

# Tourism Development in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century - Destructive Place Taking vs Authentic Place Making



People love to visit new places and to learn about distant cultures. Travelers seek authentic places - “real places” that are not contrived, but that offer experiences specific and unique to that place. From sunny beach to ancient ruin, visitors search for that distinctive place to feed their wanderlust.

## **Deliberate Stewardship**

For the past 60 years tourism has shown explosive growth worldwide. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) informs us that there were 880 million international visitor arrivals in 2009 and that some 946 billion dollars were spent along the way. Compare that to the 25 million international arrivals in 1950!

Now consider that UNWTO expects 3% to 4% growth in 2010, and a continual rise into the foreseeable future, boosted in part by a techno-savvy world population that is almost entirely connected to the Internet. Note, too, that at least one person in ten works in the tourism system, making tourism the largest, or nearly largest, financial contributor to most nations. Clearly, tourism is a force to be

examined and understood before it can be sustainably developed and appreciated.

With these known conditions, let’s consider how we tourism developers have been doing our jobs. Will our existing methods peddle away our community’s future? Or will we take on the stewardship required to sustain the places we love. Is tourism a Place-Taker or Place-Maker? We must make a considered choice.

## **Comprehending the Good**

How are we doing in examining and understanding what is good? Do we consider what harm there may be in bringing tourism for its own sake into the community? Are we establishing roots and nourishing integral community growth? Are we prepared to answer these questions and act on them?

At one time, promotion and advertising were all a community needed to attract visitors, done by either by local destination management organizations or by individual attractions themselves. Tourism success was (and still is) judged by how many visitors came and how much cash they left in the till.

Some communities even warped themselves to meet (or create) visitor desires and to make jobs and increase local revenues. Neighborhoods were forgotten in the rush to “develop” the local economy. Their organic social, recreational, cultural and business ties eroded or disappeared. Their places were taken away. Tourism activities must, and can, create lively, robust neighborhoods. To do otherwise is mere peddling. It is Place Taking instead of Place Making.



## **Making the Grade**

Tourism higher education came into being in the early 1970's. It studies the subject as a science. Common thought was that promotion and marketing would attract visitors for economic gain. Initial courses placed emphasis on these subjects, along with management, travel and hospitality. Missing were courses in tourism planning and development.

Tourism students today must study and understand land-use, community planning and sustainability. They must examine that tourism unfettered can leave a community "in a pickle" with traffic congestion, unauthentic improvements, pollution and faceless development. And once a community becomes a pickle it can not go back to being a cucumber. To avoid putting communities at risk, we must teach prospective tourism professionals new fundamental principles.

The tourism professionals of the future cannot simply promote a place until it becomes a destination. They must seek to partner with its residents, businesses, government and agencies. They must be taught that tourism development requires objective guidance and that the true bottom-line of well managed tourism is integrated place-making based on the authenticity and values of the community.

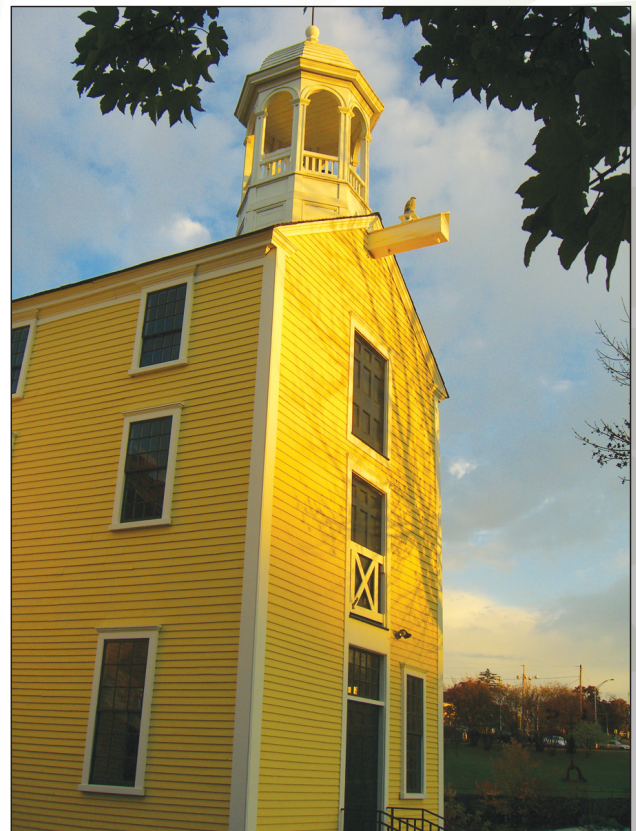
## **Putting Theories to the Test**

It is past time to find new ways for communities to become great places to live, to work and to visit. New theories suggest that the residents should benefit first and most from tourism development; a result obtained when we first preserve and protect and then promote our places.

Theories are emerging that communities are eager to test. Some apply the principles of "whole community planning." As articulated by Kip Bergstrom, founder of Re-inventing Stamford (CT), whole communities are full

of life and are "hospitable, authentic and distinctive." Such communities empower and engage residents. They are water and energy efficient, and disaster resilient. This definition reveals a shift to the new paradigm of tourism development as place making.

The theory of Geotourism, authored by Jonathan Tourtellot of National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations, is that tourism sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place and the



well being of its residents. It provides local incentive to protect what tourists come to see. Geotourism focuses on the place as a whole.

Civic Tourism, developed by Dr. Dan Shilling of Arizona State University, proffers that we must reverse our thinking about tourism from economic juggernaut to





responsible corporate citizen, enhancing the cultural, built, and natural environment, thus preserving cultures, protecting the environment and saving historic districts. More than being an economic tool, Civic Tourism aims to enable healthy place-making.

According to Dr. Martha Honey of the Center for Responsible Travel, the mission of her organization is to improve ecotourism using sustainable tourism practices and principles. The Center's research focuses on tourism as a tool for poverty alleviation and biodiversity conservation while incorporating socially and environmentally responsible practices.

Costas Christ, of the World Travel and Tourism Council submits that sustainable tourism is the integration of, and balance between, economic and environmental concerns. Ideal sustainability encourages the environment to flourish while tourism activities provide a net environmental gain.

### **Options and Challenge**

As residents or visitors, we can preserve the places we love and those we yearn to discover. Options are emerging for a new type of tourism and a new type of tourism management to take on the challenge. Rather than treating our places like commodities, we must work to integrate social and economic development, effectively planning, managing and making healthy places building on the authenticity of the community.

Dr. Robert Billington is the President of the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council and the Sustainable Tourism Planning and Development Laboratory. He founded and lead the Council for 25 years. These organizations are based in Blackstone Valley, Rhode Island, USA.

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