



Tourism Area Life Cycle

R.W. Butler

Emeritus Professor Strathclyde Business School, University of Strathclyde

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About the author

Introduction

It is now three decades since the original Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) article first appeared (Butler 1980), and rather surprisingly the model proposed in that article is still being cited and used in tourism research. That fact alone makes the TALC somewhat extraordinary, as most models have a short life span before they are relegated to at best a passing reference in current text books or articles. The reason for the longevity of the TALC is not entirely clear. It is very much a classic academic model (Griere 2004), in other words “a representation, usually on a smaller scale, of a device, structure etc.” (Collins:1988, 730), intended to aid in the discussion of, and research on, the development of resorts. It attempts to portray a common pattern of the development of tourist resorts, a pattern which it argues is common to many resorts throughout the world. Such an argument may well be thought to be presumptuous and arrogant in the 21st century, given the variety and range of tourist destinations that have been developed, in particular over the last few decades. This range reflects the massive changes which have occurred in transportation, politics, economics and societies over that period, which have seen destinations appear in what might have been envisaged as hostile or unwelcoming environments and communities a few years earlier.

Political changes such as the disappearance of the Iron Curtain and the demise of communism, the end of Apartheid, the opening up of China, Vietnam and other countries to tourism (Butler and Suntikul 2010) combined with the development of budget airlines, the world wide web (WWW) and a generally increased affluence in the world at large, have all contributed to create a very different face to global tourism over the past three decades. Indeed, one might well argue that tourism has changed more in the last three decades than at almost any other comparable time period. The two world wars, the Great Depression and the Oil Crisis of the 1970s have all had significant effects on tourism, mostly in terms of delaying expansion rather than fundamentally changing the geography, economics and social character of the phenomenon. Thus one may well anticipate that models developed in the decades before the late 1980s would have become redundant and outmoded because of subsequent events. Somewhat to the contrary, the TALC model has continued to be used in attempts to describe and understand the process of the development of tourist destinations in a wide variety of settings. This review briefly examines the origin of the model, its early utilisation, its criticisms and modifications, and its current relevance in tourism research. In conclusion it examines some of the basic assumptions of the model and its suitability in the present day and speculates on why the model has continued to be used in such a rapidly changing world.

Development of the Field

Research on tourist destinations and resorts in particular has a relatively long history, although much of the early literature published was essentially descriptive and based on specific case studies (e.g. Hobs 1913; Webster 1914). Gilbert (1939) was one of the first authors to discuss in more general and theoretical terms the development of resorts, albeit only in the context of England. It is not really until post World War Two that what might be seen as the real beginnings of research on resorts, particularly their morphology and development, begins (see for example Barrett 1958; Christaller 1963; Plog 1972, 1973; Stansfield 1972). The influence of these early researchers was significant in the development of the TALC model, as noted by Butler

(1980). More detailed discussion of the TALC model, including its origins, have been discussed at some length elsewhere (Butler 1990, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2006a,b,c, 2009a, b) and will be dealt with comparatively briefly here. A comprehensive review of the application of the TALC up to the early years of this century can be found in Legiewski (2006), and thus much of that literature is referenced but not cited in detail here. Many other references to the TALC can be found on the WWW, where there a search for 'Tourism Area Life Cycle' produced some 1,360,000 "hits" (http://www.google.co.uk/search?q=Tourism+Area+Life+Cycle&hl=en&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla:en-GB:official&prmd=ib&ei=eYdITLOVLI_QjAfl0dDiCw&start=60&sa=N)

The TALC's origins (Butler 2006a) stem from the belief that, even if not fully appreciated in many tourist destinations, resorts are essentially products, i.e. they have normally been developed and modified to meet the needs of specific markets (holidaymakers) in a similar way to the production of other goods and services. As such, therefore, it appeared to be reasonable to make the assumption that resorts would follow a generally similar pattern of development to that of most other products, namely, to have a "life cycle" (Catry and Chevalier 1974) of acceptance and rejection as the market first desired the product and then eventually found it outmoded and unattractive (Avlonitis 1990). While the life cycle model may have fallen out of favour in the business literature (see for example, Dhalla and Yuspeh 1976, and Tellis and Crawford 1981) and is a simplistic representation of the marketability of a product, it can still have relevance.

Examples from other fields, such as automobile production, reveal how markets in most cases slowly accept a new product, then become enthusiastic, mirrored in a rapid growth in sales, and eventually grow tired of the model and sales decline. Only in a very few cases do sales take off immediately (E type Jaguar), continue for decades (Volkswagen Beetle) or experience a rebirth (Mini), and these are normally a reflection of an element of genius and/or true innovation in the original model concerned. In most cases models experience incremental change in the form of performance improvements, structural and design change, and the addition of new features, all aimed at maintaining an existing market and/or capturing an additional market. Tourist resorts are little different, except in one fundamental element, that of control. Most commercial products are manufactured by one company which has control over the product design, production and marketing, whereas most tourism resorts are rarely under a single controlling force and their component parts often display a remarkable lack of ability to co-ordinate either product offering or marketing. This is mainly because they are comprised of a large number of elements of vastly differing size, ambition and focus. Thus while modifications and improvements are relatively easy to undertake in the case of most manufactured products, such changes in tourist resorts are harder to achieve, especially when the component parts may have no common direction or goal and there may be no clear controlling force. As well, resorts offer an intangible experiential product which the consumer must travel to in order to enjoy and which cannot be stored until markets change.

The original TALC model also drew on ecological models in a very simplistic way. There has been criticism of the use of the term "evolution" in the context of tourism resorts (Ravenscroft and Hadjihambi 2006) from the conceptually correct standpoint that such features are not living phenomena and therefore not capable of evolution in the strict Darwinian sense. However, the term 'evolution' is commonly used to refer to a process of apparently natural or uncontrolled change along a consistent path, and this is what was envisaged when the term was used in the context of the TALC. Clearly resorts are not living entities, although they are dynamic, and the

time scale over which they change is far from that found in the natural evolutionary process of species, but one can argue that the development process which they undergo is evolutionary in that it is often gradual, and generally reflects adjustments to ensure survival in a competitive environment (Ritchie and Crouch 2003). Ravenscroft and Hadjihambi (2006: 163) concluded that changes in tourist destinations “are best viewed from an evolutionary perspective in which the external environment is understood in relation to Darwinian selection, while changes to the built environment are mediated according to Larmarckian inherited traits”.

Thus it is reasonable to infer that without such changes to a resort, its extinction, or at least economic death, is likely. Indeed, that was the basic argument in the original model, and the subtitle of the 1980 article was “Implications for Management of Resources” (Butler 1980). This latter comment was meant to make it clear to readers of the article that resorts would face decline (however measured) if there was no appropriate intervention to manage the resources (in a very wide sense of the word) to keep them competitive to the tourist market. Such intervention would not come about from natural processes as in biological evolution, but rather through the deliberate actions of those with an interest in the wellbeing and continued attraction of the destination. The model was not arguing that the decline of all resorts was inevitable (as Plog (1972) had suggested), but that without appropriate interventions such decline was almost certain.

A focus on the “Cycle of Evolution” and the figure (Figure 1) in the original article appears to have distracted attention from the argument about the need for intervention to ensure survival. The figure itself had emerged from earlier papers dealing with the process of destination location and development (see for example Brougham and Butler 1972) where the focus had been on how new development would not be located in declining resort(s) but instead would be located in nearby sites sharing similar physical features to the original resort(s). It was argued that when development and growth peaked, astute potential developers would seek new locations with lower costs, untouched resources and greater opportunities for expansion. The key issue was to identify when the peak had been reached. The original model did not deal with the potential predictability of the model, this was an aspect explored some time later by other researchers (Manente and Pechlaner 2006, Berry 2006).

As has been stated elsewhere (Butler 2006a,c), the TALC was a creature of its time, and, as noted above, its origins reflected the literature which existed in the 1970s, in particular the writings of pioneering tourism researchers such as Christaller (1963), Cohen (1972), Doxey (1975), Plog (1973), Stansfield (1972) and Wolfe (1966). To many contemporary readers and researchers in tourism these references may appear now to be of limited validity, the majority not being based on empirical research of any depth, and most would probably not survive the refereeing process of academic journals in the 21st century. The latter comment is perhaps more of an indictment of modern journal reviewing than it is of those particular articles, all of which displayed innovative and insightful thinking and made significant contributions to the theoretical development of tourism research. The TALC model also reflects the nature of tourism in the 1970s, when the rapid expansion of destinations was underway following the technological innovation of jet aircraft, along with increased levels of affluence in western countries (based in part on the economic innovation of credit cards), decreased restrictions on travel, and rapid increases in mobility. Travel abroad was no longer the privilege of a small elite, and mass tourism in its modern form (or perhaps nearly post-modern form) was well established. Thus

fundamental changes were occurring in markets, in tastes, in destination locations, and modes of travel for large numbers of potential tourists in the western world, and not surprisingly, those changes were increasingly visible in tourist resorts, particularly those which had been established a century or so earlier, based on limited restricted markets and the railways.

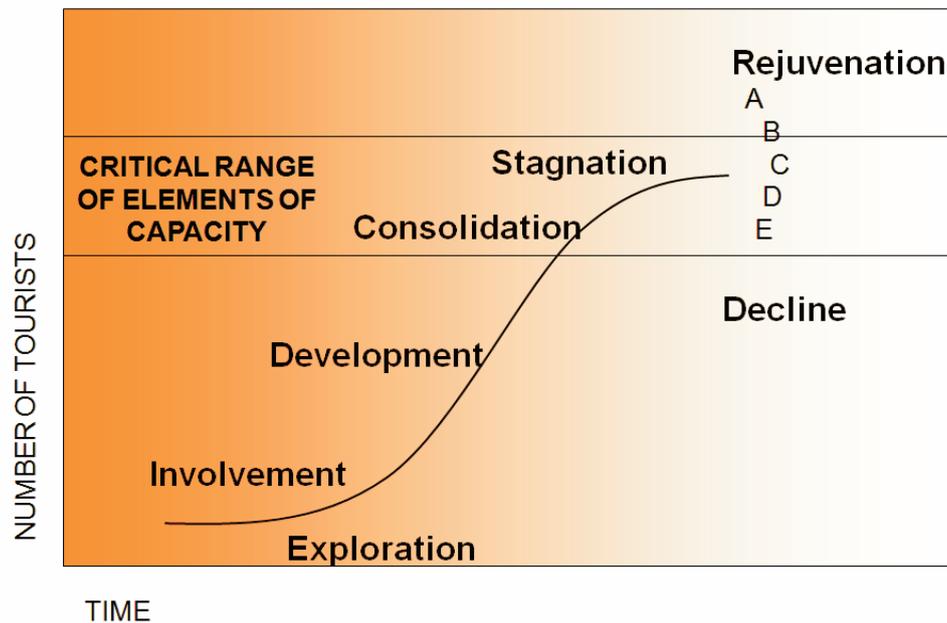


Figure 1: Hypothetical evolution of a tourist area (Butler 1980).

Framing the Field

The purpose of the model was to draw attention to the dynamic nature of destinations and propose a generalised process of development and potential decline which could be avoided by appropriate interventions (of planning, management and development), or as suggested in the title of the article, the management of resources. It did this by proposing a common pattern of development of resorts that had multiple stages (exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and then a range of possibilities from rejuvenation to decline, Figure 1). Key to this was the concept of carrying capacity, in the sense that it was argued that if the carrying capacity of the resort was exceeded, the relative appeal of the resort would decline, it would become less competitive, and this would be reflected in declines in visitation, investment, and development. The appropriate interventions noted above would be the key to ensuring that the various carrying capacities (economic, social-cultural and environmental) of the resort were not exceeded, or where possible, were increased to meet growing pressures. It should perhaps be noted that in the 1970s the concept of carrying capacity in tourism was very much in vogue, although it has fallen out of favour since then (Butler 1996, 2010). The resources on which destinations depend for their success in the tourist market vary widely. The early tourist market in the developed western countries in the northern hemisphere at least had for a long time tended to perceive tourist destinations as commonly coastal (particularly marine coasts), or at least associated with and adjoining water, having accommodation and related facilities, and being accessible, often by public transport.

As the markets grew both in size and in personal mobility and affluence their expectations and demands changed. They became more sophisticated and demanding in terms of quality of

infrastructure and facilities, in terms of a greater range of offerings of attractions, and in terms of cheaper, quicker and easier access from their origin regions. Resorts which did not accommodate such changes very quickly fell out of favour and were replaced in consumers' minds with new resorts being created, often in "Greenfield" (or perhaps "bluecoast") locations, i.e. locations undeveloped as far as tourism was concerned, generally with desired physical features such as amenable climate, water and space. Increasingly technology has become a substitute for some, or even all of these attributes. The most apparent examples of this are seen in Dubai, Las Vegas and Macao, and perhaps also the Disney theme parks, where technological features (rides and 'artificial' experiences, or massive luxurious hotels sometimes imitating real world locations, e.g. Venetian, Luxor, New York, pseudo movie sets, or artificial ski slopes in an area experiencing temperatures of 40C or more) substitute for conventional beaches or traditional cultural heritage.

Given such massive changes, at least at one end of the destination spectrum (Prideaux 2000), it is reasonable to query whether the TALC model still has relevance. Given that it was conceived in the context of destinations that had first appeared several decades before, often based originally on the railway for access by their restricted markets, equipped with few facilities or attractions, and with a heavy reliance on repeat visitors who were not mobile when they were staying at the destination, it would not be surprising if few modern destinations followed precisely the TALC process of development and decline. As well, the original model did not have a fixed time scale, it was accepted that some destinations might take a century or more to pass through the cycle when the model was proposed, but general consensus is that destinations are going through such a cycle in a few decades at most. Such is the rate of change as a result of technological and other changes in the global economy and society that destinations based on technology are particularly vulnerable to obsolescence. Markets now have a vast range of choice from which to choose their holiday destination, they are no longer tied by limited transportation connections to just a few or even one destination. Anyone can reach almost any destination in the world within 24 hours in relative comfort and safety, quite often at almost absurdly low cost if budget airline travel is involved. Repeat visitation is not a necessity but very much one of many choices which holidaymakers have and thus destination loyalty has declined rapidly.

The TALC model has received considerable attention from other researchers. In the first quarter century after its publication it was used in a variety of ways and locations, and the relevant literature during this period is reviewed, as noted above, by Lagiewski (2006). Despite the dynamic nature of tourism and the factors affecting both it and resorts, the continued application and testing of the TALC (see for example Dodds and McElroy 2008; Cole 2009; Komppula et al 2010; Pechlaner et al 2010;) would suggest that it still has relevance even in such a dynamic situation. Kapczynski and Szromak (2008) suggest that Polish spas over the last half century have followed the basic pattern of the TALC despite the major upheavals in Poland during this period, but have managed to overcome a decline phase and enter a new expansion phase in the last few years. In most resorts, however, it is only when decline, or initially stagnation occurs that much attention is given to proactive planning and development rather than reactive measures. Cohen-Hattab and Shoval (2004) note that in fact failure to follow established planning policies may well be a factor in explaining resorts entering the final stages of their life cycles, as shown by their research in Israel.

In more recent years the TALC model has been used in a wide variety of situations beyond its original focus on resorts. For example Xie and Lane (2006) propose a variation on the original figure in their paper on Aboriginal Arts Performance in Tourism, substituting a 'cycle of authenticity' based on the TALC. In so doing they were following an argument presented by this author that appeared in a rather obscure publication (Butler 1997) and an illustration used then, but not published which made a similar point (Figure 2).

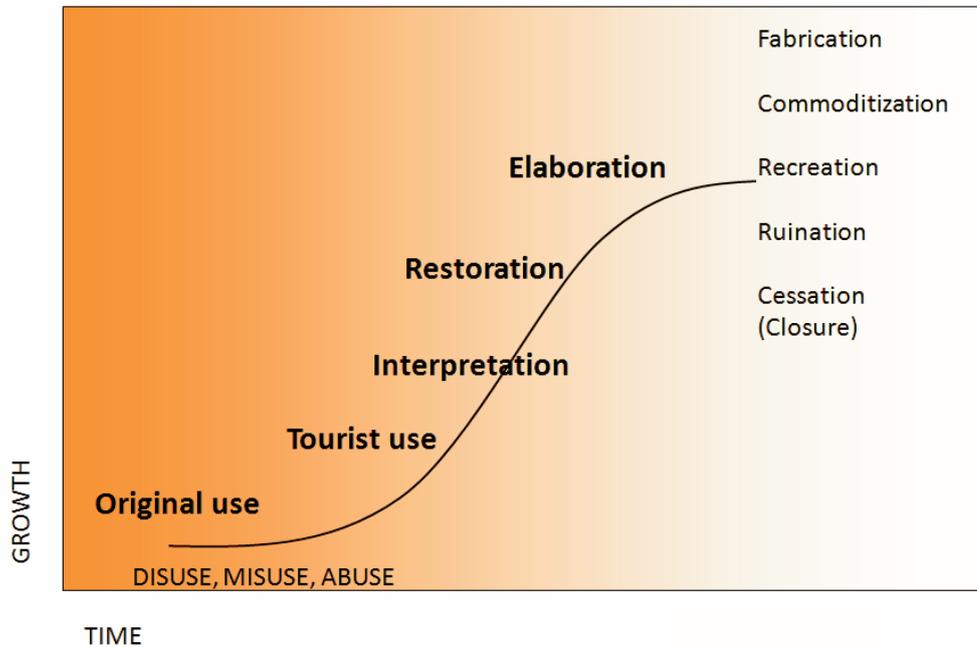


Figure 2: Heritage Opportunities and the Life Cycle (Butler 1996)

It is perhaps logical to expect that the model might be adapted to examine the life cycle of specific events as these are phenomena that exist in resorts as well as other locations. It is also not unexpected, given the occurrence of such tragedies, that it might be utilised in the examination of the impact of crises and negative events on tourism places. Putra and Hitchcock (2006) applied the model in reviewing redevelopment and the life cycle in the aftermath of the Bali bombing in 2002, and Cohen (2008) examined the impact of the tsunami on Thailand, the disaster applying a catastrophic 'shock' to the destination and its pattern of development, a feature discussed more below. In a similar vein, Moss et al (2003) have used the cycle model in the context of two terrorism acts, the Twin Towers destruction in New York and the Madrid train bombings. They argued that their research is the first to model the magnitude of the episode, the duration of the effect, and the shape of the associated life cycle. They concluded that "the impact on tourist air travel from these catastrophes follow scalable and fad life cycles, respectively" (op cit p.207).

Kompulla et al (2010) used the model in a more traditional manner to examine the life cycle of a particular product, namely Christmas in Lapland, where that product is tied both to the image of the area and specific localised offerings, and rather in contrast, it has been featured in *Surf Economics* (Nelson 2008) in the context of the life cycle of surfing sites. It has also been used in the context of wine tourism by Tomljenović and Getz (2009), who examined the life cycle concept in terms of the development of wine tourism regions in Croatia, with the innovation of incorporating winery owners' perceptions and attitudes. Whitfield (2008) applied the model to cyclical aspects of conference tourism in the UK, with a focus on the use of refurbish-

ments as triggers for rejuvenation, an aspect which, as noted later, could usefully be applied to resorts, and in a somewhat similar vein, Sundt (2006) examined hotels in Switzerland from a life cycle perspective. The TALC, along with other models, was also used by Duffus and Dearden (1990) in the context of wildlife tourism to illustrate how changes in demand can affect specific 'products' and assist in the management of wildlife resources, an approach also suggested by Weizenegger (2006).

Other researchers have examined tourist area life cycles using different approaches and alternative models. Toh, et al (2001) for example, in their study of the tourism life cycle of Singapore, utilized a travel balance approach. Cole (2009), in an application of logistic modeling, examined the TALC by producing a logistic tourism model which he used to explore whether the tourism industry was 'chaotic', concluding that quite different dynamics were exhibited compared to those of traditional growth models. The application of more sophisticated modeling techniques such as those above to the TALC has also been followed by Chinese researchers (see for example, Xu 2001; Xie 1995; Yi 2001), along with more conventional applications of the model (Bao 1994, 1998) in a variety of settings, both physical and cultural.

The TALC has also been used in the context of gambling, as for example when Moss et al (2003; 393) applied the model to casino winnings, and concluded that "The model supports the position that casinos conform to Butler's S-shaped product life cycle for resorts, suggesting that the rapid increases in early-period gaming revenues will not continue without intervention to rejuvenate the industry". Gambling presents an interesting topic for the application of the TALC, as the logic of the model might have suggested that by the present day a resort such as Las Vegas would be well into decline. The perhaps surprising continued success and popularity of Las Vegas no longer stems from its monopoly on legalised gambling in the United States, which had meant that it had a unique selling point that seemed impervious to overdevelopment. That privileged position disappeared with the legalisation of gambling in New Jersey (and then virtually every other state in the United States) and on Indian reserves (Stansfield 1996, 2006). The continued success of Las Vegas relies at least in part on continued renovation, replacement and addition of its attractions, in other words, appropriate (in the context of Las Vegas) interventions by major developers and support from local and state administrations. While Las Vegas may not appear to be an ideal model to put forward in an age of supposed sustainability, energy conservation, and protection of authenticity, in fact it shows exactly how a destination can continue to attract a market, even one that is highly volatile and has many alternatives from which to choose. Las Vegas may well be unique (although Macao and Dubai may prove similar in longevity) but in its possible uniqueness it is tending to prove the continued relevancy of the TALC model. It may well implode following a further economic recession, a new wave of high energy prices, or a broad rejection of gambling, but until then it is likely to continue to frustrate academics and others who support the idea of a simpler, less extravagant and less energy-consuming setting for a holiday and to help support the basic ideas implicit in the TALC.

Issues, Controversies and Debates

It would have been surprising if the TALC article had not provoked criticism, rejection and alternative suggestions about the development process of destinations. While the first application

of the model (Hovinen 1981) appeared only a year after the original article, criticism took a little longer to appear (Wall 1982a,b, Hayward 1986). Wall's comments were in a mostly conceptual manner to linkages between the concept of carrying capacity of tourist areas and its application to the development cycle, and perhaps related to the decline in interest in the topic of carrying capacity in a tourist context over the past few decades (Butler 2010), but his concerns have not been followed up. Hayward's early criticisms related to a number of specific issues (Lagiewski 2006), including measurement issues and the identification of the stages outlined in the model. In a later review of the model (Hayward 2006: 29) noted not only that many of these issues had not been resolved completely but also addressed the fact that the "within the industry, however, the TALC concept is virtually ignored". This led him to suggest that the TALC "may need to be reconceptualised. Operational ambiguity must be overcome" (op cit: 30). He does accept that tourism is a living system and draws attention to the need to identify constraints (to change, to progress and to possible actions) as well as the possible relevance of the application of chaos theory to destination development.

Other researchers have argued for the abandonment or rejection of the TALC, although few perhaps as strongly as the late Neil Leiper (2004: 135) who stated that the model "should now be assigned to the archives of history – as a former theory, now discredited, shown to be false". There have been a number of other criticisms about the model's non-validity or failings and alternative approaches (Choy 1992,; Bianchi 1994; Prideaux 2000; McKercher 2006). Aguiló, et al (2005) argued that the model was essentially only theoretical, although others (e.g. Getz 1992) have supported its relevance in tourism planning. Prosser (1995) noted a number of criticisms of the model, related to doubts about their being a single model of resort development, limitations on capacity issues, limitations of the life cycle model itself, a lack of empirical evidence and limited practical utility. However, he concluded (1995: 9) "The extensive criticism leveled at the resort life cycle concept shows no sign of dissuading researchers from adopting the model as a framework for their research...the original model survives largely intact and according to some, offers the prospect of further development". Given the vast variety of resorts and environments, to say nothing of the widely differing aspects of tourism, it is not surprising that the model would fail in relevance or accuracy in specific locations or types of resorts. As this author has noted elsewhere (Butler 2004: 167) "It is perhaps more appropriate to consider whether it still has validity in the twenty-first century rather than whether it totally explains all examples of destination development". The fact that researchers are still applying the model to examine resorts would suggest that its validity is at least still worth examining. Nevertheless, several researchers have made critical and enlightening comments on the model when utilizing it in their research.

Papatheodorou (2004) drew attention to the relative absence in the literature on the TALC from the beginning of the relationship between the development process and competition. He argued that in tourism there is competition between resorts at one level, and competitiveness between individual enterprises at another level, and the final pattern of tourist flows (demand) combines these elements of competition along with consumer tastes and constraints. Given that competition is dynamic and subject to individual actors, the TALC is likely to be at best limited in its ability to incorporate the array of influences resulting from competition at different scales. He argued that "the demand management policies of the TALC should be complemented by an integrated, supply-driven planning framework" (Papatheodorou 2006: 81). In

essence such a call can be argued to be supporting the original idea of appropriate intervention at the resort level, but taking this a stage further to include recognition of the competitive element between resorts and the need to reconcile this with a more regional spatial outlook to maximise benefits to an area by maximising competitiveness and thus supporting their common future. In making these criticisms and arguments Papatheodorou (2006) is following a somewhat similar line to Coles (2006) who placed the TALC in the context of related retailing and marketing models. He notes that many of the criticisms of the business Life Cycle model are appropriate to the TALC, namely relating to the question of products being living things, a possible lack of validity for all classes and forms, that phases are not definable and precisely placing a product on the curve at a particular time is not feasible (op cit 56). As well, he noted that price (as competition) is not considered explicitly in the model, there is no mention of individual actions (e.g. entrepreneurship) and does not deal with the presence of multiple forms of tourism in what are mostly mass tourism destinations and their impacts on demand, behaviour and promotion. In response one might note that completion is implied within the TALC in the sense that it is argued that one of the main reasons why resorts decline is because they have ceased to be attractive to customers, or in other words, uncompetitive, perhaps at both the local (regional) and global scales. The issue of price is also implicit, if not in the original model, then in the discussion in later papers about the tendency of destinations to resort to lowering prices in order to retain a market and remain competitive if and when they are experiencing a decline in visitor numbers.

The criticism of the above authors about the lack of attention to individual entrepreneurship and the role of key individuals in shaping the process of resort development is one that has been addressed in subsequent contributions to the literature by Russell in particular (Russell 2006b; Russell and Faulkner 1999;). The need to pay more attention to the importance of local resident opinions and actions, particularly in the local political context has been noted by Gale and Botteril (2005), and the role of single individuals in not only establishing resorts but also in changing the face tourism at the global scale has been addressed in recent publications (Butler and McDonnell forthcoming; Butler and Russell 2010). This aspect of the TALC and destinations has also been addressed by Weaver (1988, 1990) in particular, who has pointed out that in certain economies, in his example, plantation societies, it may not be local indigenes that initially become involved in tourism development, but rather local-resident ex-patriots who have the capital and experience to tap into the tourist market. Whether this group represents something different to the local residents noted in the original TALC paper (Butler 1980), or whether ex-patriots have become part of the 'local population' may be controversial in both semantic and political, as well as anthropological, contexts, but it is clear that there are variations in the beginning phases of development of resorts in different economies and societies and this aspect warrants further research.

Rather in contrast, there has been considerable discussion about the accuracy of the TALC in illustrating the mature stages of destination development and whether there needs to be additional stages added to the model. Agarwal (1994; 1997; 1999; 2002) has explored this aspect more than others and her criticisms and contributions have found support (Priestley and Mundet 1998; Knowles and Curtis 1999; Smith 2002). Agarwal has argued for "the insertion of an additional stage in order to take into account the series of restructuring efforts that are inaugurated before decline sets in" This stage, termed as 'reorientation' should be added between the

stagnation and the post-stagnation stages of the TALC model to represent continued efforts at restructuring" (Agarwal 2006 214-5). Priestley and Mundet (1998) also discussed the need for additional stages in the model, in particular post-stagnation and reconstruction stages, along very similar lines to Agarwal. One may argue as to whether additional stages such as those proposed are necessary, although there is little doubt that many resorts do go through a process, if not a stage, of re-orienting themselves, or attempt to do so. In many cases this is related to 'going up-market' and/or becoming more sustainable, in the belief that such steps will counter any decline in image or appeal and reduced visitor numbers. While it would not be unreasonable to add such a stage, albeit possibly increasing the difficulties of determining when one stage ends and another begins, it is harder to justify the amendment to the original curve (Figure 1) as shown in Figure 3 as there is not overwhelming evidence of such a temporary decline and rise in visitation before the onset of either rejuvenation or continuous decline after a period of stagnation. One could also argue that if sustainability was achieved, perhaps as a result of re-orientation, the result would be a continuation of a relatively flat or only very slightly increasing line from stagnation over the long term future. A decline and subsequent rise would depend on the speed of success or failure of promotion and market acceptance of the re-orientation and new offerings by the resort.

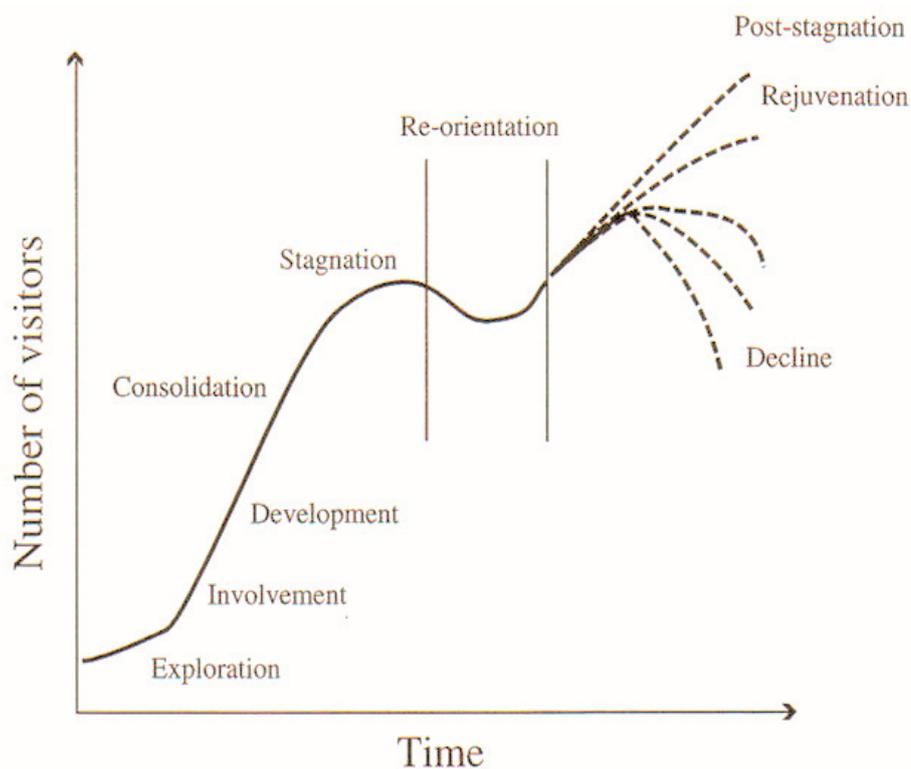


Figure 3: Modification of the Butler Tourist Cycle of Evolution Model (Agarwal 2006)

If re-orientation did take place but was unsuccessful in terms of recapturing the declining market or attracting a new market, then, as Baum (1998) has suggested, there may be a need for an additional stage to be added at the 'end' of the cycle, namely, that of complete 're-invention' whereby a resort would endeavour to make a complete change in the nature of its offerings. To date the best example of this is probably Atlantic City (Stansfield 2006) which reinvented itself from a traditional family summer beach resort to a year round mature market gambling destination. Baum also proposed an alternative final stage, namely an exit from tourism completely, which could occur when a resort acknowledged that it had no further future in tourism.

The suggestion of re-invention proposed by Baum is not entirely new to the TALC as the case of Atlantic City was noted in the original article as one example of rejuvenation. If and when such a step occurred, it was assumed that the destination would then in effect begin a new cycle of development, which may well mirror the previous cycle over time and thus need another reinvention in due course. Where such reinvention is made on the basis of technology, one might expect the subsequent new life cycle to be relatively short, as whatever one resort can produce through the application of technology, in time a competitor will reproduce, almost certainly in a larger, more complex, challenging, less costly, and inevitably, more attractive form to the ever-changing market. The appearance of ever more bizarre and larger hotels and casinos in Las Vegas is evidence of this.

Future Research Agenda

The basic focus of the TALC is on “What”, in the sense that it is focused on what happens to tourist destinations in terms of their development process or cycle. As a descriptive model it has performed remarkably well for a considerable time, partly because many of the destinations studied have been well established ones and to some extent therefore, are remnants of an earlier stage of tourism. Thus one important area of future research should be to test the TALC on what might be defined as “instant” resorts, particularly with respect to their patterns of investment, physical development and markets. This author has been informed (personal communication 2007) that Sharm El Sheikh in Egypt has already seen declines in some national markets and is actively pursuing replacement markets already, less than two decades after its establishment as an international destination. Establishing the time scale of movement of resorts through the cycle and whether different types of destinations or those in different types of locations operate at different rates would be informative and useful, adding a considerable refinement to the original model. Di Benedetto and Bojanic (1993) almost two decades ago suggested that the faster the speed at which a destination was developed the shorter would be its lifecycle. This is an intriguing hypothesis that deserves further exploration and if true, has significant implications for many modern destinations, but unfortunately their innovative idea does not appear to have been pursued, although it is supported also by research by Bao and Zhang (2006).

Clarification and increased differentiation of the stages of the cycle would also be valuable. The excellent work of Berry (2006) on the predictive potential of the TALC did much to broaden understanding of what indicators can be used to identify not only the stages themselves but also to predict imminent movement from one stage to another. Additional work on determining a more complete set of indicators of each stage would be useful in clarifying the degree of exclusivity of the stages themselves. In the context of stages, few authors have challenged the model from the point of view of there being stages or that these might be identified. The initial criticisms of Haywood (1986) are still valid and while he has revisited the topic (Haywood 2006) his original reservations, particular on the difficulty of identifying stages remain mostly unaddressed. Of interest in this respect would be whether objective empirical indicators of where a resort lay on the cycle (i.e. in which stage it was), were matched by subjective perceptions of decision makers and operators of services and facilities within that resort. Whatever objective indicators demonstrate, no actions are likely to be taken unless those responsible for the development of the destination agree with the location of the destination on its ‘curve’.

The destinations on which the original TALC was based were mostly existing communities which had taken on a tourist function in addition to, or as a replacement of, more traditional economic activities. It would therefore, be informative to explore more modern resorts that have not had 19th or early 20th century transport modes as their means of access in terms of their progress through the development cycle. In recent years the advent of low cost carriers has meant the rapid, almost immediate growth of tourism in places not previously viewed as tourist destinations (Papatheodorou 2002, 2010) and as yet, the growth patterns of these locations have not been examined. Whether they will follow the traditional life cycle or face a different future with a different pattern of growth, given that their initiating causes were external agencies not directly concerned with the development of the destination but rather access to it, remains to be seen.

As noted above, there have been a number of suggestions of variations from the model, Baum (1998 suggesting an 'exit' stage; and in particular, Agarwal (1994; 1997; 1999; 2002) who has argued powerfully for the examination of restructuring as a factor in the development of the cycle and possible adjustment of stages in the post-stagnation period. The need for or justification of additional stages in the cycle could be explored in much more detail than has been done to date and might better illustrate post-Fordist arguments about restructuring in the tourism context. Gale (2007: 29) has noted that a problem with uni-linear models is that they do not address structural changes such as economic restructuring and cultural changes in societies which clearly influence resort relevance in the postmodern world, echoing some of the earlier arguments of Gordon and Goodall (2000).

Also in the spirit of moving from "what" to "why", it is of critical importance to identify triggers which affect the transition process from one stage of development to another. Keller (1987) touched on this topic when discussing instability (a topic which is currently experiencing major interest in the form of chaos theory as noted below), particularly in relation to control of development in destinations, and movement between stages in relation to capital investment. Important questions include whether there is a consistent set of triggers that operate throughout a destination's cycle, or if different triggers are more influential at different stages; whether specific triggers only affect destinations of particular types or in specific locations; and whether such triggers can be controlled and managed or only dealt with in a reactive manner. Gale and Botteril (2005) have suggested some elements that are involved based on their study of Rhyl and proposed a challenging research agenda in this area, noting that decisions about aspects of development reflect choices and preferences of those in control or at least influencing development or non-development. Haywood (2006: 63) goes on to note that "TALC studies must consider, not simply the existence of choice in reaction to change, but the conditions that both underlie change and enlarge or restrict choice". Clearly destinations are not passive phenomena, and those individuals, businesses and organisations managing, planning and controlling destinations need not react passively to influences, either external or internal. They can, and perhaps should be more pro-active in determining stage shifting in a destination, as called for in the original model (Bramwell and Lane 2000). How and why such decision-makers make those decisions is partly what Gale and Botteril (2005) were concerned with and this suggests that research into the power and politics of destination development is necessary if we are to understand more about the life cycle of destinations, and tourism in general, an approach long argued for by Hall (1994) in particular.

The vulnerability of destinations to both internal and external “shocks” is an area also warranting more detailed examination. Endogenous influences often reflect local politics and viewpoints (Martin 2006), an issue that has received attention from tourism researchers for several decades, Doxey (1975) being one of the earliest studying the changing attitudes of local residents in destinations, and this area has been the focus of many other researchers since (for example, Smith 1978; Lannkford and Howard 1994; Ap and Crompton 1998). Exogenous influences (such as the introduction of low cost airlines noted above), however, have been investigated less, and yet they have the potential to create massive impacts upon destinations. Few locations have escaped the influence of events such as the energy price rises of the early 1970s, conflicts in the Middle East, terrorism, natural disasters (e.g tsunamis, [Cohen 2008, above]), global trade and political agreements or the recent economic downturn. Increased turbulence in the global economic and political systems has seen the application of chaos theory in tourism and specifically in the context of destinations and the TALC model (McKercher 1999; Faulkner and Russell 1997; 2001). Russell and Faulkner (1999) brought some of the issues raised above together in their examination of individuals (chaos-makers) involved in tourism development and their role in the changing fortunes of destinations. The key importance of individuals in changing the face of tourism in general has been explored only briefly, and is a topic that needs further examination, both in the context of tourism broadly (Butler and Russell 2010) and specifically at the destination level, where single individuals can be both initiators of development (Butler and McDonnell 2010) and agents causing a destination to move from one stage to another (Butler and Russell op cit).

One other area which has not been investigated to any degree is that of multiple cycles at work in a destination. This author has suggested previously (Butler 2009) that it is highly likely that many destinations are not on one single curve or cycle but rather are experiencing a series of cycles at different stages of development. It is likely that some of these will be in their early stages, some at their peak and still others in decline. The TALC curve for a destination, therefore, may represent represents the overall aggregated pattern of development based on these multiple cycles. Different market segments will be at different stages in a destination at any point in time, some markets will be growing and some declining. The same can be said of the products or attractions (facilities, activity opportunities) that a destination is offering. Zimmermann (1997) suggested there are different cycles for different forms of tourism and even for individual activities and illustrated this with a figure showing patterns of activity popularity or life cycles from 1860 to 2000 (Figure 4)

Research is needed to integrate the myriad forms of tourism, their respective markets, and their development cycles with the cycles of development of destinations. Thus Atlantic City is near or at the end of its cycle as a beach resort but relatively early in its cycle as a gambling destination. The aggregated curve for that resort cannot capture either the detailed dynamics of the individual cycles occurring in that place or their effects on the destination. It was somewhat different in earlier times, when tourism and tourists at a destination were more homogeneous, when holidaymakers tended to come from a common origin, shared many common socio-economic characteristics and engaged in a more limited number of activities than is the case now. It was much easier to anticipate the likely pattern, scale and timing of development then, but as tourism has become more fragmented and resorts more complex in development, it is much more difficult to predict patterns and rates of change.

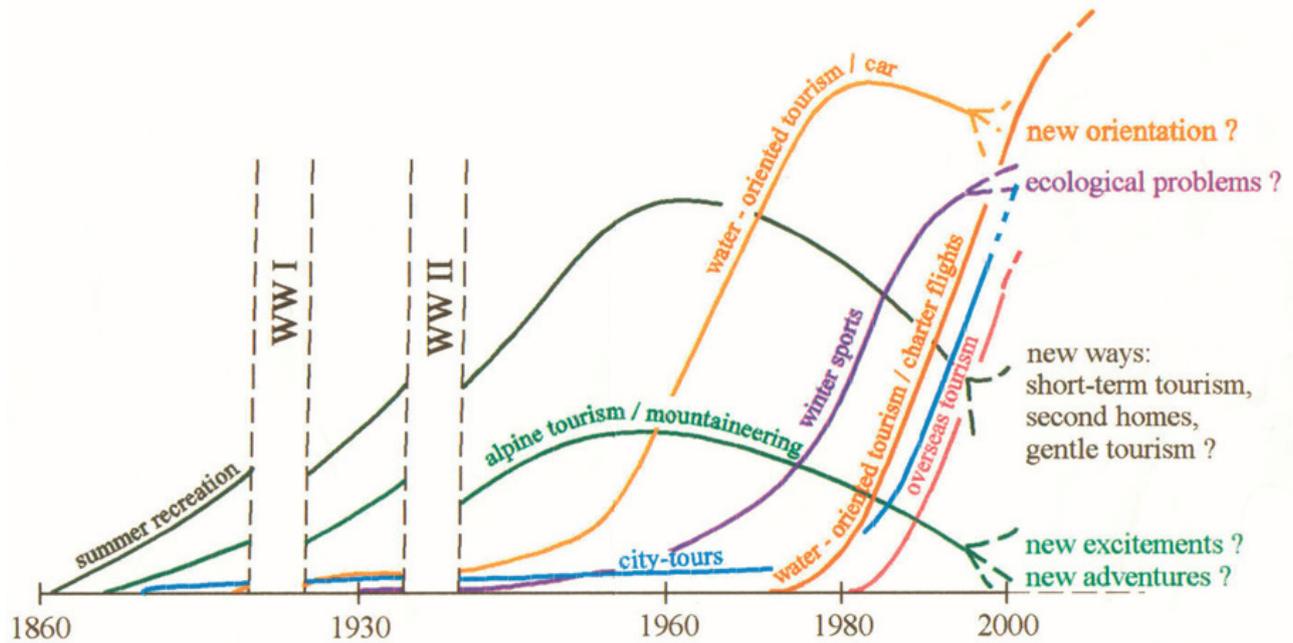


Figure 4: European Tourism Products – A Product Life Cycle Approach (Zimmermann 1997)

In the context of shocks to the system noted earlier, it is interesting to note that Zimmermann's diagram (Figure 4) also shows an interruption in cycles as a result of war, and such interruptions, although most likely at a smaller scale and shorter in time, might also be expected as a result of the rapid rise in energy prices in the 1970s, the Gulf and Balkan wars at the turn of the century, the economic recession of 2007-9 and even, although at a different time scale, climate change (Gossling et al 2010). As well, these interruptions can be expected not only in participation rates and popularity in various forms of tourism, but particularly in destinations, with correspondingly greater effects on specific destinations. Rapid rises in energy prices would affect greatly those destinations dependent on long haul travel or that are high in energy consumption (e.g. Dubai), the Gulf Wars would have particularly negative impacts on destinations in the Middle East, and the economic recession on all foreign travel. Climate change might be expected to impact on tourism cycles in more complex ways, including rises in numbers in some locations from 'last chance' tourists, and falls in other areas as attractions decline in quality or disappear or potential tourists succumb to 'do-right' or 'do-good' inclinations and decide not to travel at all. In all cases, such effects on the TALC of specific destinations can be significant, speeding up or delaying the progress of the cycle, or even halting it in extreme cases. Corak (2006) noted the effect of conflict (wars in 1914-19, 1939-45, and 1991-5) on the TALC of resorts in Croatia, in effect causing the cycles to begin over again after each conflict ended. Thus the relationship between conflict and other causes of 'interruptions' in the TALC for destinations could be a fruitful area of further research.

A final area of research which could yield useful information in an applied context would be to explore the applicability of the TALC model to the prediction of the nature of change in destinations. Berry (2006) has illustrated how this might be done, and Manente and Pechlaner (2006) have also integrated the model into an "early-warning system" to predict decline in destinations. Clearly, given the number of destinations in a wide range of locations that are entering or have already entered a decline stage in their pattern of development, predictions would be useful. Predictions, however, serve little purpose unless they are correct and are acted upon. Decision-

makers in many destinations are well aware of the potential of decline but few seem willing to act on such knowledge, and denial and “business as usual” is frequently a more common reaction than endogenously inspired change, or intervention. Few destinations have undertaken the depth of research and subsequent attempts to ensure sustainability and a prolonged life cycle that Hawaii has (Sheldon et al 2005) but this is an area that many more destinations and researchers need to investigate if destinations are to avoid the need for sudden rejuvenation (Faulkner 2003) because of their failure to anticipate decline. Even where such research has been undertaken and policies framed, the effective implementation of relevant policies is rare (Dodds and Butler 2009).

Conclusions

Whether the TALC model will continue to be used in the future remains to be seen. It has already had a life longer than could reasonably be anticipated. The reasons for this are not entirely clear, after all, as Lundgren (1984: 22) noted some years ago “Butler put into the realistic cyclical context a reality that everyone knew about, and clearly recognised, but had never formulated into an overall theory”. Perhaps the most important and fundamental future research agenda item in this field should be to explore the forces at work that provoke change in destinations (Butler 2010), as such knowledge would allow researchers to better understand the “why” as well as the “what” of destination development and cycles. The broad influences are clear and have been noted above, political and economic change, both internally and externally, environmental deterioration, technological (particularly transportation related) innovations and improvement, shifts in tastes and behaviours, and media influences. However, the way such forces impact on specific locations and communities, the duration and degree of permanence of their effects, and what can be done to mitigate or control such forces are still relatively unclear. Identifying the likely pattern and process of destination development is useful, but how this process might be controlled, protected, maintained and managed would be a considerable step forward and is well worthy of continued research effort.

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Glossary

Attractions: Places or features of interest, such as sites of cultural, historical or religious significance, of natural beauty or places of amusement such as theme parks to which people travel for pleasure.

Authenticity: Something that conforms to the fact, linked to integrity and has not been created specifically for tourists.

Budget Airlines: Also known as 'low cost airlines', low cost carriers or 'no frills' airlines. These airlines generally provide low fares but charge for other services such as in-flight food, baggage, check-in, priority boarding and seat allocation. These airlines have a unique business model that is distinct from the legacy carriers.

Carrying Capacity: The maximum number of people or level of use that an environment (such as a destination) can accommodate without experiencing irreparable change.

Climate Change: Changes in the earth's climate, generally in the context of the effects of global warming caused by human population growth and development. **Markets:** In economics, the system by which buyers and sellers exchange goods and services.

Product: Anything that can be offered for consumption or acquisition that could satisfy a need or want of a market. This could include physical objects or services.

Resources: A resource is something that is perceived to have instrumental and sometimes monetary value in economic development.

Sustainability: The capacity to endure or continue, generally used in the context of 'sustainable development', implying living or operating within the limits of the specific environment.

Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC): A process describing how a destination starts off slowly with visitor numbers limited by the facilities and access. As the destination attracts more visitors, amenities are improved, and visitor numbers grow rapidly towards and sometimes beyond the carrying capacity of the destination.

Tourist Destinations: A place where tourists plan to spend time away from home. This geographical area could be as small as a self-contained centre, such as a village, town or city, or be as broad as a region, island or country. It encompasses all the organizations, companies, individuals and government bodies (stakeholders) which offer products and services to people visiting the destination, as well as natural and artificial resources and attractions. More than one destination may be visited as part of a holiday, for example, on a tour or cruise. The term is considered complex to define but it tends to refer only to the geographical unit in which products can be purchased or experienced.

Tourist Resorts: Small geographic areas with attractions and services for the tourist. The population during the high season is mainly made up of transient visitors. The economy of resorts is based on tourism and transactions by tourists.