1. FRAME FLIPPING:
Something More Than a Business

The community accomplishes the productive work that is necessary to any economy; the economy supports and preserves the land and the people. The economy cannot prey on the community because it is not alienated from the community; it is the community.
~Wendell Berry, "Does Community Have Value?"

The subtitle of this essay—"the poetry and politics of place"—represents a twofold consideration (product and process) of an industry that, arguably, generates the most economic activity in your region; possesses tremendous potential to fiddle with the look and feel of your town; changes the social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental landscapes of nearly every place it touches; and increasingly is using the deep-rooted memories of your community's narrative (neighborhoods, cultures, natural wonders) as products—commodifying them and, in the process, sometimes altering meaning, occasionally rewriting history, certainly modifying form and content. Yet it is an industry that operates stealthily, with little public oversight, recognition, respect, or support.

That is changing. The business of tourism, which is among the top three economic drivers in every state in the nation, is too important and influential, in good ways and ill, to be left to the traditional "hospitality industry"—those who pave the way for, service, and take advantage of the visitor experience, whether for leisure, business, education, or escape. Given that hospitality-dependent economies continue to multiply, that local tourism decisions often affect residents more than visitors, and, further, that the tourism product increasingly is crafted from a region's "sense of place"—that is, the very thing people call *home*—it is essential that we deepen and broaden the conversation about if, how, and for what purpose communities "do" tourism. The following pages touch on why we should and how we can, incorporating three overlapping strategies that emerged during discussions with citizens in dozens of communities:

- rethink economics
- connect to the public
- invest in the story

The civic mission is not new. Indeed, since the 1970s a number of tourism scholars have recommended, Peter Murphy notes, "a more open and community-oriented approach which views tourism as a local resource." Our local conversations updated, amplified, and sharpened that charge by pulling together contemporary economic, social, and environmental place-making tenets, and then using tourism to unlock their potential and enhance their integration. If citizens appreciate *that* possibility for the industry, if they begin with a renewed sense of hopeful purpose,

many of the mechanics will fall into place. There's no shortage of consultants, publications, organizations, foundations, and best practices to help communities rethink economics, connect to the public, and invest in the story. The *how* isn't scarce or unknown, perhaps there's another *why*. One close to home.

Undeniably, civic tourism is among a lengthy list of proposals that question more than a few accepted industry goals, structures, and procedures, so it comes as no surprise that some voices may not endorse the direction this conversation will take us. Ultimately, however, it is in your community's interest—*and*, others are discovering, in the local tourism community's interest—to look beyond the industry's dated, self-imposed, mission-driven boundaries and limitations. Often cutting deep and forging new fields of study, the academy has studied the "boundaries and limitations" of place-based tourism for several decades, and the research can read like someone describing a painting or symphony, maybe jazz. The painting is by Seurat, pointillism executed in dabs of culture, finance, nature, design, politics, and society. The symphony is by Stravinsky, pieces that can jar individually but work when folded together. Jazz speaks for itself, like a mountain I know. Skimming a bit of this research and folding it into our community discussions, this essay hopes to encourage the guardians and appreciators of place, *including* members of the traditional tourism cluster, to begin conversations that "look beyond" the industry's boundaries and limitations, not really knowing what you will find "beyond," but trusting that mountain thinking will lead communities to value and then act on a restorative tourism ethic, one that believes, as Aldo Leopold writes in "The Land Ethic," that a policy "based solely on economic self-interest is hopelessly lopsided. It tends to ignore, and thus eventually to eliminate many elements in the land community that lack commercial value, but that are (as far as we know) essential to its healthy functioning. It assumes, falsely, I think, that the economic parts of the biotic clock will function without the uneconomic parts."

A Dab of History

It's worth remembering that as an "industry" (and there's plenty of debate about whether it even is such a thing) tourism is relatively young—still maturing, finding its way, learning how to belong as a responsible corporate citizen. Certainly people have always traveled to experience different places and cultures: thirteenth-century BCE Roman graffiti on Egyptian tombs, American Indian oral histories, Chaucer's fourteenth-century pilgrimage verse, accounts from Neoclassical aristocrats on the Grand Tour, and the nineteenth-century fascination with travel literature, such as Isabella Bird's immensely popular *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, tell us that much. In my neck of woods, Fred Harvey revolutionized and popularized tours to Indian lands and national parks in the early twentieth century, Lorenzo Hubbell dabbled in trading post curios, and Route 66 towns such as Gallup, New Mexico, were defined by travel. They still are. Travel has often been part of our economy

and work (the root is *travail*), and business has regularly lent a hand: guidebooks, transportation, lodging, souvenirs. But the everyday, ordinary experience of tourism has only come about in the average boomer's lifetime, which is also true of the way most municipalities practice tourism today—for example, funding convention and visitors bureaus and other taxpayer-subsidized enterprises to lure vacationing families and business travelers, in effect positioning the hospitality sector as integral to a region's overall development agenda. Considering the post–World War II era of development, it's not surprising that many of these operations were instinctively designed under the spell of industrial-age economics. Unfortunately, some planning, often where tourism is viewed as a panacea, is still intoxicated by that siren song, a tune that can shape cities and towns. Intersections dotted with cookie-cutter motels, chain restaurants, and gas stations blanket the landscape, joining with other uninspired development to change the very nature of public space. The assembly-line protocol, corporate supervision, and loyalty to one bottom line that characterizes these tourist stopovers regrettably may contaminate or otherwise sway general planning principles, reflected in Kunstler's pod worlds or Kenneth Jackson's "crabgrass frontier." When did this happen, and is tourism a cause or effect?

Set aside Europe and its centuries-long affair with mass tourism. Think about the place you were raised. Unless you lived in Atlantic City, Anaheim, Santa Fe, Scottsdale, Miami, a gateway community, a border town, a big city, or a handful of other places historically linked to travel, the industry was not a big deal in your community, especially rural places where "hospitality," such as it was, consisted of a gift shop, an outdoor supply store for weekend campers, and a batch of locally operated twelve-room motels on the edge of town. At restaurants my family frequented we saw neighbors, not strangers with cameras, and spotting cars with out-of-state licenses was a game my sister and I played. Our hometown's main drag consisted of a bunch of old houses; today a sign on the interstate, which didn't exist back then, welcomes travelers to "Historic Downtown." Sure, there were tourists—the decrepit billboard promoting our caves drew a few—but hardly anyone gave much thought to developing the industry into a keystone of the economy. Ours was a factory town. Seldom did an ambitious, publicly financed meta-machine annually dream up another scheme to attract traveling families to the area; rarely did governments, business associations, or universities conduct research to evaluate and exploit the staying habits of tourists; and almost never did public officials, corporate leaders, cultural advocates, and other community voices assemble in focus groups to brainstorm cutting-edge tourism strategies. I never saw a television commercial inviting my family to visit another state (developed and paid for by a public agency), newspapers had yet to publish travel sections that rival the classifieds' heft, and the Travel Channel and Expedia were decades away. As recently as a generation or two ago, a great deal of local travel business was managed, if that's even the right word, by default. Appeals to

expend public funds to advertise hotels and other private attractions were greeted as "corporate welfare" (still true in places), while city planners dismissed tourism as a harmless but economically irrelevant boutique industry—the equivalent of your little nephew, seated at the children's table for Thanksgiving dinner. There now, Sonny, we've got *important* things to discuss.

But somewhere along the line tourism snuck up on us when we were reaching for the gravy and joined the adults at the big table, becoming one of the largest industries in the world, and a lot of slick salesmen convinced local officials that *your* town deserved a piece of the pie—and, hey, it's a clean industry! Nice people visit, spend money, and go home; and we can tax *them* to pay for *our* services! Dandy. With dollar signs clouding our vision, we allowed industrial-age tourism, gradually, like the frog in boiling water, to infiltrate, influence, and in some cases take control of social and economic policymaking; and now some of us look around and notice that much of what we don't like about our dowdy drive-thru landscape can be traced to an industry that serves strangers and corporate bottom lines. Not us. Many who care about "place," the very thing the traveling public is supposedly interested in experiencing, have seen their hospitality industry snookered or even hijacked by forces that are not entirely friendly to place-making: "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, / But in ourselves, that we are underlings." In *Devil's Bargains*, his history of western tourism communities, Hal Rothman describes a familiar endgame:

> In each, the new configuration changed the balance of power, granting incoming neonatives a greater say in the direction of the town than its longtime residents possessed. The process alienated locals, many of whom did not understand and few of whom could participate in the changes. The neonatives who were attracted to these transformed places soon recast them as reflections of their values.

A Restorative Tourism

In these conversations, then, I'd like to talk about why I believe it is incumbent upon and possible for your local tourism sector, revivified and retooled, to emerge as a leading force for economic, social, environmental, cultural, and political change. Small stuff like that. These aren't comfy conversations—asking tourism and cultural professionals to reexamine and possibly reshuffle long-held priorities, to rebuild and reinforce the decision-making and financial scaffolding, to entertain concepts that may seem irrelevant to the business of tourism, and to operate responsibly, transparently, and deferentially with the public. For some in the travel business it's likely more fun to think about designing a new visitors guide or tinker with a website and, as a result, this conversation goes nowhere. Elsewhere museum directors say they're too busy and, anyway, they've already done the cultural tourism thing. Or civic tourism is too conceptual, theoretical,

and academic; it's not practical, raises more questions than it answers, and doesn't provide enough best practices. Others say I'm naive and don't understand how business really works—Spencer had it right.

That is all true. Designing a marketing campaign probably is more enjoyable than wandering through an unknown and sometimes threatening territory; opening operations to the public can be fraught with angst, especially in towns where tourism is not well liked; I do lay out a lot of problems and don't deliver as many answers; there's no guarantee these conversations will accomplish anything, partly because they deal in slippery topics like people's values; it's surely less risky to adopt best practices that work elsewhere, projects thought through and delivered FedEx; and, yes, I'm just naive enough to think that tourism can be bigger than the tawdry and inequitable business practices that threaten the very things people love about their communities—that tourism can be, in fact, a transformative agent.

What makes me think so is that it's happening. We are beginning to see exciting, sustainable, community-directed, economically robust place-based tourism initiatives around the world, centered in the interactions between and among the hospitality sector, nonprofit organizations, government, and, most importantly, a proud, committed public. These efforts are proof that building vibrant communities *touristically*, to warp Dean MacCannell's invented term even more, is indeed a hope that is not misplaced. A few of these models are mentioned here, and we need more of them, but civic tourism, which itself is an experiment that will no doubt look different by the time these words see print, is not so much a menu of best practices as it is sketchy directions to the kitchen, where you're invited to discover and concoct your own recipes. Place, Melville reminds us, "is not on any map," so especially when place is the product, tourism and the communities in which the industry does its business are often shortchanged by the prescriptive, copycat approach, jumping to schemes that appear to work elsewhere before examining one's own circumstances, one's own values. That's old advice:

> . . . before we plow an unfamiliar patch
>
> It is well to be informed about the winds,
>
> About the variations in the sky,
>
> The native traits and habits of the place.
>
> What each locale permits, and what denies.
>
> ~Virgil, *The Georgics*

Determining what constitutes and befits your "native traits and habits of the place," and *who gets to say*, is the process civic tourism embraces—the "poetry and politics of place." Destination communities have long weighed similar questions, but nearly always from a perspective that interprets the possibility of

tourism narrowly—as an economic apparatus, as a tool that serves visitors. The pervasiveness of tourism today, however, combined with its increasing reliance on place-based attractions, especially among smaller communities where tourism historically has been a marginal player, argues for a broader interpretation of the industry's instrumentality.

Triple Bottom Line

Our local conversations exhibited a double-edged theme: In communities where "sense of place" has tourism appeal the hospitality industry is often perceived as either a corporate juggernaut that threatens to undermine a region's identity, or an ineffective economic catalyst, unable to capitalize on the area's intrinsic assets. Or both, often combined with a wish to do it right. Given the growth of hospitality-dependent economies among small to mid-sized towns, these places, which represent the majority of communities, are often the most vulnerable, yet they also hold the greatest potential to craft a responsible tourism ethic, from which citizens can build a sustainable travel economy. It's hard to wrap my mind around Las Vegas or towns that want to be Vegas, or the theme-park complexes, cruise-ship ports, and resort capitals of the globe, although there are neighborhoods and initiatives *within* these larger vacation megalopolises that may benefit from these conversations, such as Las Vegas's efforts to diversify its travel options by highlighting the city's wonderful cultural facilities and overlooked dramatic desert setting—a happy development to be sure. No one sitting in my chair denies the significance of mass travel; there's a place for Mickey Mouse, wax museums, Dollywood, and the rest of that synthetic bait. That "place," however, should be a concentrated exception that feeds local tourism economies rather than a model to which others aspire. Big calculated tourism is just not feasible, nor is it usually suitable at any scale, for many smaller communities where hospitality programs struggle, often because they're hoodwinked into measuring success against Gatlinburg's traffic or Orlando's balance sheet. Listen up: You already have a theme park! It's called your streetscape, your lands, your cultures, and *no other community possesses those same gifts*. Forget about being Santa Fe—be yourself first. Forget about attracting or appealing to visitors—satisfy your residents first.

The belief that tourism isn't living up to the boosters' hype, owing to one or both conditions cited above, runs through a lot of places, some of which I've visited, and after meeting in dozens of towns with hundreds of people, I believe this: Encouraged to mature *organically*, that is, humbly, in a manner appropriate to and consistent with a region's heritage, and *ecologically*, that is, reciprocally, in true partnership with other community players, the hospitality industry has the potential to transform towns—to create prosperous, sustainable, dynamic, distinctive *places*. Talking about tourism this way, as *the* agent for social, cultural, environmental, and economic regeneration, is a values discussion, not an

inventory of best practices or toolbox of paint-by-number techniques, but that's the center from which a responsible tourism ethic must spring, starting with core principles—*what we value, what we aspire to*—not more "projects," a new brand, or better marketing. What I have in mind is a large shift, beginning close by.

Now is the appropriate time for tourism—*especially at the local level, where adjustments are usually easier and more effectual*—to redefine its purposes and methods using values-based strategies that do not answer solely to the economic bottom line, but to social and environmental bottom lines as well, a tripartite scheme that encompasses "The Three Es": ecology, economy, and equity. First defined by John Elkington as the "triple bottom line," this characteristic of contemporary economic theory revives and amplifies John Kenneth Galbraith's concern in his 1958 classic, *The Affluent Society*: the nonfinancial responsibilities of financial activities. Adopting a holistic, restorative approach to community planning where the market, to cite Paul Hawken, "creates, increases, nourishes and enhances" regional culture can enrich quality of life across the board, including economic health.

Happily for tourism, *no industry is better suited to benefit from and make a worthy contribution to triple-bottom-line research and development*. But to do so, local hospitality leaders and practitioners must step forward and own it, which means rewiring what success looks like, embracing another set of values, and partnering with a different cast of characters—redefining, in fact, what constitutes your "tourism industry." Just the same, these new partners, soldiers in the place brigade—cultural organizations, preservation agencies, and land-use groups, to name a few—should walk through the door that has been nudged open for them by today's creative economists and join the conversation—and *not* in a token capacity, since they, not the travel bureau, are what visitors come to experience. Also, as Aldo Leopold discovered while hoping to advance an ethic that reframed humankind's relationship to the larger biotic community, another essential ingredient in the conversation, perhaps the most essential, is the civic sphere: "We need knowledge—public awareness—of the small cogs and wheels," he realized.

Civic tourism extends Leopold's ecological and political expressions to the process of place-making for touristic purposes. Just as his many writings, and especially the classic *A Sand County Almanac*, magnify biological and historical relationships *in* and ethical responsibilities *to* nature, so too, argues sociologist Robert Bellah and his coauthors in *Habits of the Heart*, is there something like a "social ecology," a network of cultural reciprocities that distinguishes our communities, a network from which the travel sector has too often stood apart. Thinking like Leopold's mountain, wedging tourism into a comprehensive causal framework, reveals this about the industry's prospects in your community: Its most opportunistic links to quality economic growth strategies, such as those advanced by triple-bottom-line lingo, are vertical and multi-layered, cyclical rather

than linear, and comparative rather than reductionist, not unlike ecosystems in nature. "Economics requires the *comparison* of costs and benefits," emphasizes Herman Daly, "*not their addition*." Considering tourism development as part of a complex, interrelated whole, where economic reciprocity is evaluated within a values-based bubble, is the first step toward reimagining the industry's potential, the key to reframing tourism's purpose. Mountain thinking moves tourism into a network where relationships, and relationships between relationships, matter, especially between and among economic, environmental, and social structures—the three-legged stool of triple-bottom-line planning and, not insignificantly, the three primary legs of tourism development. A healthy place and a sustainable tourism economy rest, together, atop a level stool. Today, most are tilting.

A Way Cool Something Else

Many of tourism's restraints, as well as its unflattering reputation, spring from the industry's tacit connection to and sanctioning of the growth machine, a term coined by economist Harvey Molotch in his 1976 essay, "The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place." It's no coincidence that many hospitality operations, whether local or statewide, are housed within and managed by a chamber of commerce, department of commerce, or similar marketing or economic development agency, whose letterhead slogan or public relations meme typically includes words like *jobs* or *more* or *growth*—perhaps all three in some combination—and whose respective boards of directors and advisory councils are liberally sprinkled with members who benefit from the triumph of that slogan, people Molotch refers to as "politically mobilized local elites": developers, realtors, hoteliers, bankers, media owners, retailers, car dealers, politicians, and other usual suspects.

The implication is beyond implied: tourism is about dollars. And that's okay, to a point. Justifiably, the economic argument will always remain a weapon in the hospitality sector's advocacy arsenal—when lobbying for public funds, for example. Once, though, when I was doing just that a friendly legislator whose ear I was bending leaned close and said, "Dan, everybody here makes the economic argument—health care, universities, transportation, corrections, social services, you name it. What else you got?" Well, tourism's got something else, a *way cool* something else, but somewhere along the way we misplaced it. Yes, Thomas Cook started his tours in the 1840s to make money, which they did and still do, but he also imagined his trips would benefit the struggling working class and bring people of different backgrounds together, thereby averting misunderstandings between nations.

In that same spirit today proponents of cultural tourism, heritage tourism, geotourism, sustainable tourism, community tourism, ecotourism, and a long, growing, and sometimes perplexing list of other alternative approaches to travel, including unabashedly political ventures such as social justice tourism and peace

tourism, imagine the hospitality business as *something more* than a business, as something other than the market-driven "reign of quantity" that E. F. Schumacher warned can destroy what we love: "The modern industrial system, with all its intellectual sophistication, consumes the very basis on which it has been erected. To use the language of the economist, it lives on irreplaceable capital which it cheerfully treats as income." Does the whaling industry ring a bell? Or consider the question Jared Diamond asks in *Collapse*: "What did the Easter Islander who cut down the last palm tree say while he was doing it? Like modern loggers, did he shout 'Jobs, not trees!'?"

Radical when introduced more than thirty years ago, and still pooh-poohed by textbooks, trickle-downers, and global free-marketers clinging to Adam Smith's invisible hand, Schumacher's Buddhist Economics nonetheless resonates with today's triple-bottom-line proposals, some of which are bracketed within labels like "New Economy," "Creative Economy," or "Green Economy." For the hospitality industry, the implications of this trend are indeed cautionary, given the sector's industrial bent, seemingly designed by Ayn Rand, yet also extremely promising, since the New Economy and a responsible tourism ethic dance around the same pinpoint—*place*. Communities have a choice, reminiscent of the one confronting the Western world in the nineteenth century as the Industrial Revolution roared across the land: Either use technology's inventions to spur hope and collective progress, the position of Beatrice Webb's Fabian Society, or succumb to the cynicism of Herbert Spencer's cutthroat social Darwinism and its corollary laissez-faire marketplace, whose comeuppance Garrett Hardin forecasts in his famous essay, "Tragedy of the Commons," where dog-eat-dog policies eventually devour *all* the dogs—or cattle, in Hardin's story. The hospitality industry can learn from past misreadings and misapplications of Darwin, who wrote *not* of "survival of the fittest" in Spencer's gloomy individualistic idiom, but of variation, adaptation, and cooperation in place-based contextual terms. Go, Chuck.

Respecting the caution while capitalizing on the hope and promise, civic tourism stakes out a bit of new territory, since the relevant economic models of our day, the offspring of Webb, Galbraith, Schumacher, Jane Jacobs, and other early progressive scholars and activists, rarely mention the hospitality sector, one of the most powerful economic machines in the world, focusing instead on nurturing high tech utopias and similar "knowledge economies," or on retrofitting industries historically unfriendly to place—energy, transportation, and manufacturing, for example. Too, some New Economy–speak comes down from the macro peripheries of academic theory, not up from the street-level transactions that distinguish local tourism operations. Other studies privilege the politics of globalization over grassroots activism that might reshape perceptions and, perchance, universal policies. Elsewhere the language leans toward manufacturing hip Pottery Barn

villages for the gentrified set, not real places for real people. Most interestingly, the New Economy has little room for tourism, which in today's fashionable literature occupies a low rung on the ladder of economic respectability. At the same time, it must be said, the hospitality industry has made but few creative attempts to move up the ladder: "The main mistake made by pro-tourist planners," writes Dean MacCannell, "is they see tourism only in traditional economic terms"—that is, one bottom line.

Civic tourism addresses these omissions and discrepancies with a creed that accepts, even celebrates, the omnipresence and continuing growth of travel, the power of place, and the possibility of citizen politics. An extension of, supplement to, and tool for heritage tourism, ecotourism, and other place-enhancing designs, civic tourism suggests another way into the local hospitality conversation—a way of conducting tourism planning as *community* planning; a way of locating the hospitality industry as a *solution* to healthy place-making, rather than an obstacle; and a way of valuing and practicing tourism as a *public art*, with all of the social and ethical obligations embedded in that undertaking. That is, a tourism "reframed," reversing and turning inside out the conventional paradigm, as Wendell Berry advises: "The answers to the human problems of ecology are to be found in economy. And the answers to the problems of economy are to be found in culture and in character." That's a good place to start.

"Reframing is changing the way the public sees the world," writes linguist George Lakoff. Civic tourism urges your community, beginning with the caretakers of place, to help change the way the public sees tourism: as a *means* and not an end. "For all their power and vitality," the authors write in *Natural Capitalism*, "markets are only tools. They make a good servant but a bad master and a worse religion." It's one thing to talk about tourism as a "means" or "tool," but acting on that talk is a huge and difficult frame flip, and it's not a mission statement you'll find embossed on the letterhead of too many travel and tourism bureaus. Your state office of tourism, for example, is a research and marketing agency, and probably a good one, but it's definitely focused on economic ends and place-making is not its job. But it's yours if you want it, and especially at the local level tourism gives citizens a tool, when held in their hands, to build the kind of place where they want to live, work, and raise a family. Ultimately, a "civic" approach can embolden sense of place, the local economy, *and* tourism's social ties and political standing, a not unwelcome change for an industry that's usually talked about, if at all, as a necessary evil among residents or the Rodney Dangerfield of economic development among planners and politicians.

Possibility Unbound: Juicy Peaches

Former World Bank economist Herman Daly writes, "The economy is a subsystem of the environment," a reminder that all commercial activities, not

just agriculture, mineral extraction, and other obvious land-based businesses, are dependent on the natural and cultural landscapes in which they find themselves. Nowhere is that more true than with the tourism industry, where, like farming and other trades rooted in the land, we sow, nurture, harvest; and we neglect "the habits of the place," as Virgil coached farmers two thousand years ago, at our peril. Let us begin community conversations, as does peach farmer David Mas Masumoto, "by planting hope":

> In trying to save my Sun Crest peaches, I discover that they are more than just food, they are part of a permanence, a continuity with the past. People who enjoy my peaches understand what juicy, sweet ones taste like. Biting into one may send them back to the orchards of their childhoods and that warm sense of constancy of family found in their memories. Individuals leave for the city, but the memories of farms stay behind to anchor personal family histories.
>
> My peaches find a home with these folks, a touchstone to their past.

May you grow organic, juicy communities that "find a home" with visitors *and* residents.