PERSPECTIVES ON TOURISM PLANNING IN CHINA

Dr. Geoffrey Wall
Professor of Geography and Environmental Management
Faculty of Environment
University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5X4
Canada
E-mail: gwall@uwaterloo.ca

The 7th UNWTO/PATA Forum on TOURISM TRENDS AND OUTLOOK
Guilin, China, 21-23 October 2013
INTRODUCTION

- Places that are good to live in are also good to visit - product of tourism is experiences

- Such places do not occur by chance but require careful planning and management

- Focus of presentation on tourism planning in China
NATURE OF EVIDENCE

- PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH TOURISM PLANNING IN ASIA AND ELSEWHERE
- INVOLVEMENT IN TOURISM PLANNING INITIATIVES IN CHINA FOR ALMOST 20 YEARS
  - PROVINCIAL TO LOCAL
  - URBAN TO RURAL
  - WIDE GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION
- DIRECTED MULTI-YEAR ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS IN CHINA
- SUPERVISED 30 THESES ON TOURISM IN CHINA
  - NUMEROUS PUBLICATIONS
  - ETHNIC TOURISM PLANNING (Xishuangbanna, Yunnan)
- INTERACTED WITH OFFICIALS, ACADEMICS, TOURISTS, RESIDENTS, SOME OPERATORS
WHY DO DESTINATION AREAS WANT TOURISTS?

- TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF RESIDENTS

- IMPLICATIONS
  - TOURISM IS A MEANS RATHER THAN AND END IN ITSELF
  - TOURISM PLANNING SHOULD BE AS MUCH ABOUT RESIDENTS AS TOURISTS
  - APPROPRIATE SPECIFICATION OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
CHINESE CONTEXT

- MANY SUCCESSES – TOURISM GROWTH OVER 25 YEARS

- ALSO FAILURES
  - “BUILD THE NESTS AND THE BIRDS WILL COME” – NOT TRUE!

- CHALLENGES OF SPEED AND SCALE OF DEVELOPMENT

- TIME RIGHT FOR EVALUATION
  - 2013 INTERNATIONAL VISITOR STATISTICS DISAPPOINTING SO FAR
CHINESE CONTEXT (cont’d)

- PRESIDENT HU – TOURISM DEVELOPMENT (PLANNING) SHOULD BE ‘SCIENTIFIC’ AND ‘HARMONIOUS’

- PRESIDENT XI – ENVIRONMENT AND MORE EQUITABLE

- WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?
CHINESE CONTEXT (cont’d)

- TOURISM NOT A SCIENCE (DEBATED) BUT SHOULD BE DEVELOPED:
  - LOGICALLY
  - SOUND PRINCIPLES AND CONCEPTS
  - APPROPRIATE DATA / INFORMATION

- HARMONIOUS = SUSTAINABLE
  - BALANCE BETWEEN ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE
  - LONG TIME HORIZON
  - EQUITY – SOCIALLY AND SPATIALLY

- DOES TOURISM PLANNING MEET THESE CRITERIA?
PROCESS AND PRODUCT

PROCESS

- CURRENTLY TOP-DOWN
  - NEED FOR INVOLVEMENT OF MORE STAKEHOLDERS

- EXPERT DRIVEN
  - BUT ARE THEY REALLY EXPERTS?

- NOT BASED ON ADEQUATE DATA / ANALYSES

- STATUS OF TOURISM AUTHORITIES WEAK
PRODUCT

- NARROW FOCUS ON ATTRACTIONS

- LIMITED INTEGRATION
  - WITH OTHER SECTORS
  - INSUFFICIENT ATTENTION TO ENVIRONMENT OR SOCIO-CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

- INSUFFICIENTLY STRATEGIC
  - CONTAIN MUCH USELESS INFORMATION
  - SELDOM PHASED ADEQUATELY
  - RESPONSIBILITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION UNCLEAR

- PLANS NOT PUBLIC DOCUMENTS
CONCLUSIONS

- OVERALL, TOURISM IN CHINA IS A SUCCESS STORY (WHEN VIEWED NARROWLY)

- LESS CLEAR IF WELL-BEING OF RESIDENTS IMPROVED

- GOALS COULD BE BETTER ACHIEVED IF BOTH PLANNING PROCESS AND PRODUCTS IMPROVED:
  - GOALS / OBJECTIVES SPECIFIED WITH CARE
  - PLANS HAD BROADER CONTENT
  - HAD STRONGER INFORMATION BASE (RESEARCH)
  - INVOLVED MORE STAKEHOLDERS (ESPECIALLY RESIDENTS)
  - MORE ACCESSIBLE (PUBLIC DOCUMENTS)