

A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO CITY TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY

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Abstract: Generally, destinations with pristine natural attributes are the ones faced with issues related to tourism sustainability. However, this narrow focus often leads to the establishment of dogmatic 'dos' and 'don'ts' that are not always practical in all circumstances. Secondly, depending on the definition that is given to the concept of sustainability, no form of tourism can last very long unless deliberate efforts are made to ensure that it has a future. City tourism is one of the types of tourism that is not usually associated with the sustainability debate, and yet needs to be. Experience has shown that when a laissez-faire attitude is adopted toward city tourism development the strengths and weaknesses of a city are not studied in detail to determine which attributes may be exploited for touristic purposes. In addition, when the unique characteristics of local residents are not harnessed through community partnerships to ensure that tourism development is sensitive to existing cultural and environmental systems, the longevity of city tourism becomes suspect. This paper summarizes a study that uses the Importance Performance analysis to identify those tourism features in Indianapolis that international visitors perceived to be tourism magnets to the city, as well as the attributes that needed to be worked on. It is such grounded evaluations of city tourism perspectives that can make reliable contributions toward the building of a sustainable city tourism model.

Introduction

Sustainable tourist development is viewed as development that caters to the needs of current tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing for future generations the very opportunities and attractions that make a destination desirable today (World Tourism Organization, 1995). Meadows (1992) contended that a sustainable society is one that can persist over generations, and that is far-seeing enough, flexible enough, and wise enough not to undermine either its physical or its social systems of support. Ekins and Jacobs (1995) defined sustainability as development based on a unique

relationship between production and consumption that can be pursued into the distant future without corrupting the human or natural environment. Daly (1997) associated the term with economic growth of a different and more self-conscious variety, one whose purpose is the enhancement of human welfare and the release of human potential, both of which require care for the natural environment.

However, lots of questions remain regarding the basic meaning of the sustainability of anything. Is it a commitment toward balancing short-term gains against long-term viability? If so, then what time scale of viability can be deemed acceptable (Luke, 1995)? Are the 'gods' of sustainability satisfied if the prescribed technical fixes guarantee the sustainability of an urban museum for five hundred years, or does it have to be three millennia? Who are the stakeholders and the major players who can make the major contributions to tourism sustainability? Are there different instances where the actions of individuals acting alone or as local communities and cities can make the difference while in other circumstances, it has to be corporate giants, nations or even the whole planet that have to work together to produce any significant impact (Wahab and Pigram, 1997)? Other questions also need to be asked about who the intended beneficiaries of a policy of sustainable tourism should be. Is it just humans, all living things or the whole planet? On the human level, who speaks for the interests of the generations yet unborn?

The different definitional possibilities and perspectives of the notion of sustainability that these questions present make it difficult to attempt to reduce the concept to its technical dimensions, with consistent technical fixes (Torgenson, 1995). A more practical approach toward long-term viability of tourism assets at destinations may thus involve destination-appropriate management practices which are based on empirical studies of the strengths and weaknesses of each destination. Attempts can then be made to promote only those types of tourism for which the specific destination has strong strategic advantages over the competition, and can thus withstand the 'wear and tear' of the use of its resources for such touristic purposes.

The sustainability of tourism at a destination then depends on the natural, socio-cultural, economic and aesthetic environment in which a particular type of tourism can thrive with minimal negative impacts on those environments (Sandercock, 1998). In certain instances, city tourism can be an engine that helps revitalize a city and its regional economy while at the same time dignifying and preserving its architectonic and cultural richness (Law, 1993). This provides alternatives to mass tourism and allows a community to diversify its tourism offerings. Jansen-Verbeke (1988) as well as Buckley and Witt (1985, 1989), cited by Law (1993) suggest that urban regeneration for tourism purposes is an appropriate approach not only for the great cities, but also for smaller urban centers that offer tourist attractions quite different from the traditional mass tourism destinations.

Literature Review

a) City tourism

The study of city tourism has also been ignored by the academic world (Ashworth, 1989, Fainstein et al., 1992). It was not until the middle 1980s that articles began to appear on city tourism (Jansen-Verbeke, 1986, 1988, 1989). Researchers began examining the potential of city tourism as an economic revitalization tool for smaller industrial areas as well as major cities (Buckley and Witt, 1989). However, the existing studies continued to ignore the potential of city tourism as a tool for sustainable city planning and development. Furthermore, the lack of a widely accepted definition of city tourism prevented researchers from establishing a methodological research frame to estimate the financial and social dimensions of the city tourism activity.

Jansen-Verbeke (1988) defines the city tourism product as historic buildings, urban landscapes, museums and art galleries, theatres, sport, and events. The author classifies the elements of city tourism into primary, secondary, and additional elements. The primary elements are the core characteristics, attractions, activities, and facilities of the city that would exist whether or not tourists visited. These characteristics often turn out to be the main reason that tourists visit a destination. They include cultural facilities, physical characteristics, sports and amusement facilities, and socio-cultural features. The secondary elements comprise the tourism superstructures intended to accommodate and service the visitors. They include hotels, catering facilities, and markets. Lastly, the additional elements consist of support services and destination management issues that facilitate access by visitors to the local attractions and activities, as well as to the hotels, restaurants and airports. These elements include tourist information offices, parking facilities, signposts guides, maps, and other services that facilitate the accessibility of the tourist offerings of the destination.

b) Importance Performance Analysis

An importance-performance analysis (IP) is a research technique often used in strategic quality assessment of the salient features of services and products provided to customers (Martilla and James, 1977; Hawes and Rao, 1985; Dolinsky, 1991; Almanza et al., 1994; Go and Zhang, 1997; Joppe et al. 2001). In tourism destination assessments, it involves a simultaneous examination of visitors' opinions about both the importance of the salient features of the services and products provided by a destination, and the extent to which the destination is seen by the visitors to have performed to their expectations on those salient features.

A two-dimensional grid is created on which the values of the perceived importance of service features and the level of performance of the destination are plotted. The horizontal axis of the grid indicates tourists' perceptions of the destination's *performance* on the salient features of the service. This axis measures performance that ranges from poor to

excellent. There is a mid-point which is equivalent to the grand mean of the scores of all performance measures for the salient features under consideration.

The vertical axis measures the *importance* of the salient features of the services provided, and range from 'not at all important' to 'very important'. The mid-point is again signaled by the grand mean of the importance measures for the salient features under consideration. The grand means of the importance/performance measures create 'cross hairs' which divide the two-dimensional grid into four quadrants. The features, whose IP scores place them in the upper right quadrant, are considered important by tourists in attracting them to the destination, since they rate high on the importance axis. The destination is also seen to have performed well on those features, since it rates high on the performance scale.

The features located in the upper left quadrant are considered important destination attraction features, but the destination is performing below the average expectations of visitors, given that the features score below the grand mean for performance.

The performance of the destination is rated high for features in the lower right quadrant although visitors rate them below average in importance. Given the low level of importance attributed to these features, the scores suggest that too much effort is being given to features that do not really help attract visitors to the destination.

Finally, the features in the lower left quadrant are not perceived to be important by visitors. There may be a need to shift some resources and effort from these features to features in the upper left quadrant, to improve performance on features that are considered important destination magnets.

Methodology

The Importance Performance (IP) analysis was used in this study to help Indianapolis begin the process of identifying the features of the city that can contribute toward the building of a sustainable community that favorably positions itself to these diverse tourism market segments.

Data was obtained from 374 international participants at the 2001 World Police and Fire games, hosted by Indianapolis between June 8 and June 16, 2001. A structured questionnaire was designed, pilot tested, and used to collect data for this study. The questions were based on other instruments previously employed and empirically verified concerning both their validity and reliability.

Part of the survey contained two 4-point Likert-type scales of 14 items each. The first listed certain tourism services and products of a destination and asked respondents to state how important these items normally are in influencing their choice of a vacation destination. The measurement scale for these items went from 'very important' to 'not at all important'.

The second Likert-type scale listed the salient tourism services and products available in Indianapolis, which correspond to the list of items on the importance scale. Respondents were asked to state

how satisfied they were with the performance of Indianapolis in providing those items.

The mean of each item on both scales was calculated and the corresponding pairs of items on each scale were used to plot IP ratings on a two dimensional grid. These responses were then compared with responses to corresponding questions that rated the importance of these features in generally influencing vacation destination choice. This process enabled the researchers to determine the selection process of vacation destinations by the visitors.

The study divided participants into four regions: Europe, Canada, Asia, and Australia. One-way ANOVA was used to make comparisons among participants from these different geographic regions to identify potential differences in perceptions relating to the IP analysis.

This investigation resulted in the creation of a sustainable city tourism development model. Organizing and involving the community in city tourism initiatives, based on research findings such as the IP analysis, is the foundation for building successful community enterprises. It is vital that the entire community experiences some level of involvement and benefit associated with local city tourism businesses. The involvement of a community's stakeholders in city tourism projects is paramount. Examples of community stakeholders may include concerned individuals and groups, small business owners, entrepreneurs, local associations, and government officials.

Results

The developed IP grid provided baseline information on strengths and weaknesses of the different tourist features of Indianapolis. The Importance scale had an alpha reliability measure of 0.7593 and the Performance scale had an alpha reliability of 0.6981. Reliability scores for both measures suggest that the two IP scales were reliable.

a) Importance Performance (IP) rating

Figure 1 shows the two-dimensional grid, where the grand means of the items on the importance and performance scales create the 'cross hairs' that divide the grid into four quadrants. The location of the combined IP pairs of items suggests possible management options by the city for each item. The grid indicates that Indianapolis fared well in the following items, located in the quadrant labeled "B":

- Local residents are perceived by visitors to be friendly.
- The city is viewed as having high standards of cleanliness and hygiene.
- Personal security for tourists is above average.
- The city creates opportunities for visitors to have new experiences.
- The variety of restaurants in the city is good.

These items scored well above the average thresholds established by the grand means of the items in both the importance and the performance scales.

They are thus important destination magnets. When visitors come to Indianapolis, these elements are provided to their satisfaction.

Respondents rated items located in the quadrant labeled "A", as being above average in importance and in their ability to influence destination choice decisions. However, Indianapolis performed below visitor expectations on these items. These items include:

- The need for a destination to have many things for visitors to see and do.
- The need for good local transportation services.
- The need for a destination to be entertaining.
- The cost of accommodations.

The two items in the quadrant labeled "D" (the quality of accommodations and the ease of getting tourism information in the city) are rated below average in importance, and yet Indianapolis does a good job providing them to visitors.

The three last items, concerning the difficulty of getting to Indianapolis by air, nightlife and night entertainment in the city, and arts and cultural attractions in Indianapolis are elements that respondents considered less important in influencing their vacation destination choice decisions. Indianapolis performed poorly in those items as well.

b) Perceptions of Indianapolis Tourism Attractions by Origin of Visitors

Tables 1 and 2 compare, by region of origin of respondents, the importance ratings of selected items in influencing destination selection and the performance ratings of Indianapolis on those items.

In Table 1, the desirability of excellent nightlife as a destination asset that attracts visitors was significantly more important for European respondents than it was for Asians ($p=0.014$). On the other hand, Canadian and Australian respondents did not differ significantly from Europeans or Asians in their perceptions of this item.

While respondents from all regions felt that the variety of restaurant choices was an important visitor attraction for a destination, Australians were significantly more emphatic in this view than Europeans ($p=0.044$).

Similarly, respondents from all the regions perceived good local transportation services as an important asset for a destination. However, Canadian respondents were significantly less sold on this idea than their Australian and Asian counterparts (Australia: $p=0.030$, Asia: $p=0.022$).

Among respondents from different geographic regions, preference for air travel for holidays was the other statistically significant difference in the items on the importance scale. Canadian respondents differed significantly from European and Australian respondents by minimizing the importance of air travel for their holiday trips (Europe: $p=0.002$, Australia: $p=0.015$).

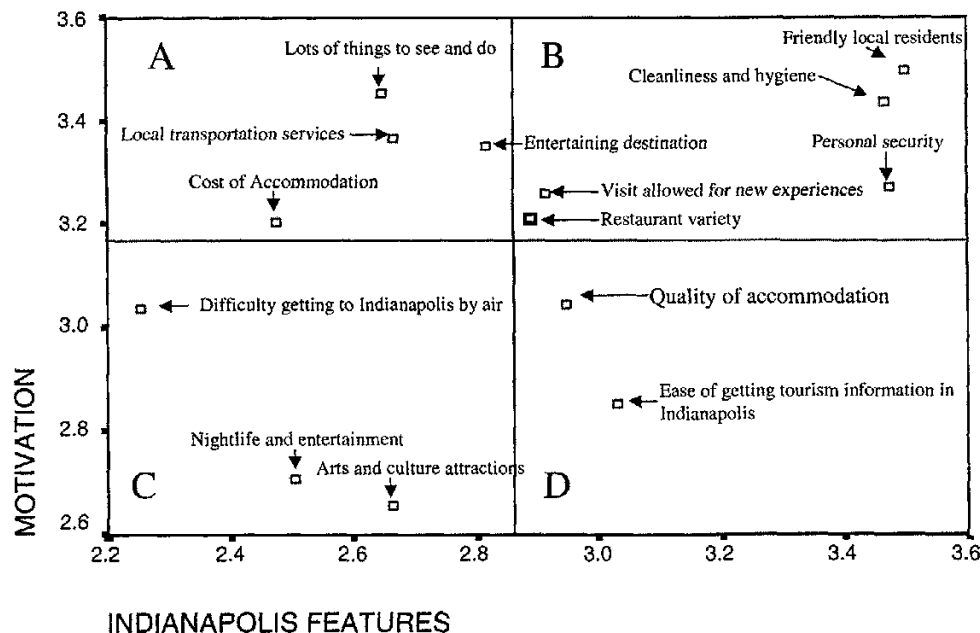


Figure 1: Foreign Visitors: Importance-Performance Analysis of the Tourism Attributes of Indianapolis

Table 2 presents the satisfaction ratings of respondents on the tourism offerings of Indianapolis, by geographic region of the respondents. Asian respondents were the least satisfied with the choices of restaurants in Indianapolis. They differed significantly in their perception of restaurant choices from Australian and Canadian respondents (Australia: $p=0.031$, Canada: $p=0.025$).

Even though all groups generally rated safety in Indianapolis high, Asians were the least impressed with safety. Results differed significantly from respondents in all the other regions under consideration (Europe: $p=0.001$, Canada: $p=0.022$, Australia: $p=0.034$). The Europeans appear to be the group least concerned about safety, followed by Canadians and Australians.

Respondents from all regions gave a failing grade to Indianapolis regarding the cost of accommodations. Accommodations were perceived as being too expensive. Canadians emphatically expressed this conviction, which differed significantly from Asian respondents ($p=0.028$).

Regarding the question of Indianapolis being an entertaining destination, Asians and Europeans rated the city below average, while Canadians and Australians gave it an above average rating. The Asians were the least convinced about the entertainment capabilities of the city, and they differ

significantly from Canadians and Australians in this view (Canada: $p=0.044$, Australia: $p=0.022$).

Conclusions

Successful implementation of city tourism sustainable development model could provide an array of extra benefits to city destinations, such as:

- Greater understanding of the dynamics of a city tourism market and city tourists,
- The ability to test new ideas before the implementation phase,
- The ability to target niche city tourism markets,
- Cost effective alternative to mass tourism media advertising,
- Development of new distribution channels, and
- The ability to plan for year-round city tourism, thereby eliminating seasonality.

Table 1: Considerations that international visitors normally take into account when selecting a vacation destination.

	Canada		Europe		Australia		Asia	
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
Destinations that allow me to try new experiences	3.15	106	3.17	131	3.43	21	3.13	32
Destinations that provide excellent nightlife attractions	2.78	102	2.88*	129	2.81	21	2.29-	34
Destinations with good variety of restaurant choices	3.31	104	3.21-	133	3.68*	22	3.14	36
Travel that emphasizes learning about the arts, culture and history	2.56	102	2.61	136	2.95	22	3.00	33
Visits to destinations where the people are generally friendly	3.41	102	3.48	135	3.82	22	3.46	35
Destinations that have excellent accommodations	3.21	100	2.95	129	3.32	22	2.85	34
Destinations that do not create serious personal safety problems for tourists	3.40	102	3.13	128	3.32	22	3.38	32
Destinations with moderate accommodations costs	3.20	102	3.10	126	3.50	22	3.28	32
Destinations with high cleanliness and hygiene standards	3.43	106	3.33	132	3.59	22	3.42	33
Destinations with good transportation services	3.17*	103	3.32	131	3.64+	22	3.57+	35
Destinations offering fun and entertainment	3.42	102	3.22	130	3.59	22	3.21	34
Destinations with lots of activities and things to see	3.50	104	3.38	130	3.57	21	3.29	34
I prefer to travel by air to my holiday destination	2.83*	52	3.37+	49	3.60+	10	2.94	18
At my travel destination, I prefer to find things out on my own rather than having to pay for a guided tour	3.00	52	2.94	47	3.00	11	2.76	17

Indicates that the mean of the item for the country or region in question is significantly different from one or more of the means of the other regions/countries.

+Signals that that mean is greater at a statistically significant level than the one marked with an asterisk.

-Signals that that mean is smaller at a statistically significant level than the one marked with an asterisk.

NB: Since one mean can differ from several other means at different levels of statistical significance, the exact level of difference (significance) is only mentioned in the text above.

Table 2: The adequacy of the tourism-related features of Indianapolis from the perspective of international visitors.

	Canada		Europe		Australia		Asia	
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N	Mean	N
The visit to Indianapolis allowed me to try new experiences	2.94	96	2.97	114	3.09	22	2.84	32
Nightlife and night entertainment in Indianapolis are generally very good	2.60	87	2.90	104	2.24	17	2.82	28
I liked the choices of restaurants in the area	3.05+	102	2.97	118	3.18+	22	2.65*	31
Indianapolis has very good arts and culture attractions	3.00	85	3.00	106	3.29	21	3.03	29
I found people that I interacted with to be generally friendly in Indianapolis	3.50	103	3.46	103	3.73	22	3.35	34
Accommodations in Indianapolis are poor	3.14	100	3.04	114	3.00	20	3.06	32
I feel safe and secure in the Indianapolis area	3.45+	103	3.55+	122	3.55+	22	3.12*	33
The cost of accommodation has been reasonable	2.40*	103	2.59	116	2.41	22	2.84+	32
I think the city of Indianapolis maintains high standards of hygiene and cleanliness	3.44	102	3.53	123	3.55	22	3.28	32
Transportation services within Indianapolis are adequate	3.01	91	2.77	115	2.73	22	2.94	32
I consider Indianapolis an entertaining destination	3.02+	98	2.86	118	3.19+	21	2.67*	30
There is a lack of things to do and see in Indianapolis	2.95	91	2.54	116	3.05	20	2.68	31
Getting to Indianapolis by air is difficult	2.71	56	2.57	111	3.00	22	2.58	31
I found the tourist information I needed for the city rather easily	3.11	96	3.10	115	3.05	22	2.94	32

Indicates that the mean of the item for the country or region in question is significantly different from one or more of the means of the other regions/countries.

+Signals that that mean is greater at a statistically significant level than the one marked with an asterisk.

-Signals that that mean is smaller at a statistically significant level than the one marked with an asterisk.

NB: Since one mean can differ from several other means at different levels of statistical significance, the exact level of difference (significance) is only mentioned in the text above.

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