TOURIST ATTRACTION SYSTEMS

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Abstract: The literature on attractions is reviewed and a model of attractions is proposed. A tourist attraction system is defined as an empirical connection of tourist, nucleus, and marker. Tourists are travelers or visitors seeking leisure-related experiences, which involve nuclear and marker elements. Nuclei are discussed in terms of a hierarchy, clusters, and their inviolate zones. Markers are analyzed in reference to an earlier model of tourism systems, and nine roles or functions of markers in attraction systems are identified. An explanation of how places "attract" tourists is proposed. Suggestions are made for future research and practical applications of the theory. Keywords: tourist attractions, tourism systems models, tourist motivations, tourist precincts, tourism marketing.


INTRODUCTION

What are tourist attractions, what are their components, and how do they operate? These are the broad themes of this paper which proposes and discusses a theory of tourist attractions. The aim is to discuss a set of concepts and principles that describe and explain the structure and functions of a category of systems. For research purposes attractions can be regarded as systems or sets of interconnected elements. They can be treated as subsystems of larger tourism systems.

Gunn (1972, 1979, 1980) and Lew (1987) are among those who have stressed the importance of attractions in the study of tourism. Lew observed that "Although the importance of tourist attractions is readily recognized, tourism researchers and theorists have yet to fully come to
terms with the nature of attractions as phenomena both in the environment and the mind" (1987:554). Despite the fact that the literature on tourism frequently mentions attractions, the treatment is usually less detailed than that given to other topics. Moreover, the treatments given attractions in much of the literature often lack scientific qualities:

Most of the literature on tourist attractions is descriptive, case-specif-
ic, and not explanatory in either the general or specific case. A pre-ponderance of teleological interpretations posing as scientific explana-
tions plagues this issue (Stear 1981:91).

Lew's study "summarizes the range of approaches employed in the categorization of attractions, as revealed in recent tourism literature" (1987:554). Reviewing several dozen earlier studies, Lew identified three approaches to the topic and he called these the ideographic perspective, the organizational perspective, and the cognitive perspective. The first, the ideographic perspective, is the most common way of conceptualizing attractions in laypersons' consciousness and in scholarly writings. Lew cited several studies as examples, including the widely quoted works by Ritchie and Zinns (1978) and Ferrario (1979). This first perspective refers to the general attributes of a place, attributes which could include, for example, natural beauty, any named site, climate, culture, and social customs or characteristics. The term "ideo-
graphic" might be an inappropriate label since Lew's first category includes classifications by name; however, the strict meaning of "ideo-
gram" is symbolism without naming. Perhaps "formal perspective" is a more suitable label. The second category, the organizational perspec-
tive, refers to geographical notions, not managerial notions of organi-
ization. It focuses on the spatial, capacity, and temporal nature of at-
tractions to develop typologies. Spatial classifications, for example, can range from a small object (the painting of the Mona Lisa) to a very large area (a whole country), both of which are regarded as attractions. Third, the "cognitive" approach involves categorizing attractions ac-
cording to "tourist perceptions and experiences" (Lew 1987:560).

Parts of Lew's discussion can be criticized for their implication, via references to "the" tourist, that tourists are homogeneous in terms of motivation and behavior. As Cohen (1979) has emphasized, references to "the" tourist as a general behavioral type can be mistaken. Rather than stereotyping, scholarship should acknowledge that there are dif-
ferent types of tourists in terms of behavioral patterns. A tendency to stereotype in parts of Lew's presentation contrasts with his classifications which imply that tourists are motivated by a wide range of needs and that behavior of tourists in general is anything but homogeneous. However, the value of Lew's work is that it identifies and describes a three-sided framework for categorizing phenomena associated with tourist attractions. Accordingly, the framework has potential utility in further studies, both empirical and theoretical. The ideas in his defini-
tion may, however, be questioned:

In essence, tourist attractions consist of all those elements of "non-
home" place that draw discretionary travelers away from their homes.
They usually include landscapes to observe, activities to participate in, and experiences to remember (Lew 1987:554).

That definition reflects ideas common in the literature, but they can be misleading in their essential connotations. A problem is the suggested literal meaning for “attraction” and related key terms such as “draw” (in Lew’s definition), and “attract,” “magnetism,” “gravitational influence,” and “pull factor” (all found scattered widely elsewhere in the literature). These imply that the thing itself has the power to influence behavior, that an attracting force is exerted from within some imminent attraction.

One assumes the implications are not seriously intended. Since the late 17th century, no one has intentionally suggested that a physical force emanates from within a sight, an object, or event to cause people (tourists) to move towards or direct their view towards that phenomenon. As Jaynes sums up his historical review of scientific understanding about the causes of movement: “Newton’s laws of motion make it all the more clear that physical behavior is a quite distinct thing from animal behavior” (1973:178). But the way many modern writers define tourist attractions, alongside sparse explanations of how attractions function or operate, might lead to inferences of a pre-Newtonian or metaphysical kind. Besides Lew, other writers who convey these connotations include Lundberg: “tourist attractions—by definition anything that attracts tourists” (1985:33); Burkart and Medlik: “attractions might be site attractions or event attractions... both of which exert gravitational influence upon non-residents” (1974:44); Gunn: “by definition an attraction is magnetic. If it does not have the power of drawing people to enjoy its values, it fails to be an attraction... The true test of being is pulling power” (1972:37), and “sometimes natural and historic features have intrinsic attracting power” (Gunn 1979:71); and Schmidt: “I believe that tourist spots do have some inherent unique quality which attracts tourists...” (1979:447).

Taken literally, such statements are awkward in scientific terms. A partial solution is to add a caveat, by placing inverted commas around the expressions (e.g., “attraction”) or by a note such as “It is important to recognize that magnetism is not somehow an inherent quality” (Pigram 1983:193). Pigram’s note emphasizes that in the context of tourism studies, as in other social science contexts, certain words are used as metaphors. “Tourist attractions” are phenomena that can be likened to real attractions studied in physics, but the former category does not operate in the same manner as the latter. The Tower of London does not literally “draw” discretionary travelers, nor “attract” tourists, nor exert “gravitational influence” over people; it has no “magnetic power” over travelers, and is not inherently a “tourist attraction.” But the Tower of London, and millions of other phenomena around the world, certainly appear to do or be those things, they create that image in observers’ minds.

Metaphors are natural in everyday language and are, therefore, useful and appropriate in promotional messages from the travel and tourism industry. But they can be a minefield for students and therefore can be risky in scholarly writings unless presented carefully. Metaphors
are a rich part of language ("a minefield for students") and indeed, writers such as Jaynes have demonstrated that metaphors are the means by which languages evolve. But problems emerge when metaphors are used in scholarly discussions in ways that cloud or seemingly contradict the truth. For example, Jaynes, in dissecting flaws in ideas about consciousness, concluded that "most of the errors about consciousness . . . are errors of attempted metaphor" (1982:53). The errors about tourist attractions noted above are also errors of attempted metaphor. A valid theory of tourist attraction will require care to avoid metaphorical problems.

Caveats such as the ones noted above may be helpful, but are insufficient for a comprehensive treatment of tourist attractions, because though they imply how the thing does not operate, they fail to indicate how it does operate. A different sort of perspective on the structural components of attractions is required, from which a plausible theory of how they function can be developed. Lew (1987) cited MacCannell's (1976) definition, but he did not pursue its potential for structural analysis. MacCannell proposed a concept radically different from those offered by other writers, a concept that can be rephrased to form the core for attraction systems.

**ATTRACTION SYSTEMS**

I have defined a tourist attraction as an empirical relationship between a tourist, a sight, and a marker—a piece of information about a sight (MacCannell 1976:41; emphasis original).

One crucial difference between that definition and those set out by others who follow conventional thinking about the topic is that MacCannell defined an attraction as having three components, whereas convention regards just one of those components (a sight or some other phenomena) as constituting the attraction. MacCannell's definition conforms to the idea of Angyal (1969) and some other writers on systems who see two-unit links as relationships, while regarding systems as certain arrangements of three or more interconnected elements. The rephrased definition becomes: a tourist attraction is a system comprising three elements: a tourist, a sight, and a marker.

This systemic definition does not apply to all forms of tourist attractions, but refers to the most common and obvious, involving sightseeing. Lew's framework indicates other forms. Sightseeing is a very common tourist activity, but it is not intrinsic. Many places are visited by large numbers of tourists but lack significant sights, and many tourists complete trips successfully without ever indulging in more than incidental sightseeing. Tourists who return to the same place for annual vacations might do no sightseeing after the first trip: sightseeing behavior is essentially that of first-time visitors to a place. Arguably, it is, in the first instance, orientation behavior; although it often seems to be motivated by other needs such as status (to be able to say one has "been there, seen that") and, as Crompton (1979) has shown, to be motivated by a desire for novelty and education.
Gunn (1972), recognizing that attractions have a scope beyond sightseeing, avoided words such as “sight” for his theoretical model. In their place, he used “nucleus,” literally meaning the central component of the attraction, in the center of what he called inviolate belt and the zone of closure. Gunn’s word choice seems most appropriate, for the “nucleus” of an attraction in principle can stand for any attribute of a place. The nucleus might be a sight (for sightseeing attractions), an object, a person, or an event, and so on. By substituting Gunn’s “nucleus” for “sight” in the systematic adaption of MacCannell’s definition, a broader and more general model can be formulated: A tourist attraction is a system comprising three elements: a tourist or human element, a nucleus or central element, and a marker or informative element. A tourist attraction comes into existence when the three elements are connected. Treating tourist attractions as systems allows the elements to be integrated conceptually within systemic models for the total tourism-related phenomenon.

Getz (1986) has reviewed various models of tourism and has noted how some are, in his words, “whole system models,” meaning that they attempt to embrace the total phenomenon. A tenet of systems theory is the hierarchical principle: each system can be regarded as a subsystem of its superior systems. Accordingly, tourist attractions can be regarded as one of the subsystems of whole tourism systems. Some of the alternative models of whole tourism systems appear to be receptive to the subsystem. Models proposed by Gunn (1972, 1979), Leiper (1979), and Mill and Morrison (1984) are examples. A systemic treatment can describe and analyze how travelers/tourists, nuclei, and markers are connected as functioning tourist attractions.

A. Travelers and Tourists

Generally, “tourists” are subsets of “travelers.” Implicit and explicit meanings of “tourist” span a wide range. To clarify thinking about the line of demarcation, a first step is to remember three contexts in which the expression is used and decide which is relevant for the issue at hand. The first context applies to popular notions, deriving from subjective opinions and perceptions and emerging in millions of persons’ consciousness. The second context relates to technical definitions, used for purposes such as collecting statistics, where there is a need to delineate “tourists” from other travelers in a precise and unambiguous way. The third context includes all the formalized concepts developed for academic and business purposes focusing on topics such as tourists’ behavior. The second context relates to technical definitions, used for purposes such as collecting statistics, where there is a need to delineate “tourists” from other travelers in a precise and unambiguous way. The third context includes all the formalized concepts developed for academic and business purposes focusing on topics such as tourists’ behavior in various roles (consumers, cultural agents, etc.).

Springing from the third context, this paper regards “tourists” as persons away from home to the extent that their behavior is motivated by leisure related factors. This avoids any questions of trip or visit purpose, not pertinent to the theme. Persons on trips for the main purpose of business, for instance, often have intervals of uncommitted time during their itinerary, and may devote that discretionary time to a leisure-related pursuit. To that extent, during such intervals, those persons can reasonably be regarded as tourists in a behavioral sense.

An intrinsic link between tourism and leisure is acknowledged by
several writers, including Bodewes (1981), Pigram (1983), Leiper (1985), Hamilton-Smith (1987), and Krippendorf (1987). Pursuing this line of analysis, five assertions can be made about the tourist/leisure connection. First, the essence of touristic behavior involves a search for satisfying leisure away from home. Second, touristic leisure means a search for suitable attractions or, to be more precise, a search for personal (in situ) experience of attraction systems' nuclear elements. Third, the process depends ultimately on each individual's mental and non-mental attributes such as needs and ability to travel. Fourth, the markers or informative elements have a key role in the links between each tourist and the nuclear elements being sought for personal experience. Fifth, the process is not automatically productive, because tourists' needs are not always satisfied (these systems may be functional or dysfunctional, to varying degrees).

Leisure experiences can be broadly classified into two categories following Dumazedier's (1967) analysis, which was applied to a theoretical discussion of touristic leisure elsewhere (Leiper 1985). Recreational leisure is behavior which restores the individual; it re-creates via rest, relaxation, and entertainment. Creative leisure brings about a new state. Across the spectrum, taking in the wide range of recreational and creative needs that might be found behind tourists' behavior, a very wide and diverse range of attractions is implied.

B. Nuclei

A nucleus, the central element in a tourist attraction system, might be any feature or characteristic of a place that a traveler contemplates visiting or actually visits. The needs and motivations underlying such experiences are individualistic and, therefore, nuclear elements in attraction systems are correspondingly varied. However, to simply imply that nuclei are amorphous or ubiquitous is not much help in research and scholarship. Rather, such implication increases the desirability of categorization. Therefore, in the context of the model of attraction systems, Lew's (1987) work can be regarded as a study of three useful approaches or perspectives for categorizing nuclear elements. Alternative approaches can be suggested, providing additional insights.

One approach, akin to Lew's "cognitive perspective," is to classify nuclei types on the basis of tourists' experiential attributes. This could be subdivided in several ways to reflect many possible ways of analyzing behavior. A categorization beginning with needs, psychological factors underlying motivations, would provide a comprehensive approach: each need implies a type of nucleus. For instance, the need for social interaction requires, as the nucleus, people willing and able to socialize; the need for rest requires environments that are personally regarded as peaceful and conducive to recovery from fatigue. However, "needs" are insufficient specific for a practical discussion about attractions; what is salient is not the "need" but the "want" that it stimulates in an individual. Three individuals might all need relaxation and all seek satisfaction of that need from trips, yet each might pursue different behavior. For example, the first wants to be in a seaside resort with a few good novels, the second wants to hike 50 miles across a national
park, and the third wants to take a sea cruise advertising exotic ports and lots of socializing.

The distinction between needs and wants helps explain why practical research into links between traveler behavior and tourist attractions has tended to be descriptive and case specific (Stear 1981). In fact, needs are the underlying factors. But a single need might be expressed in dozens of different motivations and wants and, conversely, a single want might reflect any of several different needs, a principle relevant to tourists' behavior (Mill and Morrison 1984:4 ff) as it is to leisure behavior, generally (Kelly 1982:1–2). Descriptive research, about actual cases, is useful for identifying the range of possible wants. The underlying problem to which Stear (1981) alluded is that descriptions do not provide explanations of function (discussed later).

Another approach, akin to Lew's "ideographic [or formal] perspective" is an environmental analysis. Various environmental categories of actual or hypothetical places can be listed with their attributes. Every place, regardless of scale, has multiple attributes that can be classified with varying degrees of scope and detail. The natural environment includes topography, landscape, flora, and fauna. The built environment encompasses factors such as cityscape, specific buildings, monuments, and archaeological sites. The sociocultural environment includes ordinary people and famous individuals, language and dialect, customs, music and dance, cuisine, historical artifacts and collections, and artistic objects and collections. The technological environments include applications of science, in incidental or staged displays. Additional categories could be added. Another variation on Lew's ideographic perspective is Schmidt's (1979) typology, structured under five headings of "emphasis": geographic, social, cultural, technological, and divine. However, very few tourists probably have both the range of interests and the time necessary to experience every category of environment in places they visit.

Relevance of alternative approaches. Multiple approaches to categorizing nuclei help in recognizing the many facets of the phenomena, in theory and in the field. Moreover, alternative approaches may correspond to different practical applications. Such differences are illustrated by considering experiential and formal approaches in terms of Marketing theory.

Nuclear categories framed in relation to touristic experiences can be expressed as lists of what (different) tourists might want to experience. Formal categories of nuclei are lists of the types of attributes that places might have available for tourists to experience. The subtle difference corresponds to the distinction emphasized in marketing between a customer orientation and a product orientation, a distinction sometimes referred to as a "marketing" versus a "sales" emphasis. Business organizations' policies and practices reflect those leanings to some extent and a principle of marketing management is that the former orientation ("customer/marketing" is the better path to serving customers' needs and to long-term business success (Kotler 1986; Levitt 1985).

The distinction has implications for regional and national tourism organizations whose managers deal with the attractions in their geo-
graphical constituencies. In marketing activities, such as designing services and facilities and promoting a destination, the place's attractions should be approached from the perspective of tourists' experiential attributes. When planning a place as a tourist destination, the formal perspective might seem to be the most obvious and relevant; it refers directly to the actual phenomena that can function as nuclei in attraction systems. However, marketing theory dictates that any application should begin with the needs of potential customers, so the experiential approach should precede a formal approach in planning as in other managerial applications.

*Nuclear mix and hierarchy.* An individual tourist might be part of just one attraction system in the course of a particular trip. That is, a person might set off from home with just one experience in mind, to see or do something specific, and might focus on that single experience for the duration of the trip. However, a far more common condition is that each tourist is involved with a range of nuclei. The nuclear mix is a useful expression for referring to the combination of nuclei salient to the experiences of a tourist during a trip.

Within a nuclear mix, different nuclei are likely to have different degrees of significance, because some attractions are more important than others for an individual tourist or for a group. This can be acknowledged by classifying nuclei in a hierarchy, comprising primary, secondary, and tertiary categories relevant to each tourist or each tourist typology.

A primary nucleus is an attribute of a place, a potential tourist destination, which is influential in a traveler's decision about where to go. That implies information is available to the traveler about the attribute and is active, pre-visit, in stimulating motivation in the person to travel towards the place where the attribute can be experienced. A secondary nucleus is an attribute known to a person pre-visit, but not significant in decisions about the itinerary. A tertiary nucleus is an attribute unknown pre-visit, but discovered by the individual after arriving in a destination region.

Analyzing nuclei into primary, secondary, and tertiary categories can help explain behavior patterns of individuals and, by extension, a group of tourists. Some surveys of visitors conducted for national and regional tourism organizations suggest categories along these lines, but no surveys or other empirical research works are known that have used the three-part analysis suggested here.

On the surface, the interests of a tourism organization would seem best served if large numbers of potential tourists were well-informed pre-visit about all the potential nuclei. The broad aim of promotional activities by regional and national tourism organizations, in terms of the hierarchy, is to create primary nuclei. But some types of touristic experiences may be (more) pleasurable because they involve a tertiary nucleus, something discovered by the individual. The pleasure of discovering something can be as much in the discovery as in the subsequent experience. In such cases tourists become, in experiential terms, explorers, mastering what was beyond their knowledge to enrich their cognitive potential.
Spatial distribution of nuclei. Lew's (1987) organizational perspective included the concept of analyzing "attractions" (nuclei) in spatial terms. However, Lew did not relate the spatial categorization to any model of whole tourism systems. In that context, nuclear elements of attractions might be found in two of the three geographical elements of tourism systems, following an earlier model (Leiper 1979). Their major role and location is in tourist destination regions. A secondary role is along (or at points on) transit routes. The nucleus of a tourist attraction is never located in a traveler generating region, places where trips originate, because axiomatically tourism means leaving one's home environment. In practice, particular sights, sites, objects, or events will often be the focus of experiences for tourists and local residents, but for the former group, they are an object of tourist attraction and for the latter an object of leisure related experience in the home locality.

Within a tourist destination region, different types of nuclei have different spatial patterns, as Lew (1987) has shown. Some nuclei can be described as regional, meaning that they may be found throughout a designated region. For example, features and characteristics of Tuscany's cultural and physical environments may be found and experienced throughout Tuscany. Other types might have spatially narrower distribution, limited to a zone, city, town, suburb, precinct, site, or room. Each distribution has its implications for understanding tourists' behavior, linked to the structure of itineraries.

A system modeled geographically in regional terms implies that a region is the elementary spatial unit (Leiper 1979). But larger as well as smaller units are relevant. Some nuclei extend beyond the region and permeate a country or continent. Long haul travelers making touristic trips, for instance, from North America to Europe might perceive nuclei associated with that continent in general, not merely the typically small portions of Europe actually experienced in person.

Clustered nuclei. Certain nuclei are so significant to the motivations of certain tourists that they can stand alone, spatially or in time, functioning as the central elements of attraction systems without other supporting nuclei. Highly popular sights (Grand Canyon, Taj Mahal) and events (Olympic Games) are examples. But at the level of the individual tourist, a unique nucleus might be in the same category: one person might travel especially to experience something that interests no other individual. For contemporary tourism systems in general, clustered nuclei functioning symbiotically seem to be more significant than any unique feature. The concepts of nuclear mix and nuclear hierarchies are linked with this notion of clustering. Symbiosis among clustered nuclei can be observed in spatial terms at various levels: continent, nation, region, city, precinct, and so on.

For example, "tourists' precinct" seems a useful expression for describing a small zone within a town or city where tourists are prone to gather because of clustered nuclei with some unifying theme. What is notable about precincts in terms of the present discussion is that although they include many potential nuclei, they might lack a single nucleus capable of interesting the majority of tourists. What is significant is the combination, the synergistic effect of experiencing many
phenomena with some unifying theme. Each item (a building, site, object, performance, or display) might not in itself be regarded by most tourists as sufficient to influence their itinerary at a trip or daily level. But together the items might be synergistic, forming the basis for satisfying experiences. Also relevant is the time frame: generally a tourists' precinct can be explored relatively comprehensively in less than a day. Tourists' precincts with some distinctive theme are only one example of clustered nuclei. Other examples can be found in shopping centers, art galleries, theme parks, and zoos.

While all nuclei have a spatial dimension, in some cases temporal dimensions are most relevant, when the event is the thing. Festivals, sporting events, and meetings of families and friends from scattered residences are examples of nuclei that take place at specific times. The clustering concept also seems relevant to some of these events. For example, a "tourists' festival" may be regarded as an event-based nucleus structured in a similar manner to a "tourists' precinct." A typical festival is a collection of subevents that have been clustered into a designated time interval; each subevent might have no significance for a tourist whereas a cluster with some unifying theme is more likely to be significant, through synergy.

That analytical approach can also help unravel what is behind the apparent "atmosphere" of a place. Merely citing (some kind of) atmosphere as (the nucleus of) attraction is not conducive to scientific understanding. A more useful approach is to identify the nuclei that, in combination with one another and with particular markers and tourists, can create overlapping systems involving perceptions of atmosphere.

Surrounds of a nucleus. Gunn's (1972, 1979) work has concentrated on physical aspects of nuclei and their surrounds. He introduced the important concept of the "inviolate belt" to designate the area immediately around a nucleus, noting that "every attraction has place, both by physical location and by association" (1972:36). A nucleus is accessible "only by passing through some entering space [the location of] physiological conditioning and reflecting [because] a person's mental set or anticipation of an attraction has much to do with his reception and approval when the feature is reached" (1972:40-41). Gunn's message includes the point that unless designers and managers give proper attention to the inviolate belt, a nucleus might be less than optimally effective in satisfying tourists' expectations and might even fail to be noticed by tourists. Gunn's writings include several examples. A similar message runs through many commentaries which decry excessive commercialization in the immediate vicinity of attractions. What distinguishes Gunn's work is his theoretical constructs, which allow commercialization in its place, beyond the inviolate belt.

Commercialization is associated with most support facilities and services used by tourists, but it should not, according to Gunn's principle, violate the core processes of tourism, processes involving experiences of nuclear elements of attraction systems. Even in cases where the support facilities themselves may form the nucleus, as in a resort hotel, commercialization can be managed in ways that set it apart from recrea-
tional experiences. The successful Club Med organization seems to be managed with this principle very much in mind. For example, its holidays are sold as a comprehensive package at an inclusive price, and anything bearing an extra cost is paid not in cash but in tokens. But Club Med's major distinction in this respect is that operations personnel do not behave and dress in the formal styles of most hotel and resort staff, but in ways that help make them indistinguishable from guests.

An inviolate belt may perform several roles, and thus may be designed or managed with any of several functions in mind. Gunn referred to the conditioning role. He also noted a protective function: a fragile and valuable nucleus (such as an art work or wildlife) can be protected by its immediate surrounds from the undesirable intrusions from more distant environments. Additional categories are suggested in MacCannell's (1976) discussion about the evolutionary phases of attractions. Illustrating those phases in relation to inviolate zones also shows how new nuclei may emerge and how molecular structures of linked attraction systems may evolve. The illustration draws on Sumption's (1975) study of medieval pilgrimage, which he described as the tourism of the era.

At first pilgrims came to communicate with the revered dead, via the relics of holy people. Jaynes' (1982) study is very detailed on this point. To protect some of those saintly relics (a type of nucleus), tombs and buildings were constructed, initially functioning as inviolate belts. The buildings, chapels or churches, were given names, often that of the interred saint. This represents MacCannell's "first phase of sight sacralization . . . naming" (1976:44). With time and with increasing veneration by larger numbers of pilgrims, the tombs were displayed more prominently, framed off and placed on pedestals. This is MacCannell's second phase, "framing and elevation." Later, the buildings themselves came to be venerated. That third phase ("enshrinement") means that a new nucleus has emerged from the inviolate zone of an existing one, so now there are two attraction systems and what could be termed a molecular structure of nuclei. Subsequently, the new nucleus, the building, may acquire its own inviolate belt in the forms of a landscaped entrance, forecourt, and grounds. Later, in some cases, this too evolved to become a nucleus, and a third system formed. Those processes, involving multisystem or molecular compositions, provide an analytical explanation for the evolution of tourists' sites or precincts.

The evolution can only occur around an original nucleus that remained popular for large numbers over a lengthy period. Religious objects, sites, and events are a particularly good example, especially due to their contemporary popularity, as "cultural attractions" in a secular era with large scale tourist flows. Any nucleus relevant to just one tourist, representing a literally unique attraction system, would not evolve in that way.

C. Markers

Markers are items of information, about any phenomenon that is a potential nuclear element in a tourist attraction. MacCannell's (1976) use of the term emphasized that "markers" should be distinguished
from their media. A sign post is not a marker, but might be the medium by which a marker (the information) is conveyed. MacCannell referred to two categories, “off-sight” and “on-sight” markers. That bisection suggests a more detailed analysis, several categories and several functions or roles.

_Detached marker_ is a suitable expression for information functioning apart, spatially, from the nucleus to which it refers. These can be subdivided into _generating markers_ and _transit markers_. The former term refers to information received before setting off to a nucleus and the latter is information found along an itinerary path leading to (and from) the nucleus to which it refers. A typical generating marker is the information people receive in their home environment about the “attractions” (nuclei) in other places, potential tourist destinations. _Contiguous markers_ are at the nucleus to which they refer.

Certain kinds of media typically convey certain geographical categories of markers, because of the typical location of those media in the context of a tourism system. For example, consultants in retail travel agencies, whose main activity in this context is telling clients about the attractions in places they might visit, are trying to convey generating markers. Advertisements and publicity on television, radio, and in the public press, aimed at motivating people in their home environments to travel to particular places, also usually try to convey generating markers. Stories from one's neighbors about the attractions of the places they visited on vacation are also generating markers. Pictures of beaches and fish on roadside billboards leading to a seaside resort are transit markers. Signs on plaques attached to monuments and beneath paintings in an art gallery are contiguous markers. The information in a commentary by a tour guide conducting people around a site or interpreting an event is also a contiguous marker.

Some media are portable, and can convey different categories of markers. A guide book might be read pre-trip, again on route, and later while actually experiencing the sights, sites, objects, events or whatever. Tour escorts often provide their clients with information about a specific nucleus on several occasions during a trip. Other travelers and people met along the way may be media for all kinds of markers.

_Roles and functions of markers_. Every tourist attraction includes at least one functioning marker. Broadly, markers act as the catalytic element, linking the human and nuclear elements of an attraction system. Many systems have multiple markers, with overlapping or diverse functions and roles, referring to one nucleus or a set and potentially received by an individual tourist. An attraction system might be defective because its markers are too many, are conflicting, or deficient in some respect. These general principles become clearer after considering the range of roles and functions that markers can have. The first three items to follow are presented to represent an individual who first becomes motivated to travel, who next decides where to go, and who then plans an itinerary. Some travelers make all three decisions in a single phase, if their initial motivations relates to some specific nucleus.
Trip motivation. People must have information about what might be experienced somewhere before they can form positive expectations about the prospect of traveling to visit a place. Expectation that a need will be satisfied is one necessary condition for motivation. The principle from this is that at least one generating marker is necessary, referring to some kind of phenomenon that acts as a primary nucleus, before an individual can become motivated to set off on a touristic trip.

Destination selection. At least one detached marker referring to a specific nucleus is necessary before an individual makes decisions about where to go or where to visit for touristic leisure. The detached marker can be the generating or transit category, because a traveler might decide about destinations pre-trip or after setting out from home. The explanation is the same as for trip motivation: a necessary condition of destination selection is information relating to potentially satisfying experiences.

Itinerary planning. A series of detached markers are necessary for planning itineraries of multidestination trips. That activity involves contemplating which places might be visited for touristic leisure, an activity that involves a series of detached markers relating to potential primary and secondary nuclei. Travel agents and tour operators perform this planning function to some degree for some tourists; others, the highly independent types, might only draw on markers outside the travel and tourism industry.

Activity selection. Markers can influence tourists' decisions about the activities they will undertake. In other words, markers often invite participation in or attention to phenomena that a tourist had not previously contemplated during a trip. On vacation, a person might see or hear an advertisement for a golf course and consequently become motivated to play a round. Many ski and seaside resorts issue daily weather bulletins, information that helps tourists at the resorts to decide their day's activities.

Nucleus identification. Most markers name the nucleus to which they refer. This piece of information enables the nucleus to be identified and distinguished from other similar phenomena.

Finding the nucleus. Certain information about nuclei, in media such as maps and roadside sign posts, is used for locating the nucleus that a tourist is seeking.

Name connotation. Certain names of nuclei have connotations that affect tourists' perceptions of the experiences in prospect. Positive connotation can contribute to the motivation and satisfaction, which is why organizations trying to promote a place often coin new names for it with tourist markets in mind. Monte Carlo, coined to promote Monaco, is an example (Cameron 1975). Sometimes the chosen name has authentic associations with the nucleus it connotes, as in Costa del Sol. In some other cases, the name coined for tourism promotion can be effective in that function despite dubious authenticity relative to the nucleus it connotes, as in Surfers Paradise. That highly promoted place is one of the most popular seaside resorts on the east coast of Australia, but has never been rated a paradise for surfers according to several veteran surfers interviewed by this writer along that coast.
Souvenirs. Certain markers, in durable media, help people remember touristic experiences. Photographs are probably the most common medium for this function. Indeed, the technology of photography was invented in 1839 by an English tourist, Fox Talbot, as he wanted a method of recording the scenery of Lake Como (Sontag 1979).

The meanings of tourism. Some sort of information is necessary to give meaning to any touristic experience. MacCannell (1976) has discussed this in detail with reference to sightseeing. He showed that a sight lacking a marker is not necessarily meaningless to tourists, but rather the sight becomes a marker for the place being visited. That is, tourists can derive meaning about the region or country (nucleus) from the sights (markers) perceived there. Certain phenomena interest sightseeing tourists only because of markers, not because of anything remarkable in the sights. MacCannell gives several examples, and the point is implicit in many guide books. E. M. Forster is explicit in the "Introduction" to his guide to an ancient city: "The 'sights' of Alexandria are in themselves not interesting, but they fascinate when we approach them from the past, and this is what I have tried to do by the double arrangement of history and guide" (Forster 1982:xx).

Why and how does that principle, that an attraction system always includes a meaningful marker, extend beyond sightseeing and other cultural categories to attractions generally? The history of a popular recreational activity provides supporting evidence. Only during the past two hundred years has swimming been regarded as a pleasurable recreation (Turner and Ash 1975). Between the late 1700s and the mid 1900s, swimming became popular as a recreational activity, and also (therefore) popular as a touristic activity, with seaside vacations becoming common. In recent years, Urry (1988) has discerned a reverse trend, away from those forms of tourism. The trends are not because of any intrinsic factors, but depend on certain values and tastes conveyed through society in a variety of cultural messages. According to Urry's analysis, societies transmit information (markers) to their members that continuously reinforce or change the meanings attributed by individuals to alternative leisure experiences, and those meanings shape individuals' preferences and wants.

In the light of the above analysis and discussion, Figure 1 presents a diagram of a common example of tourist attraction systems. Its components and their linkages, its elementary functions, are shown. Models of simpler or more complex systems are possible. Other aspects such as the non-elementary commercial support services and facilities can be imagined.

The diagram shows how the linkages occur, how a tourist attraction comes into existence, and what its motile processes involve. There is no teleology. Tourists are not depicted as being "attracted" in any literal sense; there are no "pull" factors, no "magnetic" forces functioning. Instead, past and present conditions are determinants for future behavior and states. Tourists are pushed (an appropriate metaphor) by their own motivation towards the places and/or events where they expect their needs will be satisfied. The motivation depends on information, received from at least one detached marker, matching the individual's
A tourist attraction is a systemic arrangement of three elements: a person with touristic needs, a nucleus (any feature or characteristic of a place they might visit) and at least one marker (information about the nucleus).

Figure 1. A Model of Tourist Attraction

The generating marker is information received before setting out for the place where the nucleus is located; the transit marker is information received on route; the contiguous marker is at the nucleus. The diagram depicts how “attractions” really operate: tourists are never literally “attracted”, “pulled” or “magnetized”, but are motivated to experience a nucleus and its markers when a marker reacts positively with needs and wants.

CONCLUSIONS AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This paper proposes constructs for a theory of tourist attractions. It suggests that attractions can be regarded as systemic constructs. Tourist attraction systems are subsystems in all whole tourism systems. Tourist attraction systems have elementary parts extending beyond the phenomena that are popularly thought of as being “tourist attractions.” Tourists are part of these systems, not merely consumers or users of some
discrete phenomena. If no tourist ever visited the Tower of London, it
would not be thought of as a tourist attraction; the tourists are neces-
sary parts. Markers, too, are an elementary part, not merely promo-
tional or operational devices relating to some sight or event. "Tourists
attractions" do not operate or function in any literal sense. The expres-
sion is a metaphor, and a risky one in research and scholarship. The
three part construct (the three elements forming the system) allows a
different interpretation about processes, one more appropriate to a
social science approach to understanding tourism.

Another principle argued in this paper is that the elements in tourist
attraction systems are highly differentiated. Behaviorally, there are
many types of tourists, and individual tourists might relate to virtually
any feature or characteristic of places as nuclei. Informative elements
(markers) are likewise found in very diverse media and may perform
many functions in the system.

This study contains several possibilities for future research, theoreti-
cal or empirical. Field research using this body of theory as foundation
could be focused on any particular element (a nucleus or collection of
nuclei, or markers, or tourist or group of tourists), but would integrate
the other elements in a systematic manner. The present writer's work in
progress includes a collection of case studies that are applying the
theoretical material to investigations of the effectiveness or otherwise of
particular attraction systems.

Given that development, the main practical applications would appear in organizations concerned with fostering particular places as
tourist destinations, since the theory provides a broad-based under-
standing of how a destination really "attracts" tourists. The system-
wide model can be applied in operations research to guide managerial
policies and strategies. Geographically, operations research projects
using this model would extend from selected generating regions (travel-
ers' home regions, the primary market places of the travel and tourism
industry) to specific nuclei in tourist destinations. Functionally, such
projects can account for different types of tourists, different forms of
nuclei, and different media and roles of markers. Because markers
often stem from a wide range of fragmented sources, the markers
referring to a particular nucleus are seldom consistent. Instead, there
may be gaps in the information a traveler requires, and markers that
are erroneous or misleading. Some systems seem to be less than effect-
ive because of deficient markers, while others seem to have too many
markers a condition that tourists might regard as excessive commer-
cialization.

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