given guidance in their enjoyment. Of growing significance are journalists, tour guides, artists, photographers, dramatists, playwrights, and interpreters who describe and dramatize points of interests. Signage and directions must be legible, informative, and designed with uniform standards and sensitivity to settings.

5. Tourists. The many characteristics of tourists and the location of population concentrations are basic to all tourism development. The ability and motivations for populations to travel requires special research. These factors for both domestic and foreign tourists are essential to smooth management of the overall tourism system.

At this point, after a review of the major components, the great need for interrelating these becomes apparent. No political or managerial scheme at the regional scale is suggested here; rather, any such method must emerge from the local, area and regional setting. But, no matter how organized, some means of making every element, at all scales, function in a better manner is essential to all tourism development. It is the only way that the benefits can be derived and the many problems avoided, ameliorated or solved.
At the same time that better functioning is achieved, the tourism system must remain dynamic. Better management must liberate, not restrict. Changes in every component are inevitable. As tourists change their interests, changes may be required in transportation, attractions, and services. As innovations are made in the supply of attractions, new transport routes and new service centers may be required. As publicity about new destinations appears, changes in the distribution of tourists may occur. It is at the regional scale that all actors of tourism development need to recognize their dynamic interdependencies and to support those mechanisms that will protect and balance the interests of all.

UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION

Better understanding, alone, will not achieve desired tourism development goals. Scientific discoveries of materials and biological processes did not, of and by themselves, produce better buildings or better health. Not until improved tourism knowledge is applied at all levels will better tourism be developed. This will require new policy and innovation in management practice. Hotels will gain when their development at the site scale is integrated with all other factors at the area and regional scales. National tourism policy (the regional scale) will function only when sensitive to its application at the area and site scales.

All this demands a greater number of people within each nation with both the knowledge and the commitment for better tourism development. Tourism has not been a popular occupational calling. It has not been a legitimate field of academe. It has not occupied a high place in civic and national affairs. Sporadically around the world, progress is being made but all too slowly. It is only within the human dimension that the needed change can and will take place. Without better leadership, better managership, and better entrepreneurship from the regional to the site scale neither developed nor developing countries will see much progress in tourism.
From this discussion, one might conclude that tourism is in fact altogether too complicated to develop and manage—just not worth the effort. This, however, is an unfair conclusion. Yes, tourism is complicated, demanding much greater expertise than generally available today. However, it is too valuable a social and economic phenomenon to fall into disuse. The demand will continue. But, the question of this essay is whether each country will be able to make the concerted effort and commitment needed in the future. Tourism can be very rewarding to visitors, economically productive and yet not environmentally destructive. But, is each locality, area and region willing to put sufficient muscle and interest behind proper development to reach these desired and attainable goals?

Prepared by Dr. Clare A. Gunn, Professor
Recreation and Parks Department
Texas A&M University

January 8, 1981