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Tourism Development in Latin America And Related Research Needs

During the decade of the 1970s international tourism expanded throughout Latin America and the Caribbean area. Aside from a brief period during 1974-1976, when energy problems and the subsequent widespread economic downturn reduced visitor volumes, most countries experienced continuous growth of their respective tourism sectors. Exceptions to this statement are places such as Chile, Nicaragua, and El Salvador where disruptive civil strife resulted in a virtual cessation of tourism. Growth in the number of international visitors has resulted in increases of tourist expenditures, visitor accommodations and facilities, overseas earnings, employment, investment opportunities, public revenues and expenditures, and, naturally, a host of economic, social, and environmental problems related to these unprecedented changes. In general, growth has been greatest in countries where tourism was already well-established (e.g., Mexico and Puerto Rico) where increases have exceeded several hundred percent. However, even some newer entrants into international competition for tourists (e.g., Peru and Panama) have more than doubled their number of visitors since 1970.

Despite continuing uncertainty over energy costs and availability, travel industry experts tend to agree that growth of international tourism will not subside appreciably in the foreseeable future (Papson, 1979). Accordingly, whatever the importance of tourism to the economic, social, and environmental conditions of particular places, it is likely to remain significant throughout the 1980s (Mings, 1978, 2).

Justification

Given the considerable growth of Latin American tourism that occurred during the 1970s and the continued expansion projected for the 1980s, the need for greatly increased research and planning for the industry should be obvious. Yet, data collection and analyses necessary for proper planning lag behind the burgeoning growth being experienced in many places. Failure to adequately assess the evolving planning needs of tourism is likely to result in an industry offering only limited benefits. If optimum benefits are hoped for, and they are, the development of proper research and planning procedures is imperative.

The purposes of this paper are: 1) to review the nature of research on the tourist industry of Latin America undertaken since 1970 and 2) to identify research topics that warrant investigation during the 1980s.

A Review of Post-1970 Literature

In preparation for reviewing literature pertaining to the tourist industry of Latin America, a comprehensive search was initiated during the latter part of 1978. One measure taken was the writing of a letter to each Latin American and Caribbean government tourist office soliciting information on all recent data (i.e., statistics, reports, surveys, etc.) pertaining to their respective tourist industries. Cooperation in this mail survey was excellent and the result was a major contribution to a bibliography published recently (Mings and Quello, 1979). Other useful sources of information on the tourist industry in Latin America include tourist bibliographies published by the World Tourism Organization, Centre des Hautes Etudes Touristiques, the Organization of American States, Confederación de Organizaciones Turísticas de la América Latina, examination of tourism-related journals (i.e., *The Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administration Quarterly*, *Revue de Tourisme*, *Annals of Tourism Research*, etc.), perusal of Latin American journals (i.e., *Caribbean Studies*, *Latin American Research Review*, etc.) and review of development journals (i.e., *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, *Journal of Developing Areas*, etc.) plus letters of inquiry directed to organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the Caribbean Tourism Association, and the Caribbean Tourism Research Centre. In addition, information was sought in conventional indexes (i.e., *Readers' Guide to Periodical Literature*, *Monthly Catalogue of U.S. Government Publications*, etc.).

The search process outlined above has yielded a comprehensive assemblage of recent information written on Latin American tourism and provides the primary bases for the following observations (Mings and Quello, 1979). The amount of information available has increased appreciably during the 1970s. Review of an earlier bibliography on tourism in Latin America (Mings, 1971) indicates convincingly that more and better statistical data, expanded national planning efforts, and increased scholarly inquiry are all in evidence.

Virtually all countries collect statistical data on their visitors. These data customarily are published annually, or nearly so, by government tourist offices. Unfortunately, comparable data are not collected by everyone. Efforts to standardize and expand data collection have been promoted repeatedly by the

Organization of American States, World Tourism Organization, Confederación de Organizaciones Turísticas de la América Latina and others, but with only limited success. In addition to the twin problems of varying modes for both collecting and reporting statistics on visitors, direct contacts with individual government tourist offices remain the best means of obtaining the most complete and current data. Publication of the compiled statistics on the tourist industry of Latin America simply is not available. Such a document would be especially useful to geographers and others interested in regional development patterns.

Growth of tourism during the 1970s resulted in widespread planning activity on the part of national governments and regional organizations. Comprehensive plans to stimulate and control the development of tourism have been prepared for many countries in Latin America. Seventeen countries responding to the aforementioned mail survey of government tourist offices reported either new or revised plans since 1974 (Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela). Ten others are known to have produced plans previously (Bahamas, Colombia, Haiti, Honduras, Netherlands Antilles, Peru, St. Lucia, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos, and the United States Virgin Islands). As might be expected, the nature of plans varies considerably among countries. A few are quite comprehensive and include detailed provisions for all prospective tourist destination areas and particular types of tourism (i.e., wilderness camping, snorkeling, sports fishing, etc.), while other countries rely on only general plans outlining rudimentary needs for accommodations and facilities, transportation, and market development. Still others are yet to formalize any planning goals or procedures. The Program of Tourism Development (CICATUR System) of the Organization of American States is a strong promoter of tourism planning and has been instrumental in preparing approximately fifty percent of the national plans in existence – especially among the smaller countries (note References Cited).

Scholarly examination of tourism's growth process and the related impacts of this considerable growth is another category of information that has increased dramatically during the past decade. Most of this research is economic in orientation, along with a relative bonanza of recent inquiries into the social/cultural effects of expanded tourism activity.

The largest economic category consists of studies focusing upon tourism's various economic needs for increased growth and the related impacts of past expansion

(Banco, 1978; Bogino, 1976; Carrington, 1975; CTRC 1975; Jones, 1976; Kastarlark, 1977; Krause and Jud, 1973; Meats, Cullen and Ellis, 1974; Pollard, 1976a; Silveira, 1974; UNDP, 1975; Wilner, 1974; World Bank, 1974). Other sources are more critical of the type and amount of benefits generated (Bryden, 1973; Jefferson, 1975; Pollard, 1976b). In addition, there are numerous studies outlining investment opportunities related to growth and the potential growth of tourism (Aguilar, 1979; Bureau, 1977; IADB, 1978; Powers, 1974; Ramsaran, 1976; Riegert, 1978; School, 1976; Timothy, 1976). Most economic studies are directed toward conditions in individual countries, but a few are regionally oriented (Mings and Quello, 1979).

The spate of recent articles dealing with sociocultural phenomena tends to be critical of tourism's various impacts on traditional values and institutions (Aspelin, 1977; Badra, 1974; Department of Sociology and Anthropology, 1975; Hiller 1976; Hills and Lundgren, 1977; Lundberg, 1974; Perez, 1973-74; Perez, 1975; Reynoso y Valle, 1977; Smith, 1977; Young, 1977). In a related context, attitudinal surveys are being utilized largely to determine the sentiments of resident populations vis-a vis their respective visitors (Belisle and Hoy, 1980; Central statistical office, 1974; CTRC, 1977; Doxey, 1976; Jamaica, 1974; McKenzie, 1976; Sethna, 1976; Sethna and Richmond, 1978; Yesawich and Duncan, 1975). Such surveys have been undertaken most frequently in places where anti-tourism sentiments have already developed or their emergence is feared.

Other aspects of tourism have been researched, but not extensively. Examples of topics on which at least some work has been published include: regional integration (Pantano, 1974), site feasibility (Menezes, 1974), planning assessment (Collins, 1979), environmental impacts (Rosenblum, 1977), education needs (OAS, 1974), agricultural linkages (Lundgren, 1971), dependency (Hiller, 1976; Perez, 1975) and visitor profiles (Central Statistical Office, 1975; Davidson-Peterson, 1978; Langenbuch, 1977).

Even though the above discussion of Latin American tourism literature produced during the 1970s does not attempt to quantify changes over the preceding decade (nor would such a time consuming quantitative analysis be warranted), sufficient evidence exists from published bibliographic references (Baretje, 1978; Mings, 1971; Mings, 1974; Mings and Quello, 1979) to conclude that data availability has improved dramatically during this period. We now have more and better statistical information and comprehensive plans for a majority of countries. But the largest change is in the category of scientific research by social scientists, concentrating

on the economic needs and impacts of tourism and, to a lesser extent, concern over socio-cultural issues. Prior to 1970, such critical analyses by social scientists were virtually absent. Seemingly, the problems and prospects of a growing industry have expanded to the extent that the services of researchers have become necessary.

Research Needs of the 1980s

Even with the large increase of tourism research outlined above, many facets of growth and development remain inadequately understood. Simply stated, expansion of the industry has greatly outpaced scientific analyses and, hence, a tourist industry "research gap" exists as we enter the period of the 1980s. This final section provides examples of types of research that are needed to close this gap and permit tourism to achieve a fuller potential for benefitting Latin America.

Needed economic research can be grouped into two categories: 1) for greater growth and 2) to maximize benefits more fully while limiting costs. Examples of the former include studies of accommodation and facility suitability, new transportation options (especially in view of the current unstable energy situation worldwide), potential market areas, more effective promotion techniques, and labor efficiency. Given that only limited investigation of these topics has been undertaken to date, opportunities for discovering new insights that will enhance tourism's growth rate seem promising. Widespread recognition that economic benefits from visitor expenditures may be far less than originally hoped has occurred only very recently. Consequently, research into ways of maximizing positive economic impacts while minimizing costs is sorely lacking. Areas that hold promise for gaining greater benefit include: more use of local suppliers (for agricultural foodstuffs, building materials, handicrafts and other giftwares, etc.) and re-evaluation of governmental policies and programs on such issues as imports, worker benefits (including minimum wages, inflation, corporate profit repatriation, foreign ownership of property, taxes, etc.). Research focusing on ways to effectively develop and implement appropriate objectives regarding such economic issues is quite likely to result in host countries' reaping relatively greater benefits from their respective tourist industries.

The effects of international tourism upon national and local social systems is another subject holding considerable research potential, perhaps less for the purpose of creating social benefits from tourism than the avoidance of negative social impacts. Examples of social change emanating from the development of

tourism include: alteration of traditional values toward family, religion, race, and women; commercialization of traditional ceremonies and artwork; and lowering of self-esteem and national pride. Often these changes, coupled with exploitive economic practices, lead to strong anti-tourism sentiments among host country populations. Research into causes of resentments harbored by residents and tourist industry employees will permit

the formulation of policies for accommodating their concerns in time to avoid injustices that create anti-tourism feelings and an inevitable weakening of the industry. Hence, research is needed to discover and eliminate undesirable social impacts in order to render tourism more truly beneficial to indigenous populations and, also, for the continued economic health of the industry. No tourist industry will survive indefinitely when confronted with mounting social unrest. An adversary relationship between the industry and local residents works to the detriment of both. Proper social research can avoid this through advocating a caliber of tourism genuinely deserving of public support.

In comparison with most types of manufacturing, tourism often is heralded as environmentally advantageous. Nonetheless, if left unchecked, concentrations of tourists can, and frequently do, 'pollute water bodies and contribute to the deterioration of natural areas. Overcrowding of natural attractions and favored areas of cities also is not uncommon. Research into ways to utilize environments without harming their fragile qualities is needed badly. Studies of small-scale sewage and solid waste disposal, carrying capacities, alternative sites, and types of tourism, all show promise of reducing the threat of further environmental deterioration.

A small but growing body of literature has begun to emerge with a focus upon tourism in the Third World (Britton, 1979; Farrell, 1977; Hiller, 1976; Hyma, Ojo and Wall, 1980; Hyma and Wall, 1979; Mings, 1978; Smith, 1977; Thomas, 1976). The thrust of this research is to identify structural qualities of international tourism that often renders it exploitive of poorer countries. There is considerable agreement that Third World areas reap insufficient benefits, but no consensus as to whether or not the industry can be made to "behave properly" and, thereby, justify the support of developing countries. Answers to this question are provided only through appropriate research of the type outlined above. If research provides sufficient information on ways to maximize positive impacts and minimize negative ones, and if planners develop sound goals and procedures for implementation, then political leaders and populations at large will be better able

to determine if the benefits outweigh the costs. But until the research is accomplished, nothing can (or should?) be decided finally.

Another emerging research theme that proponents of tourism should heed is focusing on forces affecting the long-term quality of tourist places (Bosselman, 1978; Relph, 1976; Tuan, 1977). Answers are needed to questions such as "What combination of qualities renders some places truly special to large numbers of people?" and "What provisions are required to assure that the specialness of places is not lost forever-to a world of sameness and near homogeneity?" In a rush to accommodate pressing economic and social problems, necessary long-term considerations can, unfortunately, give way to short-term expediency. If left unchecked, such nearsightedness will work eventually to the detriment of both hosts and guests.

What does this general research prescription hold for geographers in particular? What facets of burgeoning tourism and its related problems are relevant to Latin Americanist geographers? Each of the specific problem areas mentioned above has spatial parameters. Each factor can be viewed as being different (better or worse) at alternate locations. The geographer can assist the planner and governmental decision-maker to understand the importance of place. For example, assessment of spatial variations of the interactions among available development sites, transportation costs, visitor preferences, climatic characteristics, and labor supply are vital inputs when attempting to identify the most suitable location for a new tourist destination area. In order to maximize benefits, only carefully chosen sites will be acceptable. Alternately, if physical separation of tourists from resident populations is deemed an appropriate strategy for limiting social conflicts among guests and hosts, settlement patterns can be added and weighted heavily in such a site location model. Whatever the factor, it has a spatial expression. Geographers can articulate spatial aspects of tourism to decision-makers, thereby assisting them in optimizing the use of tourist space.

Summary and Conclusions

The record shows that during the 1970s tourism has continued to expand in Latin America and that research efforts have failed to keep pace with this growth. Accordingly, disenchantment with tourism's potential for ameliorating the economic and social needs of Latin America has begun to appear.

If during the next decade the tourist industry is to provide more effective

assistance for time-honored economic and social problems, then an expanded, wide-ranging research effort into these and other issues must be undertaken without delay. Otherwise, the full potential for tourism to benefit Latin America may never be realized and the area forever remain without the numerous advantages that a well-researched, planned, and administered tourist industry can offer.

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