

Transport and tourism: roadmap to integrated planning developing and assessing integrated travel chains

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Abstract

The article reviews planning strategies in tourism and transport based on experiences from a German project on event travel. Firstly, the concept of ‘travel chains’ is introduced as a way to create sustainable tourism products. These ‘travel chains’ combine travel and tourism activities, with particular attention to the ‘transit region’. Secondly, an assessment tool has been developed which aims to offer a practical approach to assessing the sustainability of transport services and packages. The concept of the measurement tool and the selection of indicators are presented and illustrated by the assessment of a ‘travel chain’ tested in the summer of 2003.

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1. Introduction and research context

For some time, transport research has considered leisure travel as a ‘residual’ part of mobility (Heinze and Kill, 1997). Accordingly, little attention and resources have been allocated to understanding this aspect of people’s movements. Leisure travel, however, has grown considerably over the last decades both in absolute and relative terms. About 48% of passenger transport performance in Germany is caused by leisure activities (Bundesregierung, 2001, p. 145). The main means of transport is the private car (about 52%) whereas public transport (both local and long-distance) is only used in about 6% of the cases (Grüber et al., 1999, p. 8).

In recent years, events have become an important part of tourism strategies and leisure behaviour. Events represent a sector of activities that poses distinct challenges to the transport sector through high volumes of travel demand, their direct and indirect implications for transport operations, their wider implications for the urban fabric and, last but not least, their emotional impacts on participants and visitors.

Based on these considerations, the research project ‘Transport Systems for Event-Tourism’ (Eventverkehr), sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, aimed to develop and test new transport concepts for events as part of the leisure experience. The journeys to and from events were seen as key elements of a strategy for reducing their negative side-effects whilst, at the same time, improving their integration into the regional economic and social context. The idea of integrating the trip with the event also opened up possibilities for new leisure experiences. The project ran from September 2000 to March 2004. The work targeted travel at national level, covering land-based journeys ranging from a duration of several hours up to the length of a short holiday.

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The ‘Eventverkehr’ work had two main aims:³ to bridge the gap between the tourism and transport industries’ perspective on leisure travel and to promote sustainable tourism based on a comprehensive understanding of sustainability. Taking visits to major events as an example, the project group set out to conceptualise and test products and services which created a ‘seamless experience’: The trip to the event should be perceived as part of the leisure activity instead of a mere necessity for reaching the destination, for example by visiting another attraction on the way to or near the event site. The term ‘travel chain’ (Reisekette) was adopted for this approach.

The above concept aimed to even out peaks in travel demand caused by the event and to provide additional opportunities for contact and tourist activities. Hence all three dimensions (ecological, economic, social) of sustainable development were targeted. The main trial area to test the ideas developed in the project was the Internationale Gartenbauausstellung (IGA), an international horticultural exhibition in Rostock, Germany, in 2003. However, the concept could feasibly also be applied to non event-related trips.

The assessment of these and other transport planning options and tourism products was another main challenge. Based on a comprehensive understanding of ‘sustainable’ leisure travel, none of the appraisal procedures commonly used proved adequate for the required purpose. Thus, a new assessment tool was developed to capture both qualitative and quantitative effects in a transparent and comparable way.

The remainder of this paper therefore is organised as follows: after a presentation of the concept of ‘travel chains’ (Section 3), the evaluation tool EVALENT⁴ is described and its use demonstrated in a case study (Section 4). This tool has been developed as part of the project work with the aim of providing a practical tool for the assessment of transport and tourism measures across a wide range of sustainability criteria. Subsequently, in Section 5, the real effects of one of the ‘travel chains’ are described, based on a survey of the providers concerned.

2. The transport and tourism perspective on event travel

Up to now, the travel element and its role in the tourist’s decision-making processes have only rarely been considered by the tourism industry (Page, 1998, p. 6). However, the accessibility of a destination clearly influences its attractiveness and visitor potential (e.g. Bundesamt für Bauwesen und Raumordnung, 1998, p. 13). During the evolution of tourism, supply of travel as well as accommodation as the main elements of a holiday has been expanding continu-

ously in Germany. (Mundt, 1998, p. 245). However, different motivations drove the two sectors: tourism providers did not want to lose out in the ever-expanding and changing demand for holidays and leisure activities. The tourists’ need to travel was seen as a necessary side-effect of the attractions offered, but by and large left to transport providers to cater for. The transport industry, in turn, sought to satisfy the need for (physical) mobility in the most efficient way. Their main aim was to expand transport infrastructure and provide faster services, because the trip itself was again seen as ‘cost’ to be minimised (Schiefelbusch, 2006). They assumed that transport users think the same way.

This has led to growth in travel volume and distances, but also to unsustainable impacts on the human and natural environment. The transit regions are worst affected in this respect, since they suffer from through traffic with little economic benefit. In addition, the trip itself was rarely seen as an opportunity to offer additional services and improve the quality and experience perceived by the customer. The project aimed to change this commonly held view.

Thus, whilst leisure and tourism have become a major source of income in many regions, at the same time pressure has been exerted on sensitive ecosystems and communities. Transport has been a major driver in these developments, but often ignored in the debate on how ‘sustainable tourism’ might be conceptualised and implemented (Høyer, 2000). Critics of mass tourism and car-oriented packages, as well as individually organised leisure activities, have focused on the ecological problems. However, sustainable development requires a balanced approach covering social and economic aspects too.

However, the measurement and assessment of the effects of such new products represented an additional challenge. The methodology for assessing the ecological impacts of transport and tourism infrastructures is quite advanced, but there is much less knowledge and agreement on economic and in particular social effects (Jain, 2004).

3. The concept of ‘travel chains’ in the context of sustainable leisure travel

3.1. ‘Travel chains’ as an integration of travel, side-events and tourism services

To date, there has been no clear definition of the term ‘travel chain’. Within the transport sector it is usually associated with linking different means of travel with one other. Travellers should experience their journey as a ‘chain of services’ although different means and providers may be involved (Deutsches Verkehrsforum, 1998). The tourist industry rarely uses the expression ‘travel chain’, although sometimes reference is made to the need to integrate all elements of the spectrum of tourist services in order to maximise user benefits and providers’ efficiency (e.g. Freyer, 1997:86). Both perspectives must be integrated to create travel chains for tourism-related mobility. We therefore

³ Further to the aspects described here, the project also analysed other aspects of transport planning and traffic management. Interested readers are referred to the project homepage http://www.eventverkehr.de/index_english.html where a list of publications is available.

⁴ EVALENT can be downloaded from the PTV homepage at http://www.ptv.de/cgi-bin/download/down_traffic.pl.

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