Part 3 – Evolution of Tourism

Tourism changes tourism! The question is how? This part of the book examines the three major evolutionary/revolutionary and lifecycle models that have shaped our thinking of how tourism, in general, and destinations, in particular, change over time.

Chapter 8 compares and contrasts Butler's and Plog's complementary models and engages in a discussion about which one better reflects how destinations change. Butler adopts a supply-side perspective with carrying capacity as the deterministic factor that influences the likelihood of a destination going into decline. Plog, on the other hand, adopts a supply-side perspective and argues that destinations attract a progressively softer type of tourist. If not managed carefully, destinations are at risk of sowing the seeds of their own destruction.

Chapter 9 takes a different perspective and introduces the concept of complexity theory to describe how destinations evolve rapidly over time. In spite of its broad acceptance in other fields of study, complexity theory has drawn relatively little attention in tourism studies, even though it better reflects the real world situation.

8 Lifecycle Models

By the end of this chapter, the reader will be able to:

- Describe the biological basis of destination lifecycle models
- Evaluate the validity of Butler's and Plog's lifecycle models
- Analyse the strengths and limitations of each model
- Compare and contrast the two models and describe how they integrate closely
- Explain the role of carrying capacity

Introduction

Two tourism lifecycle models developed by Butler (1980) and Plog (1974, 2001) more than 40 years ago have dominated the conceptualisation of this topic. Everybody is or should be familiar with the broad themes discussed in each model. But, while the Plog and Butler models are well known, they are not necessarily known well, for the original sources are somewhat dated, and in the case of Butler's work, obscure. Indeed, one wonders how many people have actually read the original source? Instead, they are so common that knowledge generally comes from secondary sources which invariably summarize the manuscripts into a few sentences or short paragraphs, and in doing so, simplify the complex and subtle issues raised about the nature of destinations and how they change over time. At worst, the works are condensed to such an extent that the only thing shown is the respective graphic and subheadings. It is for this reason that the reader is encouraged to read each paper as a supplement to this chapter.

Most readers should also be aware of the basic strengths and criticisms inherent in each model. For example, the devotion to the product metaphor is the main reason why Butler's work is simultaneously praised and criticized – praised because of its elegance, simplicity and intuitive logic, and criticized because it is difficult to prove empirically (Tooman, 1997; Weaver, 2000) and is deficient as a predictive tool (Agarwal, 2002; Hovinen, 2002; Moss et al., 2003). Likewise Plog's work has been both praised and criticized – praised as an early attempt to segment the tourist market by psychographic profile (Chandler and Costello, 2002; Harrill and Potts, 2002; McGuiggan, 2003) and criticized for not accurately depicting lifecycles (McKercher, 2005a).

Each had humble origins as each was written first as a conference paper and only later converted into a journal article. They are also a product of their times. Tourism in the late 1970s was undergoing rapid expansion as the development of jet aircraft led to the massing of tourism for the first time. Many remote economies identified tourism as their only economic development option and pursued a path of large scale development under the premise that the economic benefits of tourism would outweigh any adverse social and environmental impacts. They were unaware of many of the realities of tourism, and so it took authors such as Budowksi (1976), Doxey (1975), Jafari (1974), Wenkman (1975) and many, many others to write cautionary tales about spontaneous development and the inherent risks involved. Butler, in particular focused on the social and physical environmental impacts of tourism when developing his lifecycle model, and used carrying capacity as the deterministic variable to define the health of destinations. Plog took a supply-side perspective and wanted to understand reluctance to fly commercially.

Biological origins

Both Butler's and Plog's models, and indeed the broader product lifecycle and diffusion models on which they are based, have their origins in biological theory (Osland, 1981). Three complementary models influenced the development of the marketing or geographic origins of the lifecycle model.

The first and simplest analogy is the lifecycle that all higher organisms progress through (Crawford, 1984). As Tellis and Crawford (1981) note, individual biological specimens live predictable patterns of birth, growth, maturity, decline and death. Polli and Cook (1969) cite the usefulness of this analogy for the identification of each stage permits the evaluation of a series of tactical and strategic considerations that can be taken to either progress to the next stage or stem decline. However, this idea is overly simplistic for the biological model applies