Rivers as Commodity: Adapting Floodways as Tourist Retail Corridors

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Department of Geography
James and Marilyn Lovell Center for Environmental Geography
Texas State University

Research Objectives
1. To identify key elements in the success of adapting floodways as tourist clusters.
2. Compare and contrast two regional examples: San Antonio River Walk and Bricktown Canal in Oklahoma City.
3. Examine scales that specific landscape patterns become visible at the two canals.

Methods
1. Landscape appraisal
2. Land-use inventory
3. Archival Research

Background
In 1911, boosters in San Antonio sought a way to develop in downtown and decrease the likelihood of flooding on the great bend of the San Antonio River. After a major flood in 1921, engineers decided to re-route the River, but allow for controlled flow through the Great Bend. WPA labor in the 1930s helped the River Walk first come to life. More development came with the HemisFair of 1968 when many of the local hotels were built to accommodate visitors. In Oklahoma City, the Bricktown District had been the RR Hub as long red brick buildings warehoused industrial goods. The area declined with trucking industrial districts, but in the 1990s, developers saw an opportunity to use a dry wash as a River Walk type anchoring a new baseball field to spur downtown redevelopment.

Business Inventory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Business Type</th>
<th>River Walk</th>
<th>Bricktown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hotels</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restaurants</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bars</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clubs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both canals have water pumped into their system, but Bricktown is more obvious about it with the pipe giving life to the canal at the beginning whereas River Walk once was wet, but because of aquifer conditions now needs engineering to maintain water flow.

The Alamo is a major tourist attraction adjacent to the River Walk whereas Bricktown Ballpark, home of the AAA Texas Rangers affiliate is the draw and inspiration for the Bricktown Canal.

Both locales use native materials in much of the construction as Texas limestone is the material of choice along River Walk and Oklahoma red brick is common in most buildings along the Bricktown Canal. The landscape maturity of River Walk is evident in these comparative photos of the two canals.

While River Walk tries to maintain a unique San Antonio cultural feel, through time corporate chains like Hard Rock Café have located along its banks. At Bricktown, native Oklahoman, Toby Keith, uses his name to bring notoriety to this bar and grille to enhance the local sense of place.

Both canals are very successful. Adaptive re-use is a common technique along both corridors as seen in the photo of River Walk (left) and the addition of more retail establishments, whereas Bricktown canal still has open space (right) available along its banks, but Bricktown is the fastest growing entertainment district in the Southwest and open space is quickly diminishing.

Different eras are not only visible in the superior ADA compliance of Bricktown, but also in the mural art’s political correctness. This mural (R) at Bricktown depicts three Native American woman in a serene landscape while the River Walk mural (L) recounts tales of more hostile times and a characterization of a mean-spirited Mexican sniper.

The contrasting eras of major construction are also visible by the big-box retail in Oklahoma (R) as compared to Casa Rio restaurant which has operated at this location (L) in San Antonio since 1946.

Maps of both canals

Conclusions
1. While both locations are contrived natural spaces much of their appeal stems from the visual and nautical amenity the floodway course provides to patrons.
2. The Oklahoma City project resembles the pre-Hemisfair River Walk in San Antonio. It remains more of a local destination than regional or national.
3. Both corridors exhibit internal geographies at different scales that seek activities from various markets.
4. While the OKC project is clearly influenced by River Walk in SA, the built environment at Bricktown reflects a more modern and inclusive society.

Future Research
1. Investigate how people interact with “nature” at these locales through qualitative methods.
2. Broaden this topic to view other ways flood corridors are used and managed as economic development projects.

Sources: