TOURISM FRAGMENTATION: A CAUSE FOR PLANNING

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In this year of the nation's bicentennial, it is well to reflect on the
development of tourism—a phenomenon that was not of much concern in either 1776
or even in 1876. The purpose of this paper is to identify some problems that have
arisen from a fragmented growth of tourism and to suggest that overall planning
of the total tourism system is long overdue.

Growth Accomplishment

Actually the present problems of fragmentation of tourism have grown out
of its overwhelming success.

By allowing the free enterprise system to function and to flourish, the
finest hotels, motels, resorts, restaurants and attractions of the world have
been developed. Individual initiative spurred the entrepreneurs of the Holiday
Inns, McDonalds, and Disneyworlds as well as the hordes of small independent
operators to develop new generations of tourist services and facilities. The
normal competitive game continues to tap new markets and to weed out marginal
services.

At the same time, a public awareness of social need has pushed govern-
ments to function as another type of tourism investor-developer-manager.
Increasingly, natural and cultural resource areas have been established by
legislation and provided public funds for development and operation. Our many
parks and reserves are now the envy of nations everywhere and firmly support
outdoor recreation functions as logical and appropriate for governments at
all levels.

The development of the far-flung tourism network in this country generally has had grass-roots beginnings. Local people, by and large, have taken the initiative and produced the commercial developments and even fostered the governmental involvement in what is now known as tourism in its broadest sense. Local nonprofit organizations have identified and developed most of our historic and cultural attractions.

Certainly, a long list of the many positive accomplishments that have resulted from the laissez-faire approach to tourism development in this country could be documented. But, comforting as this might be to tourism promoters, it would fail to be completely honest about the present status of tourism, especially some of the consequences of fragmentation of development.

Fragmentation Difficulties

Because no comprehensive overview of tourism development problems has been made, a few examples, drawn from observation and literature, may illustrate some consequences of the lack of integration of the total tourism system.

For example, the gasoline crisis of 1973, resulting from the oil embargo, squeezed out many small operators of tourist businesses, not because they were poor operators but because they were improperly located in the first place. State highway departments, public park agencies and state planning departments generally have no mechanisms for assisting prospective investors on suitable locations. State tourism agencies, preoccupied with advertising and promotion, do not interface with other state agencies to assist private enterprise on other matters.

Businessmen, developing tourist services along highway strips leading into cities, frequently produce a confused congestion of sign and business
front clutter. This is not only displeasing on esthetic grounds but has been proven ineffective in good marketing. Research has shown that the traveler, because of his perceptive makeup, cannot respond to this multiplicity of messages displayed before him. The "average observer cannot distinguish between more than seven different sights or sounds presented to him simultaneously." (Ewald:1971,29). By ordinance, cities could greatly improve the effectiveness of signs used by the many tourist business services.

Because tourism tends to thrive on concentrated groupings of attractions and services, it sometimes smothers its own assets. The case of waterfront tourism - masses of concrete highrise buildings that wall off the beaches - is well known. Because of early land subdivision patterns and lack of overall planning foresight, limited beach assets have been stripped of much of their original beauty and accessibility.

Hundreds of miles of coastline have been ruined irremediably by virtually uncontrolled building of hotels, restaurants, bars and houses. Beaches have been divided into unsightly allotments, and noise from juke-boxes, fumes from traffic and sheer human over-population pay witness to the chaos man has made of the organization of his leisure. These evil consequences are not inherent in the development of tourism; they just happen when tourism is developed in a thoughtless and casual way. (Young:1973,157)

Another example of tourism's lack of coordination was in the Mississippi coastal pollution problem of 1973-74. Bickering over 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 the state health and pollution agencies. The only voice of tourism came from the hotel and motel interests who objected to posting beach pollution signs in their lobbies as their business dropped about 10 percent. (Cartee:1975)

Examples of the lack of integration of public agency management and
operation of tourism development projects are plentiful. At present, for instance, there is no mechanism whereby the National Park Service, developer of extremely popular and worthwhile scenic parkways, can obtain any of the tax revenues that go directly to the highway departments. Furthermore they are being threatened by unesthetic and poorly planned commercial development nearby. (Freeman:1975)

The lack of integration of public and private development for tourism is commonplace.

The national government designates a park and makes it clear that it will accept responsibility for only the area inside the boundaries. State governments generally have said the area around the park is not our responsibility—that is a local matter. Most often the local units of government have not been equipped to meet the inordinate pressures put upon them by these developments. (Christenson:1974)

Millions of tourists are attracted to our inland and sea waters because of the sport of fishing. After abusing our waters for many years we are now showing improvement, especially with the introduction of salmon in the Great Lakes. These fish are worth about $350 million annually to Great Lakes states and the province of Ontario. Yet, they may not be harvested in the next few years because of the increasing threat of contamination due to PCBs—polychlorinated biphenyls—as effluents from plastic manufacturers. (PCBs:1976, 2) As yet, no overall concern has been expressed by tourism interests who are bound to be impacted by this problem.

And, state tourism organizations, primarily created for advertising and promotion, do not include tourism planning as a responsible function. The case of Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, illustrates this point. It took two years and over a million dollars for environmentalists, fishing and oyster interests and owners of a major resort complex to defeat the establishment of
a German petro-chemical plant. The state industrial development agency had lured the plant proposal and the state tourism agency took no part in the issue. It had no plans to handle the situation. (McCaskey:1972).

The oil embargo dramatized the lack of integrated planning of the many segments of tourism. Because no overall planning mechanism was available, fragments of the tourism system began to panic and to demand relief from Congress. Their opposition to the threat of Congress to ration gasoline was temporarily effective but indicated the vulnerability of tourism to many factors that could impact its future success.

Even without further documentation, it would appear that three conclusions could be drawn from the fragmentation of tourism.

First, from a marketing point of view, the public is looking for security and certainty that they are not getting. The promises by advertising tend to overlook the complication of the tourism system and the difficulty each traveler has in making it function. It would appear that from a marketing point of view, that "set of human activities directed at facilitating and consummating exchanges," Kotler's definition of marketing, completely breaks down. (Kotler:1972,12)

Second, tourism as now practiced, violates basic tenets of modern human ecology. The human ecosystem, since the industrial revolution, has expanded greatly. Now instead of resources determining human activity, human decision-making determines resources. This is true throughout man's activity including leisure travel and recreation. (Sargent:1974,16). Fragmented tourism decision-making and utilization of natural resources does not allow proper linkage with the human ecosystem.

Third, tourism in this country remains an abstraction, not a cohesive and integrated system. Only by accident of individual conventional wisdom do the
many segments relate to one another. There are many tourist businesses, state and national promotional agencies, and tourists. But, there is no overall policy, philosophy or coordinating force that brings the many pieces into harmony and assures their continued function in harmony.

Alternative Solutions

As those concerned with tourism development become more and more aware of the lack of planning and coordination, many alternative solutions probably will be offered. For purposes of stimulating interest in this topic, two alternatives are discussed here--government takeover and voluntary collaboration.

One might consider that if fragmentation is a problem the most straightforward solution is government takeover. Proponents could devise several arguments in their favor.

It could be argued that the development process could be speeded up by having only one central decision-making body. The many local, state and federal regulations on land use and planning could be bypassed by making all decisions in one central office. Supporters could say that this eliminates much delay and overlap.

Proponents could also say that the problems of interrelating the parts is eliminated by the government controlling all segments of tourism: transportation, attractions, promotion, services and facilities. Gaps in linking these together would be eliminated.

On the other hand, opponents would object on grounds that private enterprise has been the economic and social backbone of the nation. Its elimination would, therefore, represent the antithesis of the country's tradition and national ethic.

Furthermore, those proponents of private enterprise could cite the many
innovations and creative developments within tourism that, in their opinion, would not have taken place without private enterprise. They could also document the fact that efficiencies are not necessarily obtained by centralizing control. Considering the hundreds of thousands of individual parts of the total tourism system across this nation, the complications of red tape to develop and manage them all from Washington present a formidable specter.

Other objectors to government takeover could argue that there is risk in making decisions on planning and management only in one spot. The greater the magnitude of responsibility, the greater the risk of making bad judgement.

Finally, the farther removed from the land that decision-making is taken, the greater is the chance of having incomplete land use data upon which to make decisions.

The second alternative to be discussed here, that of voluntary collaboration, seems to hold greater promise, at least in the opinion of the author. The following scenario provides the basic elements of a system that could result from broad planning on a voluntary collaborative basis.

Suppose, for example, that a new partnership is struck between government and private enterprise. Instead of squaring off against each other, governments bring private interests into their planning and decision-making processes and private interests bring their intentions and goals to government agencies affected. (Gunn:1972)

Suppose that the government agencies, such as the National Park Service, Army Corps of Engineers and the United States Forest Service, recognized the role of private enterprise and assisted in the planning of commercial services and facilities near their major land holdings. The obstacles do not appear to be new research or new technology as much as new mechanisms for collaboration.
Suppose that private enterprise, when it develops rare resource assets, such as waterfronts, realizes the importance of these resources and therefore their protection by government control. Instead of using every inch of the waterfront, wedges of development are left open for vistas and access, so important to all waterfront tourism.

It might be possible for many private and public developers of a destination region to get together on potential visitor studies to plan both better utilization of the resources and better provision of services most satisfying to the visitors.

Instead of transportation modes to remain isolated, suppose that airways, highways and bus terminals were integrated. The visitor could easily mix modes for a total vacation, providing much easier linkage between home and destination. Coupled with physical integration of the several modes into an overall system would be integration of information.

Suppose that public agency park developers clearly zoned parks into segments best suited to intensive tourist use and to resource protection. The conflict of objectives could be avoided by declaring that both resource distribution and visitor characteristics demand a multiple policy of planning and management.

Suppose that the businessman who intends to invest in some tourist business had maps and information available to him that would help guide his investment. Maps would show him the distribution of the natural resources of his state and area, such as the best water resources, forests, scenic areas and wildlife areas. Graphic and descriptive information on cultural resource distribution, such as historic trails, sites and location of important historic events would also be available. Furthermore, he could obtain facts on the influence of major transportation routes and the distribution of major service centers. His selection of a location, even though carried out on his own business terms, would be expedited greatly.
Suppose that the environmentalists and protectionists identified those locations where special natural resource characteristics are very important and need to be protected. But, at the same time, suppose that they engaged in the design and management of programs and services that would provide interpretation of resources to the greatest number of people. This allows the populace to gain greater insight into the workings of natural forces and the value of respecting natural functions when land development takes place.

Suppose that the entire array of private enterprise in tourism had regular input to state, regional and local planning departments, the state highway department and the state parks department. Then, when decisions are made on changes or additions, they can reflect the needs of tourists and tourist businessmen.

If such overall collaborative planning were to take place, within and between the segments of private enterprise and governments, it would offer many advantages. If done properly and sincerely, the people who come to visit an area will receive better treatment, will find it easier to get around and will return with richer memories of highly satisfying experiences. If done in a studied and businesslike manner, commercial interests will be able to be more successful because they are better located with reference to all external factors, both public and private. If carried out with full recognition of the natural and cultural resource characteristics of the area, there will be less damage to the environment, both socially and physically.

Obstacles to Voluntary Collaborative Planning

But, those who might wish to espouse greater voluntary collaborative planning would undoubtedly encounter several obstacles. Even though the advantages may seem to be clearly in favor of this type of planning, pragmatic
reality reveals some barriers.

First, it seems that there is a major semantic obstacle. Park planners and administrators do not see their visitors as tourists. Therefore, they do not relate to programs and agencies that support tourism. Conversely, tourism interests generally do not include anyone that is not private enterprise. Their definition of tourism excludes the many government parks, reserves and reservoirs as well as the non-profit historic sites. People who travel for pleasure could care less about how they are defined—they are interested only in their ability to travel and to obtain satisfaction therefrom.

Second, there seems to be a philosophical and ideological obstacle. Those who support government parks are often conservation-preservation oriented. Therefore, they must be against commercialization. In spite of the fact that when they as individuals do travel and seek enrichment from these parks and want high quality food service, lodging and even entertainment, they align themselves philosophically with the ideology of conservation and resource protection. We seem to be treating these ideologies as religions and become bigoted and fanatical about the issues of development versus resource protection.

Third, there seem to be real institutional obstacles. Government agencies are sensitive to their political support and have found it desirable to maintain firm jurisdictional boundaries. It takes a brave agency leader to strike out on his own to collaborate with others. Private enterprise tends to be very secretive about everything regardless if it is important to business success. Therefore, it is not easy for the many parts of tourism to initiate collaboration—even communication.

Fourth, the issue of private rights is a major obstacle to collaboration. Land rights, water rights and even air rights are not clearly defined by law.
Because of a strong national private land ethic, individuals are much concerned about any moves by anyone that might infringe upon their personal rights to the use of resources. The social value of land, water and air—a responsibility of government—often appears in direct conflict. The social value of collaboration on tourism planning appears to present a threat to individual land use.

Conclusions

The conclusions that might be drawn from this summary of tourism planning in this country could be many, but just a few might be listed as most critical.

First, the evidence of fragmentation of tourism development is mounting. As the volume of tourism expands and as development increases, the many segments are running on collision courses more and more frequently. These conflicts appear to be expressed in reduced satisfactions to visitors, reduced rewards to owner-managers and erosion of basic resource assets.

Second, the alternatives to solution are many. While both business and government may opt for continuation of existing policies and practices, reduction of problems of fragmentation seem unattainable with this option. Another alternative, government takeover of all development, is repugnant to Americans and does not appear to be a viable alternative. The ideals of voluntary collaborative planning would appear to be the most desirable but are fraught with many obstacles.

Perhaps, emphasis now needs to be placed on catalytic action by someone in order to stimulate collaborative planning. Perhaps this should be the major role of a new office of tourism now being contemplated at the national level. In the face of existing promotional efforts by private enterprise and by the
several states, it would not seem that any new agency would need to give priority to promotion. On the other hand, a domestic tourism agency at the national level could be just the catalyst needed—by means of supporting education, by providing incentives, by fostering changes in legal mandates, by offering professional guidance on planning and by establishing a national focal point for tourism. Perhaps such a catalyst could stimulate collaborative planning at the same time that the integrity of the many segments and contributing parts of tourism is maintained.
References


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