URBAN WATERFRONT--A PARK-BUSINESS MIX
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It would appear that today abundant opportunities await cities that have natural water resources, especially rivers, in the urban core. This conclusion is drawn from general observation and from two special studies conducted over the last few years, both in Texas and across the United States. The following, therefore, is a brief report of these research efforts, presented for whatever inferences one may draw for Canada.*

As noise, smoke, congestion and filth became the hallmark of cities, the greensward and natural amenities of suburbia became the magnets for urban growth. As a result, the urban waters (and most cities were built on waters), essential to defense for the ancient city and critical to commerce for the medieval and industrial city, were abused and almost forgotten. Many were converted to giant sewers lined with the city's trash. Frequently, they became the core of urban blight.

Contemporary concern over man's impact on the environment is bringing about a gradual renaissance of interest in urban waterfronts. Although sporadic and slow, renewed interest in urban water amenities is appearing throughout North America. Observation in Canada shows much progress in cities such as Toronto, Vancouver, Victoria and Ottawa. A nationwide survey of the United States showed that some cities, such as Baltimore, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Wichita, San Diego, Spokane and San Antonio, were making great strides in reclaiming their valuable urban water amenities.

None, however has made the spectacular impact as that of San Antonio, Texas. Therefore, the San Antonio River Walk became the locale for a special study of environmental and social characteristics.

The San Antonio River Walk is a narrow horseshoe-shaped ribbon of land-water interface occupying about six blocks square in the heart of the City.

*More detailed information can be obtained from the research reports, Cultural Benefits from Metropolitan Recreation--San Antonio Prototype, Bulletin MP-1046, 1972, Texas A & M University and Development of Criteria for Evaluating Urban River Settings for Tourism-Recreation Use, Bulletin MP-1139, 1974, Texas A & M University; both by Clare A. Gunn et al. Research sponsored by the Texas Water Resources Institute and Recreation and Parks Department and issued by the Office of Agricultural Information, Texas A & M University, College Station, Texas 77843.
Because of strong opposition by a conservation group in 1924 to paving over this portion of the river as a flood control measure, the deep river cut is today a bountiful floral display of colorful plant materials from the smallest of ground covers to huge cypress trees. The continuous promenade is flanked by many private and public properties that originally were oriented to the streets above. In only the last ten years, several of these owners have realized the potential of inverting their business orientation or adding new enterprises directly related to visitors. Over 24 major buildings of historic interest have been restored or redeveloped. Now, a pleasant balance of park-like setting and commercialism provides both the tourist and the local citizen a delightful focal point for relaxation and relief from the congestion of the city core.

A landscape analysis of the River Walk indicated that it could be divided into four environmentally-cohesive but discrete areas (see Figure 1). Area "A" contains landscaped walkways along the river but no shops. It offers open space and footpath linkage between the core and upper San Antonio. Area "B" is functionally more of a destination area that is heavily verdant and yet is flanked by a few hotels, a library and a hospital. Area "C" offers a pleasant landscape setting and features many shops, restaurants, hotels and places of entertainment. Area "D" is entirely man-made, excavated in 1968 to link the horseshoe with a new civic center complex of theater, exhibition building and arena.

A major thrust of the study was a visitor survey carried on throughout the year of 1971. The study sought to discover characteristics of the visitors, activities engaged in and attitudes toward the River Walk.

Results showed a wide diversity of age, income and activity interest among visitors. The majority (74 percent) were outsiders and yet there was no conflict with local residents. Several ethnic groups were observed and yet no stress was observed. 48 percent were under 25 years of age and about 11 percent were over 55. While most came to enjoy the promenade, many came to see large festivals, to dine and enjoy the evening entertainment, or to attend conventions. A surprising reaction, in spite of the great volume of visitors, (an estimated 2 million a year) was that of "seeking solitude". Many came regularly to sit, relax, feed the pigeons and reported that they enjoyed the "privacy" offered by the River Walk. It is a dramatic demonstration that, through design and management, one continuous environment, even though relatively small, can satisfy a wide range of psychological and physical needs of people at leisure. Visitor comments included: "Peaceful,
FIGURE 1. FOUR ENVIRONMENTAL ZONES OF RIVER WALK

NATURAL-INTIMATE AREA
SYLVAN AREA
ACTIVITY AREA
ARCHITECTONIC AREA

SCALE
0 FEET 500
away from air pollution"; "Clean, green atmosphere, helps relax--like a vacation spot in middle of town"; "Atmosphere of Old Mexico, altogether different"; "Designed in sense that keeps human proportions not regimented, not a national park, but commercial and natural--takes into account all human activities--dining, night life, relaxing, fact is downtown but completely divorced from city; like in country."

An equally important aspect of the study was a cross-section survey of the voters of the city. An overwhelming number of voters, 97.6 percent, had already visited the River Walk and over 76 percent had visited during the last year. About 18 percent had visited the River Walk over ten times in the last year. Many indicated that they were not only very proud of this civic amenity but took their friends and relatives there whenever they came to visit. When asked if they felt that the River Walk was of value, 96.6 percent said it was an attraction for tourists; 80.7 percent stated that it was of economic benefit to the city; and 74.9 percent indicated that it was of direct benefit to them as individuals. Comments included: "I love it! I go as often as possible"; "A great thing"; "A beautiful city reflects the people living in it"; "The image of the River and the beauty of San Antonio was an important factor in our decision to move to this city."

A clue to the public support of this park-business mix was the voter's answers to questions concerning future expansion of the River Walk concept. Over 56 percent indicated they would favor any bond issue for expansion even though it might raise taxes.

Although hundreds of civic leaders from all over North America regularly visit the River Walk and local officials in search of information to take back to their home city, there could be grave error in attempting to replicate such a development elsewhere. Few cities have the same historic, natural resource or political conditions like San Antonio.

Nevertheless, the researchers derived the following conclusions that should be of value to other cities:

A refocus (social and economic) upon downtown can be accomplished.

A small amount of water surface can become a powerful social and economic force.

Composite management (the River Walk is managed by over six agencies, organizations) can succeed.
A business-park mix offers an amalgam that cannot be equalled by either a park or a business section, taken separately.

Diversity not single purpose—is highly desirable.

Internal and adjacent land uses must be compatible.

Both tourists and local citizens can participate and can benefit mutually.

An impact for tourism, larger than that of only the city, is a likely spinoff.

In addition, a follow-up study of the entire United States and a more detailed study of contributing factors to waterfront development in urban areas was made. This revealed that many cities were waiting for that magic single agency to come along to do the job. Several planning departments were popularizing the need for waterfront protection and redevelopment. Others believed that their priorities for public moneys and effort lay in other directions.

The study revealed the need for a three-phase approach to the redevelopment of an urban core water resource into a park-business complex.

The first phase recommended is a preliminary investigation of the potential for a park-business mix. This should focus attention on the area and derive simple and immediate conclusions regarding the control of flooding and the relationship to the downtown core.

The second phase assumes a favorable response from the first and requires a deeper examination of three sets of supporting factors: 1) motivating forces; 2) site factors; and 3) other influential factors.

If the results of phase two are reasonably favorable and show the area to have potential, the city can then enter into a planning and implementation phase. It is during this stage that the facts and momentum gained from the first two phases can be incorporated into conceptual ideas that then are crystalized into plans. The critical stage is that of final implementation—a process that really depends upon action at all phases of development.

For the benefit of other communities, the researchers developed the following recommendations:

1. Consider every city situation as unique.
2. Unless there is commitment—political, public, financial—little progress can be predicted.

3. Opposition forces must be understood and overcome early in planning and decision-making stages.

4. Funding possibilities must be explored in depth.

5. Citizen involvement is essential.

6. Anticipate inflated costs for all land and development.

7. Study the decision-making patterns within a community. Learn from past successes and failures.

8. Make sure all new plans utilize the peculiar assets of waterfront locations—prohibit land uses that can succeed as well elsewhere.