

Jean-Marc Zaninetti

Institute of Geography, University of Orleans, Rue de Tours – BP 6749, France
e-mail: jean-marc.zaninetti@univ-orleans.fr

Where's the Great River Road?

Abstract: Dating back to 1938, the concept of a transcontinental Great River Parkway along the Mississippi River was developed by 10 river states in the early days of automobile-based tourism in the USA. Based on state and industry issued tourism economic data, this paper argues that tourism is unable to revitalize such a major waterway. The Great River Road appears overstretched and underdeveloped. Actually, tourism never was an important part of the economy mix along the Mississippi River as it is a major waterway primarily offering a working landscape. This is exclusive of such consumptive use of the landscape tourism favours. Despite its significant cultural asset, the Mississippi Great River Road has suffered from the lack of adequate funding. The gradual shift of the travel industry from a road-based transportation system related to fixed natural and cultural assets to an air-based transportation system associated with a capital intensive urban amusement and entertainment industry helps explain the relative decline in small river cities visitations, and the concentration of the travel industry in a handful of disconnected river cities.

Key words: USA, Mississippi, Great River Road, automobile-based tourism, commodification of space, cultural landscape, supply-side tourism, depressed areas

Introduction

Cutting across prime agricultural regions, and connecting the industrial belt of the Great Lakes to the North to the open waters of the Gulf of Mexico to the South, the Mississippi River is still a working river. Its importance as a waterway never stopped from the early day of the steamboat era (1810) to the present. Dating back to 1938, the concept of a transcontinental Great River Parkway along the Mississippi River was developed by the 10 river states in the early days of automobile-based tourism in the USA. However, due to the lack of adequate resources, it was decided that rather than building a new continuous road, the existing network of rural roads that meandered the river would become the Great River Road itself. Stretching over nearly 5,000 kilometres on each side of the Mississippi River, the Great River Road is still the brand used by depressed riv-

erside cities and regions to try to revive their struggling economies. Cutting across the central USA from North to South, the Mississippi River valley displays a unique and fascinating cultural landscape across the American history and vernacular culture. But at the difference of Route 66, another “mythic” American byway, the economic success of the Great River Road is at best mixed.

This paper aims to explain the limits of tourism along a major inland waterway by examining the supply-side of the regional tourism industry. Let's consider three successive points.

- The broader context of the travel industry in the USA
- The “commodification” of the Mississippi River landscape: assets and limits.
- The economic impact of tourism along the Great River.

1. The Broader Context of the Travel Industry in the USA

The tourism industry is very much place-dependent. Since the 18th century, the travel industry introduced an innovative consumptive use of the landscape that has never ceased to develop in the long run. The urge to travel is related to the sense of individual freedom, the need to recreate, and the aspiration of the Middle Class for upscale social mobility. Originating from the British Aristocracy, the practice of travel has expanded internationally and trickled down the social ladder as an increasing number of people have benefited a growing disposable income to the point of having enough spare money for this sort of recreational use. However, travel destinations are selective, because most tourists are basically seeking the same limited set of vacation occupations. In the USA, as elsewhere around the world, travel demand can be classified in three major types:

- Cultural heritage experience, including cultural events and religion.
- Water and nature based recreation, particularly attractive for urbanites.
- Simulacra tourism for amusement and entertainment.

According to this typology, each region has a different potential for “commodification”. However, this requires dedicated investment in infrastructures and services. First and foremost, a good transportation access is critical. Furthermore, tourism tends to be an exclusive land-use, particularly in the two first type of travel-related activities. Consumptive use of the landscape does not easily combine with production. The rise of tourism is part of the global shift from rural to urban settlement that occurred during the 20th century, and the consecutive shift from a production-based economy toward a service-based economy in the latter part of the same century (Zaninetti 2009). Tourism tends to oust agriculture, mining, logging and other industrial activities, as industrial landscapes are unappealing for tourists and pollution harms severely the travel industry. The typical consumptive patterns of travel tend to recreate a sanitized “natural” or “historical” landscape that appeals to tourists. But this cannot be achieved without selective choices by the local stakeholders and a significant amount of investment (Judd 2003).

The current trends in the USA raise the hypothesis that the travel industry benefits from scale economies and agglomeration economies (Omer 2010). One might observe the development of powerful metropolitan economic hubs that gain market shares at the expense of smaller, more dispersed attractions. The importance of business travel and of conventions is a key factor in this trend, but the importance of cultural events, museum, amusement and entertainment as a magnet for visitors is very important also. The USA have invented or industrialized two subsets of the travel industry that are emblematic of this country. Gambling is one of these American specialities; despite the fact it appeals mostly to domestic travellers. At some degree of concentration, it becomes a cultural attraction in itself even for international visitors, as in Las Vegas (Douglass and Raento 2004). Amusement parks are another American invention (Adams 1991). Since the opening of the first Disneyland in 1955, these two kinds of tourism facilities tend to merge in the broader category of “simulacra” tourism attraction. At the difference of other types of tourism, this third space of the travel industry is completely unrelated to the landscape. No need of any particular natural or historical heritage, it depends only on capital invested in the attractions. Two such large “simulacra” hubs emerge in the US travel industry nowadays, Las Vegas (Nevada) and Orlando (Florida). Large metropolises have also taken profit in investing in similar facilities to expand their market share outside their more traditional historical and cultural assets.

The geographic pattern of travel is strongly dependent on the existing conditions of the transportation system (Duval 2007). The emergence of mass tourism in the USA coincided with the rise of individual automobile use among U.S. households. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the road-trip across the continent was a joy drive that contributed strongly to model the American psyche (Jakle and Sculle 2008). This is symbolized by some U.S. highways, as the former U.S. Hwy-66 stretching from Chicago to Los Angeles which was nicknamed “America’s Main Street” or “The Mother Road”. The concept of parkways was also originating

in the Great Depression Era (e.g. The Natchez Trace Parkway). The “American Scenic Byways” are another declinations of the same basic concept, related to the long-lasting love affair the American people have with cars. Automobile-based travel offers a superior flexibility to any other type of tourism. Since the progressive construction of the US highways and freeways networks after 1916, the road is nowadays the only way to reach rural communities and small town across the continent. However, the sheer size of the USA limits most automobile-based travel within a reach of 800 kilometres from home (Jakle and Sculle 2008). Longer road trips are still popular among pensioners, particularly those using RVs. But, with shorter vacations and the lure of heavily advertised far away destinations, a majority of younger adults and families are distracted towards air transportation and metropolitan attractions. Foreign visitations, a mere 3% of the total persons-trips in the USA, follow a similar pattern. As a consequence of these conflicting trends, automobile-based tourism is now on the decline in the USA, at the detriment of small town and countryside destinations.

According to the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA), a lobby of business representatives, the travel figures reached a historical height in 2007. Despite the recent economic

downturn, the travel industry is still a huge sector in the USA (Ioannides & Timothy 2010). A domestic travel is defined by spending at least an overnight 50 miles or more from home. According to this definition, the total U.S. domestic person-trips peaked close to 2 billion in 2007. This includes 76% of leisure travel, and 24% of business travel. During the same year, the total number of international arrival reached 58 million persons-trips, including 18% of business travel. In 2007, domestic and international travellers’ expenditures in the U.S. totalled \$739.4 billion. According to the TIA estimates, the travel-related industries created 7.67 million jobs. Approximately 12.7% of these jobs were dependent on international visitors. The travel expenditures, both domestic and international, totalled nearly \$738 billion, 5.2% of the National GDP. These figures have fluctuated since 2008, with a slight downward trend because of the current economic crisis.

Because it basically displaces income from one region to another, tourism is not a reliable economic development powerhouse. It is extremely sensitive to the overall economic volatility, as we can see it since 2008. It is also vulnerable to political and natural hazard, as in the case of New Orleans drowned by hurricane Katrina in 2005 (Dolfman & al. 2007). The travel industry boasts its gross income, but for

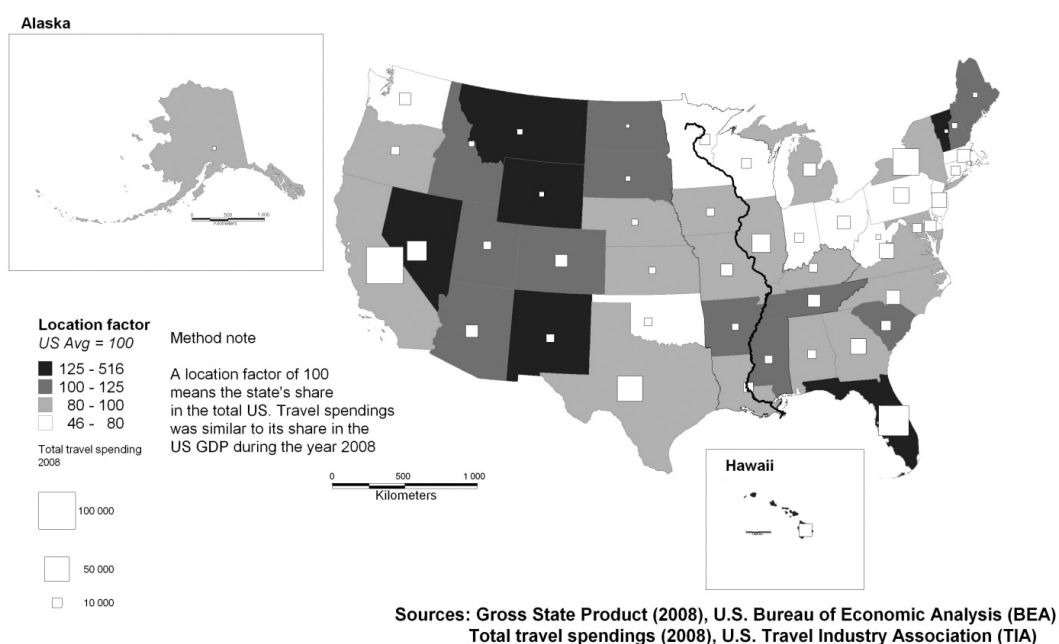


Fig 1. Tourism location factor by state, 2008

any particular city or region, the balance should be a more significant indicator. As a region attracts outsiders that spend extra money while visiting, local people travel outside the region at the same time, spending their own extra money elsewhere. What is the exact balance of this movement is never calculated. Because there are major lacunae in demand-side statistics, analysts tend to rely on supply-side data (Omer 2010, Ioannides and Thimothy 2010). Location factors can be used as a proxy indicator. The next map displays the relative location factor of the travel industry in the US states in com-

parison to their contribution to the National GDP in 2008 (GSP or Gross State Product). At the National scale, the greater Mississippi River valley is not a tourism hotspot. Three states only are relatively specialized in the travel industry: Arkansas, Tennessee, and Mississippi, with a location factor of 124. The state of Mississippi combines a major gaming industry with a stretch of seaside beach resorts on the one hand, and a weak overall economic base on the other hand. However, this is nothing comparable to the Interior Western states, Northern New England, Florida or Hawaii.

2. The Commodification of the Great River Landscape

In comparison to the national summary we have discussed in the previous section, 10 states bordering the Mississippi River share a slim slice of the travel industry bounty, despite several attempts to commodify their shared river heritage. Two kinds of fixed assets are susceptible of commodification by the travel industry; the region's unique history and cultural heritage are the main attraction, but the river itself can be turned into a tourist attraction.

A. Heritage tourism

Only large cities have major museums and amusement parks. Smaller towns have to rely solely on their heritage. The Mississippi River valley displays a unique pattern of cultural heritage.

Archaeological sites. The Mississippi River valley was the cradle of one of the most powerful Pre-Columbian civilization in North America. The Mound Builders Culture evolved slowly from the 2nd millenium B.C.E. (Poverty Point, LA) to the historic first documented contact with European explorers (Natchez, MS). This civilization climaxed between 800 A.D. and 1300 A.D. with the Mississippian Culture. The large site of Cahokia Mounds (Illinois), located in the vicinity of St. Louis, entered the World Heritage List of the UNESCO. The newly renovated visitor center and museum boast up to 1 million visitors a year.

Colonial legacy. Although the mainstream national history privilege the English legacy

along the Atlantic Seaboard, the Mississippi Valley was the site of another early colonization attempt: the French settlement starting in the late 17th century and ending only with the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. Most of this heritage has been destroyed in Louisiana, but a score of historical structures (wooden houses, stone forts) have subsisted downriver of St. Louis on both sides of the river in Illinois and in Missouri. The not for profit organization "Les Amis" supports the French heritage programs and properties in Ste. Genevieve (MO), the city of St. Louis, and Illinois' French colonial region. It is attempting to secure the UNESCO label for boosting the attractiveness of this uniquely preserved heritage.

The attempt to valorize the early settlers' heritage by reenactment and restoration of historic settlements is less widespread along the Mississippi River than it is further West, except for the French colonial legacy. Nauvoo, Illinois, is a special case. Nauvoo attracts numbers of visitors for its historic importance and its religious significance to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). Joseph Smith, the founder of this American Church, settled here and was murdered here in 1844. The Mormons resettled in Utah after this dramatic event, but they are currently rebuilding a new Temple in Nauvoo that is becoming the main attraction to visitors in this tiny river city. This is some sort of religious pilgrimage tourism.

Hannibal, Missouri, is a special place drawing visitors attracted to literary heritage sites.

The great classic novelist Samuel Clemens (aka. Mark Twain) was born in Hannibal in 1835. He contributed to the formation of the American psyche with his classic children's novel, "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" (1876), and its sequel, "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" (1885), the action of which is set around Hannibal. The writings of Mark Twain, a former pilot, are also a major contribution to the advertisement of the Mississippi River Steamboat Era.

The lower Mississippi Valley heritage is dominated by its magnificent Antebellum plantations in the states of Mississippi (Natchez) and Louisiana (St. Francisville and several isolated properties located between Baton Rouge and New Orleans). These American palaces were built before 1861 at the expense of slave labor in cotton or sugar plantation estates. Though many plantation homes have been destroyed

during the Civil War or fell into ruin in subsequent years, a handful of these have been restored and are open to visit. This sort of visit put the emphasis on the luxury furniture and architectural details. The guide insists usually on the owners' romanticized family history, and fails to mention the brutal exploitation system over which this wealth was based. A few properties display some slave cabins in the garden, as a mere footnote to the visit of the mansion.

Civil War heritage. The lower Mississippi River valley was the second largest battlefield of the Civil War. Among several battlefields, history buffs flock to the site of the Siege of Vicksburg (MS). The Vicksburg National Military Park registers 0.78 million visitors a year.

A handful of large historic cities have developed on the banks of the Mississippi River. New Orleans (LA) is the main one. Its exotic gumbo

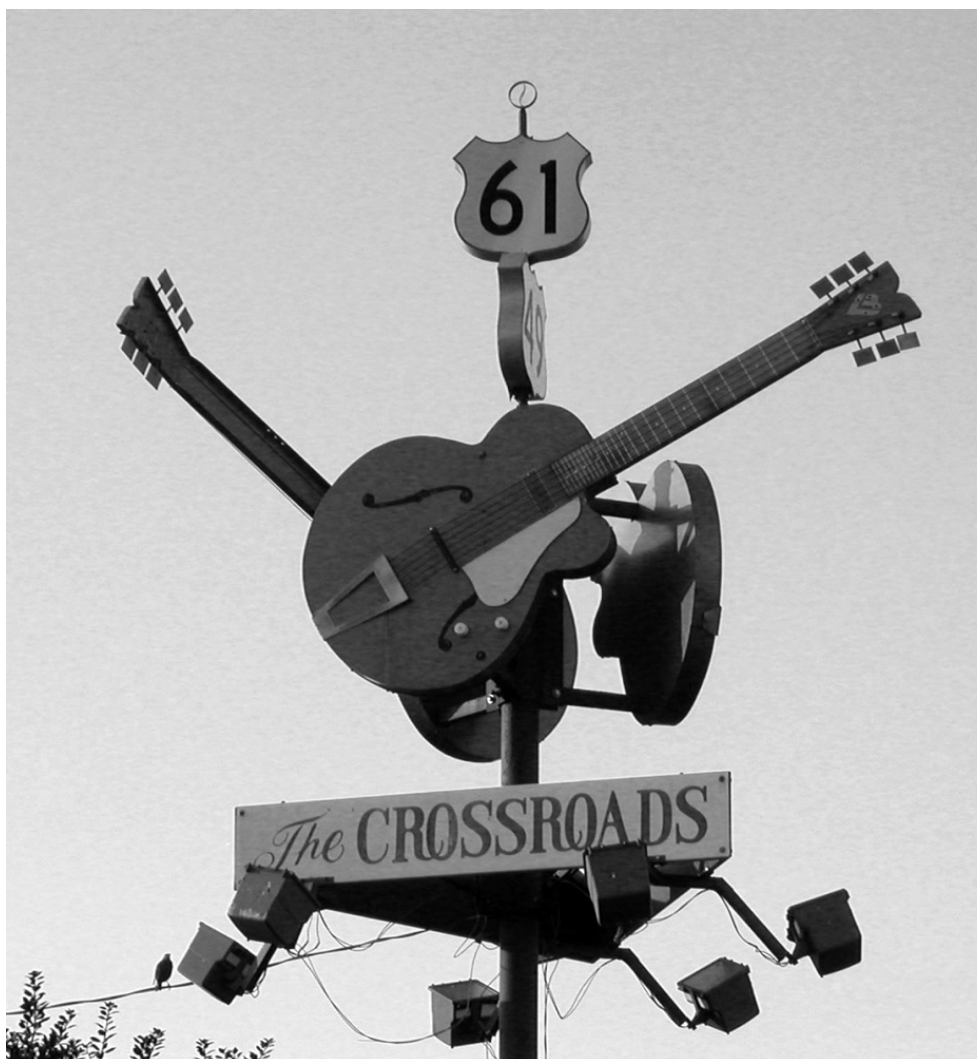


Fig. 2. Mississippi, The Blues Highway
Credit: Jean-Marc Zaninetti, 2011

of “Creole” French, Spanish, and Caribbean heritage have a special appeal to American visitors. The city offers many activities, susceptible to satisfy every taste, including “adult” ones. However, its main attraction is its blend of the Mississippi River, including steamboat cruises, interesting antebellum architecture, both American and Creole, and its unique Jazz music heritage. The city even lends attractions to its western Cajuns neighbors by organizing Swamp Tours and “Fais do-do” dance parties with live Cajun music. Memphis (TN) comes second. Its historical heritage is more specifically concentrated around popular music (Blues, R’nB and Rock n’ Roll with Elvis Presley) and the Civil Right Movement legacy (Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis in 1968).

The popular American music heritage is not only an important part of the attraction blend of both Memphis and New Orleans, but it is also used to try to promote visit of the small rural towns of the Mississippi River interior “Delta” stretching downriver from Memphis (TN) to Vicksburg (MS) in the northwestern part of the state of Mississippi and its vicinity (Helena AR, Ferryday LA), which is the birthplace of Blues music (fig. 2). Despite the ongoing efforts, these poverty stricken regions fail to offer the adequate infrastructure and accommodations for attracting a large number of visitors.

B. River-based attractions

Being the largest river in the USA, and considering its role in the history of the nation, the Mississippi River itself has become an attraction to visitors (Timothy 2009). There have been several attempts to use the Mississippi River itself to generate income for the travel industry. These facilities can be regrouped into four categories.

Watersport activities. With its hot summer climate, watersport is an extremely popular activity in the lower USA. With its changing meandering course, the Mississippi River has left several side lakes that offer perfect spots for fishing, boating and waterskiing. This latter sport was invented in the state of Minnesota in 1922. Several lakes have been set aside for preservation in scenic State Parks that offer

nature centres, camping and boat launch facilities, hiking trails and bird watching opportunities to visitors (e.g. Lake Itasca MN, Reelfoot Lake TN, Lake Chicot AR). However, these activities attract only local folks, and thus fail to bring extra income to the local economy. These freshwater-based activities are no match to the huge lure of southern beaches to resort tourism.

Several river museums and other educational facilities focusing either on the environment or the river history have been developed along the Mississippi. Among the largest ones is the Mississippi River Visitor Center of the National Park Service, located in the St. Paul Museum of Science (MN). The state of Wisconsin has the Riverside Museum in La Crosse. The National Mississippi River Museum and Aquarium is located in Dubuque, Iowa. The Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) that is in charge of regulating the river course for navigation and for flood prevention has created the National Great River Museum in Alton, Illinois. The Mississippi River Museum is located at Mud Island in Memphis, Tennessee.

River cruises offer visitors to re-enact the golden age of river navigation of the 19th century aboard historic Steamboats’ replicas, some operated by an authentic steam engine (e.g. Steamboat “Natchez” in New Orleans, LA, fig. 3). Mississippi River cruises are nothing to be compared to European Danube cruise for instance. This is a struggling industry. Due to low demand, the last overnight river cruise shut down its operations in 2010. The remaining cruise boats survive with short urban sight-seeing tours and jazz dinner cruises. However, the Mississippi River is mostly a working river, and its industrial landscape is not very attractive. In the lower Mississippi valley, the sight is obstructed by the massive protective levees and it is dominated by huge seaport facilities downstream of Baton Rouge (LA), including gigantic oil refineries. Historical attractions are wide apart along the river course.

Riverboat casinos is another specific feature of the Mississippi River landscape. Gambling is a tradition in the region since the 19th century. However, it was banned in the 1950s in order to fight crime. The gambling industry was reauthorized by all but two of the riverside states between 1991 and 1994. Because the



Fig. 3. The steamboat Natchez in New Orleans
Credit: Jean-Marc Zaninetti, 2011

Mississippi River is bordering at least two different states along most of its course, the authorization cascaded as in an arm race. There are now 64 operating casinos along the river. The state of Mississippi boasts the largest gambling industry with 18 riverside casinos, 10 of which are located in Tunica only. Tunica is the largest gambling spot along the river because it is found in the immediate vicinity of Memphis (TN) and because both states of Tennessee and Arkansas have not authorized gambling so far.

There are 28 licensed casinos in the state of Mississippi, including 18 along the Mississippi River. These casinos have generated a gross income of \$2.8 billion and 26,500 direct jobs during the fiscal year of 2007. The gaming industry boasts that 3 patrons on 4 visit from out of the state, mostly Tennessee, Arkansas (along the River), and Texas (along both the River and Coast), three relatively close states that do not authorize gambling on their territory. The riverside casinos generate 73% of the state's gaming revenue, including 56% for the

Tunica facilities. With 20 operating casinos, including 12 riverboats, Louisiana is in a similar position. The industry boasts over \$2 billion in revenue and approximately 15,000 jobs. But the majority of this revenue does not come from the Mississippi River valley, but from the western cities of Lake Charles and Shreveport, conveniently located at a 3-hour drive of the Texas metropolises of Dallas or Houston. Despite its heavy handed lobbying, the gambling industry cannot hide the fact that it does not create any added value, but simply recirculates existing income (Garrett 2003). For this reason, the omnipresence of the casinos along the river, as elsewhere in the USA, has quickly annihilated the competitive edge of those states that first authorized the gaming industry in the 1990s. The states of Louisiana and Mississippi continue to lure some outside money into their casinos, because they are placed in the vicinity of non-gambling states. But upstream, casino patrons are simply local folks and the business is not so profitable.

3. The Relative Unimportance of the Mississippi River States in the U.S. Travel Industry

Regrouping 17.5% of the U.S. total population (Census 2010) and 16.4% of the 2008 GDP, the 10 river-states (map) share only 14% of the total of U.S. travel expenditure, including these parts of the states that are not located along the Mississippi River. The travel industry located in the Chicago Metropolitan Area alone is almost the same size as that of the entire Mississippi River Valley. Summarizing the independent state-issued reports, we estimated that the total travel expenditures located in the Mississippi River valley counties and parishes fell short of \$30 billion during the year 2008. That represents 4% of the national travel industry revenues. This income is mostly concentrated around four urban metropolitan areas, Minneapolis – St. Paul to the North in Minnesota, with some spillover effects in the neighbouring state of Wisconsin being the main economic hub along the river (over \$8 billion travel expenditures in 2008). It is also the seat of the Mississippi River Parkway Commission, the public agency commissioned by the 10 member states for promoting the Great River Road. The prominence of Minneapolis – St Paul is unrelated to its heritage. It emphasizes instead the prominent role of business travellers and conference attendees in large metropolitan areas having a major international airport hub and several Fortune 500 company headquarters. It demonstrates also the superiority of investment in the development of man-made attraction over given natural and historic localized asset in attracting visitors. The St. Louis metropolitan area (Missouri and Illinois) is the second travel hub along the River (over \$7 billion travel expenditures in 2008). The location factors are the same as in Minneapolis. The larger Memphis metropolitan area (Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi) is the third largest travel hub in the region at the condition to include the Tunica casino industry into the total (over \$5 billion travel expenditures in 2008). New Orleans has dropped to the fourth rank with slightly less than \$5 billion in travel expenditures in 2008. This city has not yet fully recovered from the blow delivered by hurricane Katrina in 2005. In comparison, the 2004 travel expenditures surpassed \$5.5 billion in this urban area, approxi-

mately 20% of the travel dependent businesses having been shut down since the storm. The Louisiana state capital of Baton Rouge is lagging behind with less than \$1 billion in travel expenditures during the fiscal year 2008. Together, these five major urban areas concentrate over 87% of the total travel industry in the Mississippi River Valley. Large metros are at an advantage; they benefit from an easy air transportation access. Their economic activity at large helps keeping alive business travel, and their important hotel supply supports a healthy convention business. Minneapolis – St. Paul, St. Louis and New Orleans are important convention cities at the National scale. Minneapolis, 16th largest US. Metro, ranks 8th in the top-25 convention cities list. St. Louis (18th largest US. metro) ranks 13th, and New Orleans (46th largest US. metro only) ranks 16th, a remarkable performance for such a minor metropolitan area that has been recently crippled by a major natural disaster. Foreign visitors, mostly French and Canadians, are extremely infrequent in the Mississippi River Valley (less than 2% of the total recorded by visitor centres), except in the city of New Orleans.

At the difference of the East and West Coastal States, every Mississippi River State has still a production-oriented economy, and not a service-oriented economy. The Mississippi River is still primarily a working river, dedicated to the transportation of bulk cargo, energy, raw materials, and agricultural commodities. The industry related to its port activities is still a significant economic base for its riverbank cities. Tourism comes only second, at a few exceptions. In comparison to their other economic activities, New Orleans, LA, and Memphis, TN, are the two principal tourism-oriented River Cities, along with several small towns. These two cities have developed so not only because of their vibrant historic and cultural heritage, but largely because of the decline of their other former industries, which resulted in widespread poverty and blight. They are now striving to revive their failing economy by promoting tourism as a replacement activity. Their political representatives have discovered the virtue of their history and their regional

culture as an economic asset during times of crisis. In Memphis, it was a consequence of the progressive decline of the cotton industry from the 1920s to the 1970s and of civil unrest during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s. In New Orleans, the aggressive promotion of tourism followed the devastating oil bust of the mid-1980s. To a lesser extent, the troubled economy of St. Louis, MO, is now following a similar path.

Small towns and rural areas that are only accessible by road are sparsely travelled, attracting mostly regional visitors originating from the state itself or from neighbouring states. At the difference to large metros, small towns have suffered an extended desindustrialization. Their service economy is suffering from the collapse of agricultural employment that is emptying the countryside of its population. Heritage tourism appears as a last chance strike to avoid total abandonment. Unfortunately, small towns suffer from poor transportation access. No active airport, no operating rail road. They are entirely dependent on the road network, and have to rely therefore on the Great River Road for attracting tourists. The Great River Road fits well the global picture we have drawn in the previous section. Dating back to 1938, as part of the larger Federal-aid Highway Act, the concept of a transcontinental Great River Parkway

along the Mississippi River was developed by the governors of the 10 river states (Mississippi River Parkway Commission, MRPC). Because of the lack of adequate resources, it was later decided that rather than building a new continuous road, the existing network of rural highways that meandered the river would become the Great River Road itself. The green Pilot's Wheel road sign heralds the byway today. Louisiana is the only River State which does not care to rely on this brand. New Orleans and Baton Rouge, the state capital, are large cities well served by airline carriers. The major river plantations are located in between, at a convenient driving distance from one or both major urban centres. The Mississippi River Valley in Northern Louisiana is entirely rural and attracts few visitors. Downstream of New Orleans, the delta is even less travelled.

Except for its headwaters in Minnesota and its delta in Louisiana, the Mississippi River has been chosen to establish the borders between states. Its region is of unequal importance to riverside states. It is a relatively unimportant backwater for at least three states: Kentucky, Illinois, and Wisconsin. It is sparsely settled and little developed in the two smaller rural states of Iowa and Arkansas. It regroups only a minority of the state's population and businesses in Tennessee and Mississippi. In con-

Table. Importance of the Mississippi River Valley in the state's travel industry

State	Total travel spending 2008 (\$ million)	MS Valley share of travel expenses (estimation)	MS Valley travel expenses estimate
Arkansas	5 714	10.5%	600
Illinois	30 714	5%	1 536
Iowa	6 577	12%	789
Kentucky	7 695	4%	308
Louisiana	9 643	62%	5 978
Minnesota	10 857	79%	8 577
Mississippi	6 329	34.5%	2 184
Missouri	12 319	49%	6 036
Tennessee	14 396	22.5%	3 239
Wisconsin	9 664	5%	483
Total 10 states	113 905	26%	29 730
National share	15%		4%

Sources: TIA 2008 and state-issued economic impact reports

sequence, three river states only have a strong incentive to promote the River-related travel industry: Missouri, Louisiana, and Minnesota. These divergent perspectives over the relative economic importance of the River explains why the Great River Road project was never adequately funded. It is difficult to follow the Great River Road amid the maze of slow country roads, even for a seasoned traveller. The sig-

nage ultimately fails in Louisiana. The distance is so large and the attraction so widely stretched apart along the River that it is impossible to travel more than just a section of it in approximately one week. The traveller has to choose either between driving the upper basin, around Minneapolis, or the lower section starting from New Orleans, or the middle section around St. Louis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our finding suggests that the project of the Great River Road was embedded in the context of the automobile-based early mass domestic tourism period in the mid-20th century. The project of a Great River Parkway was placed under the supervision of a committee constituted of representatives of the 10 riverside states. It was never adequately funded because the River valley was a relatively unimportant backwater for many member states. The failure to build a parkway in the 1950s preceded the gradual shift of emphasis in the travel industry from road to air travel and from fixed natural and historic assets to man-made attractions. The Great River road appears overstretched and underdeveloped. It lacks the major tourist magnets that draw a majority of visitors in the USA, large amusement parks, and warm water beach resorts. The river landscape is still dominated by transportation and

industry, including too many brownfields. In some sections, small towns critically lack a comprehensive tourist infrastructure. It is not appealing to visitors. Widespread poverty and the extent of blight in river cities, both large and small in the South, may even have a negative impact on the region's image. It is also below the radar for most international visitors that are not even aware of its existence. Ultimately, it suffers from poor transportation access. All these reasons explain the failure of this brand to revive the struggling economy of small river towns. Only four metropolitan areas perform relatively well in this bleak landscape, but they do not cooperate, and their relative success is thinly connected to the river. The lesson learnt from this American experience is that tourism is unable to revitalize such a major waterway as the Mississippi River.

References

- Adams J. A., *The American Amusement Park Industry: A History of Technology and Thrills*. Boston, Twayne Publishers 1991.
- Dolfman M. L., Fortier Wasser S., Bergman B. *The Effects of Hurricane Katrina on the New Orleans Economy*. Monthly Labor Review, Vol. 130 num. 6. June 2007.
- Douglass W. A., Raento P., *The Tradition of Invention. Conceiving Las Vegas*. Annals of Tourism Research, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 7–23, 2004.
- Duval D. T., *Tourism and Transport: Modes, Networks and Flows*. Clevedon, UK, Channel View Publications 2007.
- Garrett T. A., *Casino Gambling in America and Its Economic Impacts*. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, St. Louis, MO. Research document, 2003.
- Ioannides D., Timothy D. J., *Tourism in the USA: A Spatial and Social Synthesis*. New York City, Routledge 2010.
- Jakle J.A., Sculle K.A., *Motoring: The Highway Experience in America*. Athens, GA. University of Georgia Press 2008.
- Judd D. R. (ed.), *The Infrastructure of Play: Building the Tourist City*. M.E. Sharpe, London 2003.
- MRPC Mississippi River Parkway Commission, <http://www.experiencemississippiriver.com>

Omer O. A., *The Economic Geography of the Tourist Industry by U.S. Metropolitan Area: A Supply-side Analysis*. Ph.D. supervised by Dr. K. Debbage. The University of North Carolina at Greenboro, 2010.

TIA U.S. Travel Association, <http://www.ustravel.org/>

Timothy D. J., *River-based Tourism in the United States: Tourism and Recreation on the Colorado and Mississippi Rivers*. B. Prideaux and M. Cooper (eds), *River Tourism*, p. 41-54. Wallingford, UK, CAB International, 2009.

Zaninetti J.-M., *Sustainable Development in the USA*. London: ISTE – Wiley 2009.