

The Tourism System, 8th edition, Kendall Hunt Publishing by

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WHY USE A SYSTEMS APPROACH FOR THE STUDY OF TOURISM? Many people talk about the subject of this book as “the tourism industry.” You have already heard that there are at least three good reasons for talking about tourism as an industry. However, the authors choose to characterize tourism as a system, rather than as an industry. This is done for several reasons. The first is to emphasize the interdependency in tourism; that it consists of several interrelated parts working together to achieve common purposes, which is called the Tourism System. The tourism system is like a spider’s web—touch one part and reverberations are felt throughout the system. The tourism system approach is based on general systems theory. The father of general systems theory was a biologist, Ludwig von Bertalanffy. He defined a system as “a set of elements standing in interrelation among themselves and with the environments.” Von Bertalanffy (1973) also suggested that general systems theory was “a way of seeing things that were previously overlooked or bypassed.” The authors are not the first to talk about a tourism system. Two of the pioneers of the concept were Clare Gunn, Emeritus Professor of Texas A&M University, and Neil Leiper of Southern Cross University in Australia. Gunn (1994) describes the functioning tourism system, consisting of the supply side of attractions, services, promotion, information, and transportation, and states that: “No matter how it is labeled or described, tourism is not only made up of hotels, airlines, or the so-called tourist industry but rather a system of major components linked together in an intimate and interdependent relationship.” Leiper (1990) believes that a tourism system consists of five elements: a human element (tourist), three geographical regions (traveler-generating region, transit route, and tourist destination region), and an industrial element (the travel and tourism industry). Although Leiper acknowledges the term “industry” in his system, he firmly supports the need to more holistically view tourism as a system rather than as an industry: “Unfortunately, many persons closely involved with the business of tourism hold a dogma that tourism is an industry. The dogma has been reiterated in academic literature. The origins of this belief are understandable, but that does not mitigate the flawed thinking.” Clearly, it is very easy to use a ‘laundry list’ approach to describe tourism—describing the businesses that obviously are part of tourism one-by-one, such as airlines, hotels and resorts. However, this approach fails to include local communities, and other businesses and organizations affected by tourism, that may or may not see themselves as part of the so-called ‘tourism industry.’ For example, many people working for hotels and restaurants do not feel they are part of tourism. Their business begins with customers walking in the front door: They fail to examine the question “Why are they walking in our front door?” This myopic view has meant that many organizations have ended up being reactive to changes that have occurred outside their front doors, rather than being proactive and anticipating future changes in tourism. For a student beginning to study tourism, it is important to get ‘the big picture’ right away. The Tourism System model framework of the book provides a more comprehensive view of tourism: it

captures 'the big picture.' A second reason for using a systems approach is because of the open system nature of tourism. The tourism system is not a rigid form: rather, it is dynamic and constantly changing. New concepts and phenomena such as space tourism are always arriving in tourism. Adventure travel, dynamic packaging, destination branding, destination management, ecotourism, strategic alliances, sustainable tourism development, tourism satellite accounting, and voluntourism are just a few of the relatively new concepts introduced to tourism. Tourism is greatly affected by external influences such as politics, demographics, technology, war, terrorism, crime, and disease. For example, changes are constantly sweeping through tourism as a result of many years of terrorism and political uncertainty, and due to technological innovations. The tragedy of 9/11 traumatized tourism in the United States and elsewhere, as did the many terrorist acts in European cities between 2015 and 2017. The Ebola outbreaks in West Africa in 2014-2016 had a catastrophic effect on African tourism; as did the MERS outbreak in 2015 in South Korea.