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The Australian Department of Tourism & Recreation

"LEISURE - A NEW PERSPECTIVE"

A National Seminar, Canberra, ACT, April 23, 1974

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OLD AND NEW TOWNS AND CITIES AS LEISURE EXPERIENCES

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by George Clarke of Clarke Gazzard Planners, a division of Urban  
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The first suggested title for this paper was "Providing for the Tourist". But, to me, this could imply two ideas which are not only wrong but also dangerously misleading to all concerned with the social, environmental and economic implications of leisure, whether in the form of tourism, recreation, sport, education, entertainment or creative work enrichment. Those two ideas are :- first, that "tourists" are a race apart from ordinary people; and second, that we should "provide" for them separate areas, accommodation, and transport, rather along the lines of "apartheid" in South Africa.

Now it's true, for example, that on many South Pacific Islands, "tourists" are literally a race apart from the local people. Further, they are provided with special and separate areas, accommodation and transport. There are often good and proper reasons for this, expressed in conscious national policies of keeping tourism and tourists from polluting indigenous social, environmental and economic systems. Within Australia, such policies are valid in special places, such as around Ayers Rock, in Conservation Areas, or on certain islands. But they have limited application and little relevance to the majority of Australians in and around our old and new towns and cities. They can severely restrict the thinking and

actions of practical people seeking practical ways to enrich the lives of Australians through the more creative use of leisure, and to improve the quality and range of leisure experiences in particular suburbs, cities and towns.

I feel it useful to stress the obvious fact that "tourists" are people - potentially all the people of Australia, as well as business and pleasure seeking visitors from overseas. I regard "providing for the tourist" as providing a comprehensive range of "leisure experiences" for people away from their own homes - whether for a few hours, a few days, a few weeks or months. Planning for tourism is more usefully thought of as planning for leisure, and must, therefore, take into account all forms of work as well as recreation, sport, travel, accommodation, hospitality, socialising, education, art, culture and entertainment. It must seek to extend the range, number, choice, attractiveness, interest, quality and originality of all such "leisure experiences". This needs to be done throughout all of the so-called residential, commercial and industrial zones of our old and new suburbs, cities and towns, interweaving new and more diverse types of "leisure experiences" into the fabric of our urban areas and of our daily lives. Our thinking in this regard should be restricted to special "open space" reserves, ad hoc "tourist projects" or to consolidated "community recreation centres".

At this seminar, we have been specifically invited to consider the implications of the Prime Minister's statement that

"There is no greater social problem facing Australia than the good use of leisure. It is the problem of all modern and wealthy communities. It is, above all, the problem of urban societies and thus, in Australia, the most urbanised nation on earth, a problem more pressing for us than for any other nation on earth".

It is first necessary to try to define or re-define "leisure" - and try to determine how it may be put to what the PM has loosely called a "good" use. We have, as the PM implies, to rethink the nature of urban society, - and of the way we wish from now onward, to shape change in our systems of old and new suburbs, towns and cities.

It is useful to think in terms of all the ways in which we use our time each day. We spend time :-

- \* In satisfying our physiological needs for sleep, food and personal hygiene and comfort.
- \* In formal work, housekeeping or schooling, and in fulfilling formal social or family responsibilities.

What's left over has been traditionally called leisure - "free time" available for passive or active "re-creation."

This segmental thinking assumes that sleeping, eating, bathing, working, shopping and going to classes can't in themselves be enriching recreational experiences. This obviously isn't so. Even working, shopping and schooling can be fun. Shopping centres are becoming entertainment complexes. We are planning new schools and shopping centres as centres of community life, incorporating community meeting rooms and halls, gymnasias, squash courts, swimming pools and sauna baths, libraries, welfare services, adult education, and facilities for arts, crafts and sports. The old ways of thinking, planning and developing single use buildings on single use parcels of land is giving way to new multi-purpose, mixed use, modes of community planning and development. New "holistic" ways of thinking about work and leisure are increasingly being explored by sociologists and social psychologists. Similar concerns find expression in many modes - ranging from demands and proposals for job enrichment, women's liberation and for active worker, citizen and resident participation in decision-making of all forms.

A further expression of this emerging view of personal and social life as a whole rather than a series of parts, is the attempt to substitute a measure of "gross national quality of life" for the discredited measure of "gross national product".

The oft-quoted, popular book Future Shock gives us another view of other trends as, for an increasing majority of the populations of rich and highly urbanised nations like Australia, "rising affluence and transience ruthlessly undercut the old urge to possess, consumers begin to collect experiences as consciously and passionately as they once collected things . . . . Experiences are sold as an adjunct to some more traditional service . . . . As we advance into the future, more and more experiences will be sold strictly on their own merits exactly as if they were things . . . . This accounts for the high growth rate visible in certain industries that have always been, at least partly, engaged in the production of experiences for their own sake . . . . The Arts were a good example and the same is true of recreation, mass entertainment and education . . . . all of which participate in what might be called experiential production."

The foregoing brief discussion could imply that "self-determination" in more and more aspects of social and personal life is one of the new experiences which will occupy more and more of people's total time. The desire or need for greater personal "self-determination" has incalculable implications for formal and informal education, child rearing and family life, as well as for the organisation of government, industry and business. On the other hand, there are real fears that increasingly, leisure experiences for the masses will be "engineered", provided and controlled by big corporations and big government. Already, watching television is the biggest single "free choice" leisure experience, in terms of person hours, of the Australian population. The media - newspapers, radio, television - have replaced the old arts of conversation and intrude into, and preempt other uses of "free time".

The ideal perspective, however, would be the integration of "work" and "free-time", the integration of leisure and living, the integration of a wider choice of leisure experiences into our ordinary suburbs, towns and cities, both for the benefit of local residents, and of visitors from other suburbs, towns and cities.

Because 64% of the Australian population live in Urban Centres with a population of 100,000 or more, it is not axiomatic that all people seek outdoor recreation opportunities away from urban areas. For a proportion of the population of any suburb, town or city, the ideal and/or most popular leisure opportunity is found either within the same area or in another suburb, town or city. For the less privileged, the opportunity of leaving their own suburb, town or city does not arise. During 1972, for example, 48.4% of Australians did not holiday away from home.

The city as a leisure centre is different things to different people. To the overseas visitor it is his main point of contact with the Australian cultural and social environment. Many overseas visitors only visit the capital cities. Three quarters of all overseas visitors to Australia only visit one or more of the capital cities. In the UK, 90% of all overseas visitors spend time in London, and 75% never leave it. Of UK holiday visitors to Australia, 27% only go to Sydney and/or Melbourne, and 29% of New Zealand holiday visitors only visit one of those cities. For all overseas visitors the figure is significantly higher, as high as 44% for Japanese. For these visitors, their views and attitudes towards Australia are formed during their period in Sydney and/or Melbourne. It is in the capital cities and metropolitan areas that the overwhelming majority of all people look for most of their leisure experiences.

For country visitors the city is a magnet, a major attraction. Morgan Research suggests that of people living outside Sydney and Melbourne in New South Wales and Victoria in 1973, 69% from each state intended to holiday in the appropriate capital. For interstate residents, another capital is an alternative cultural/social opportunity, a parallel environment to his own but with attractive features such as different or better shops, major sporting events or cultural events such as the Adelaide Festival.

For the metropolitan resident who cannot holiday away from home, the metropolis is the only leisure centre, and the metropolitan city centre may provide the focal point for his planned leisure activities, in restaurants, shops, cinemas, hotels, museums, parks, sports and so on.

For many, a city may provide more rewarding leisure opportunities than the rural scene. A walk around Battery Point in Hobart maybe a more intense experience, less physically demanding than a walk of the same duration time in the Cradle Mountain Reserve. The view from the top of Australia Square over Sydney, accessible within three minutes from the street may not have the same span and breadth as the view from the top of Mt Wellington in Hobart, or Windy Point or Mt Dandenong, but it is more readily accessible, involves less planning and probably in terms of the intensity of experience, greater reward to the individual than those remote vantage points.

The attractive power of the diversity and intensity of leisure experiences available in the well-established big cities creates problems for those responsible for the development of new "growth centres" of all kinds. It also creates problems for those seeking to revitalise disadvantaged metropolitan suburbs; and equally for those seeking to stabilise the populations and prosperity of country towns and ex-urban resort areas whose 19th and early 20th Century economic base is shrinking.

A September, 1973, survey by Morgan Research asked people throughout Australia "which of 17 listed (holiday) activities would be most likely to attract you to a place and what would be your second choice, and your third?" The activity of "touring" almost universally outranked more specific holiday activities or pursuits.

How should we interpret this? My personal interpretation in the context of this seminar is that people want a wide choice of leisure experience, and the freedom that such choice within an area, or along a route, corridor or trail, confers. The ordinary Australian, when relaxed, generally has a very brief attention span. A single project, even one costing millions of dollars, or a single magnificent piece of scenery, or a single type of some other leisure experience, may only sustain interest for a brief period, and by itself, may not be sufficient to stimulate movement away from home.

I believe that the key to the success of efforts to attract people to use suburbs, towns and cities for the more creative and active use of leisure, lies in planning and stimulating the development of the widest possible range of major and minor "leisure experiences", rather than in simply concentrating one or two major activities or projects.

The first practical step in planning for leisure in any new or old suburb, town or city, shire, municipality or region, should be to prepare an inventory of existing and potential "leisure experiences". Such an inventory would go far beyond the conventional lists of "tourist attractions", "municipal amenities" or "recreational facilities".



Such lists, when prepared by authorities or professional administrators or planners, are conventionally lists of projects or physical things. They usually concentrate on the big projects and the major natural attractions. They should be conceived and defined as inventories of experiences and events, or more usefully still, as linked chains or systems of experiences and events. They should tend to be more "person oriented" rather than "project" or "place" oriented. They should, for example, include opportunities for "bird watching" as well as actual "bird sanctuaries".

Thus, as one of such a series of leisure experiences in or around a typical small Australian country town, a walk, ride or drive equipped with unobtrusive (electronic?) means of communicating information about the history, famous personalities, flora and fauna of the area, past a well preserved 19th century or 1930's tiled pub, bakery or pie shop, or through an operating dairy farm, a modern chicken hatchery, or a commune, to a well conserved picnic or barbeque area by an old river swimming hole, with a nearby adventure playground of reconstituted old farm equipment, or an old barn equipped for arts and crafts activities, could be an interesting leisure experience in addition to a visit to the local Olympic Swimming Pool, Golf Course or scenic lookout.

Many similar minor experiences need to be planned and built in to our new suburbs and growth centres, where our open space networks, schools, shopping centres, community services, play and sports areas, need to be conceived as series and sequences of often quite simple leisure experiences rather than colours on a town plan. The physical creation of pedestrian plazas and malls, for example, is one thing, but the activities, both organised and spontaneous, that they are used for, are more important. The planning or architectural design of an area or series of buildings is less important than the nature, quality

and diversity of experiences they offer to people moving through them, or simply being in them.

This is being increasingly recognised by urban and regional researchers, planners and designers. Thus, the Canberra of today can be seen as a product of an earlier "formalist" approach to physical layout. The new city of Columbia, Maryland, is an early version of more recent attempts to plan a new city around the notion of "experiential" development. The suburbs, towns and cities of the future will increasingly be conceived, planned, designed and developed from the inside out, beginning with the question "what kind of choices of experiences are we wanting to provide opportunities for?", rather than beginning with physical forms and then trying to fit personal and social experience into those forms.

At the Seminar, Mr Clarke will present a number of case studies of conscious planning for leisure in a number of metropolitan and country centres. His presentation will be illustrated by slides.

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