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Answering questions about tourism- a growing economic development tool

JOHN D. HUNT, PERRY J. BROWN and JOHN H. SCHOMAKER

Over the years, problems of economic development and related employment and manpower problems have been paramount in Utah's growth. In a recent survey conducted by staff of the Utah Board of Higher Education, community leaders repeatedly noted that the majority of their problems were directly and indirectly related to economic development.

Of course, one of the goals of Utah State University research and education programs has been to develop and extend new and improved techniques of economic development. Some projects have been directed to improving the efficiency of existing development and economic structure while others have been devoted to exploring new methods or realizing virtually untapped potential.

Tourism, long recognized as a valid economic development tool by many states, has only recently begun to contribute to Utah. Utah's natural and historical resources are becoming increasingly used for tourism. While tourism development is not a panacea for solving the economic problems of all Utah communities, it can play a major role in many communities and counties.

In Utah, in contrast to many states, economic development through tourism is not confronted with a poverty

of the resource base. Utah presently has more national parks than all states except California with which it is tied. The change of Capitol Reef and Arches National Monuments to National Parks has increased the number to five. There are virtually no states in the United States which can boast a quantity and quality of basic tourism resources comparable to Utah. Yet, the current economic

contributions from tourism are as dismal as the potential of the resource is bright. For example, both Colorado and Utah are visited each year by the same number of tourists, yet Colorado visitors generate \$320 million while Utah realizes only \$64 million from her nonresident tourists.

While Utah may not desire to build a tourist industry comparable to that



Figure 1. Utah's redrock country provides travellers with a unique opportunity to discover and partially understand the geology of our planet.

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of Colorado, it has not even developed a tourist economy nearly commensurate with its tourist resource base. Some will argue that the reasons for this lag are simply a lack of capital, access roads, and facilities, plus a too-short season. A more intimate knowledge of the problem, however, suggests that inadequate know-how and not understanding how tourism functions as an economic development tool are more critical to Utah's inability to reap benefits.

In the mid-1960s Utah State University personnel recognized the importance of eliminating these deficiencies. Through various research and subsequent extension programs, the University began to provide the tourism industry and other interested community and state leaders with the information they needed.

An early investigation of Utah visitors suggested, among other things, that tourists tended to plan rigid vacation itineraries before leaving home, and they wanted to adhere to these plans. Further, tourists like to see and learn new and different things,

and their spending habits are altered from at-home patterns. The findings of this research helped the state and various regions devise effective advertising and information programs, shed light on the critical nature of access routes for some tourist uses, pin-pointed tourism modes, indicated best locations for accommodations, and identified those activities preferred by the nonresident visitor.

These first insights into tourist behavior and the tourist industry generated numerous related research and educational projects. For example, in 1967, USU, under a Higher Education Act grant, initiated a program of training for tourist service employees. The training consisted of providing information on tourist behavior and attractions as well as instruction about more basic aspects of tourist service. During 1968 and 1969, staff members of USU carried the training package to more than 4,000 service employees. Eventually the training packages were "canned" and are now distributed by USU and the Utah Division of Travel Development to community and business lead-

ers for their direct use. During 1970 and 1971, groups from nearly two-thirds of Utah's counties have utilized the training packages.

As an off-shoot of this training program and a direct result of USU tourism research another training program has been developed and has been ready for dissemination. This program, geared to community leadership and business management, offers interpretations of research, case studies of both successful and unsuccessful tourist facilities and programs, analyses of environmental conflicts and problems, explorations of tourist-generated social-cultural relationships, and the relation of tourism to other important land uses.

Two recently completed projects may prove particularly relevant to rural economic development. An analysis of tourist expenditure patterns throughout Utah has been used in conjunction with the "central place" theory to evaluate where facility development is most needed in the state. The data indicate what kinds of community characteristics foster successful tourist enterprises. The images of Utah residents and of land and climatic characteristics, as perceived by nonresidents, have been identified. The results indicate that some existing images need to be changed, while others should be reinforced if Utah is to be successful in developing tourism. The same perceptions by non-residents are significant in achieving success in industrial development.

In the fall of 1971, researchers in the College began a unique study of participation in outdoor recreation activities by Utah residents. The basic technique employed is to provide a diary on which respondents can record their recreation participation as it occurs. Diaries are sent to selected households in all regions of the State twelve weeks during the year. The weeks have been selected so that an equal number fall in each seasonal quarter of the year.

Respondents are asked to keep track of their recreation activities for



Figure 2. River trips on the Green and the Colorado provide adventure for both novice and experienced "river rats."

1 week and then return the diaries to USU. The basic data include the date of activity, the activity, the location of activity, and the duration of the activity engagement. In addition, questions are asked about what kinds of activities the respondent likes most, constraints on engaging in favored activities, and what new kinds of recreational facilities the respondents would like in their area.

Information derived from this study should help recreation planners define where and in what amounts recreation facilities are needed.

A second on-going recreational study deals with wilderness and primitive area planning and management. As more people use wilderness areas, the areas' carrying capacities are approached. Carrying capacity of a wilderness area, the amount of use the area can absorb without decreasing its values, is determined by the user's perception of its wilderness quality and by the physical characteristics of the resource. The perception aspect of carrying capacity is being investigated by George Stankey and Robert C. Lucas of the U.S. Forest Service's Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station.

Research in the USU College of Natural Resources is being directed toward identifying the physical characteristics that limit carrying capacity. Recent efforts have centered on identifying potential campsites in Wyoming's Bridger Wilderness. Camping is common to all recreation activities, except day use activities, that take place in the wilderness. Utah State University researchers have developed a technique to identify potential camping sites from aerial photographs.

Development of the technique involved three steps: Identifying the physical criteria associated with campsites; mapping these criteria from aerial photographs on transparent map overlays; superimposing the overlays. The essential criteria for a two-person camping party were found to be 1,000 square feet of level terrain within 300 feet of a lake. These

criteria were mapped on an overlay. On another overlay, a corridor 200 feet wide on either side of the main trails was mapped. This reflected the prohibition in the Bridger Wilderness of camping within 200 feet of a main trail, terrain permitting. By superimposing the overlays, the data graphically showed the number and location of campsites.

Although the main thrust of the research was to develop a mapping technique, during the study certain aspects of the physical carrying capacity of wilderness areas became evident. About 1 acre in 100 or 200 acres is all that is available for campsites in wilderness areas. It was also noted that trail location severely cuts into camping opportunities. Many trails pass along lake shores. Encounters between users are thus increased at these lake locations and the perceptual carrying capacity is decreased.

The integration of physical capability data and perceptual carrying capacity data will allow wilderness administrators to better understand the capabilities of their resource and will provide a sound basis for management decisions. Findings in the Bridger Wilderness have applicability in many locations in the Intermountain West such as Utah's Uinta Primitive Area. If camping limitations in these areas are exceeded, it is likely that their primitive or wilderness character will be diminished.

A third study has both basic and applied research components. College of Natural Resource researchers are attempting to design research tools such as questionnaires that will be useful in determining what needs are fulfilled by different recreation activities and environments. Development of these instruments involves working with USU students, Logan townspeople, and recreationists in campgrounds, along fishing streams, or in other locations.

The basic idea behind the study is that people recreate in activities that fit their personalities. The problem in designing research instrument (ques-

tionnaires, etc.) is to find the right questions to elicit accurate preference responses from recreationists.

Probably the most widely used and, thus far, most successful tourism research effort has been the continuing comprehensive study of Utah travel. Nonresident visitors to Utah are studied throughout the year. Roadblocks are established at sixteen major highway entrances to Utah where nonresidents are questioned and asked to participate in a state-wide study. In addition, de-planing nonresident airline passengers are contacted at the Salt Lake City International Airport as well as the Cedar City airport. This research project has probably provided Utah with a better base of tourist information than that of any other state. The methodology of the study has been well accepted and is presently being adopted by five other states. Utah State University just completed a cooperative project with the universities of Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico to apply this method to the four states.

This project keeps a quarter-by-quarter accounting of tourist characteristics, travel patterns, expenditures, and other factors. Data are available for each of Utah's counties providing an account of the number of dollars spent, accommodations used, and attractions visited. All of this information is allowing Utah's counties to better exploit an economic development opportunity. The need for economic development, particularly in rural Utah, and the opportunity for this development through tourism are great. Utah State University's efforts in tourism research and extension are geared to providing the knowledge needed to realize the untapped potential for development through tourism.