3 The Structure of Tourism

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

- Describe the key elements of systems models
- Compare and contrast different open and closed ended models of tourism
- Demonstrate how each of us operates within our own unique tourism system
- Analyse the concept of a destination as a key component of any model
- Discuss how space change can lead to adverse impacts of tourism.

Introduction

This chapter discusses the component parts of tourism and various models that have been developed to illustrate how the components interact. As Goeldner and Ritchie (2006) note, though, the complex phenomenon of tourism is extremely difficult to describe succinctly, meaning models often become exceedingly complex in their effort to capture the components, processes and outcomes of tourism. We often talk about the 5 As of tourism – attractions, accommodation, activities, access and amenities – as if they capture the entire scope of this topic. While such a way of thinking of tourism's components is important, it cannot fully capture the nuances of what tourism is and how it works.

Tourism as a system

Leiper (1979) and Mill and Morrison (1985) were the first to argue that tourism functions as a system, where the parts contribute to the whole, but whose whole is far greater than the sum of its parts. A system is defined as a set of elements standing in interrelation among themselves and their environments (Bertalanffy 1972: 417). As Lohman and Netto (2008: 3) indicate, to be complete, a system must possess the following components: an environment – the system's location; units – the system's parts; relationships – how the parts interact; attributes – the quality of the units in the system itself; inputs, outputs and feedback; and a model.

Leiper (2004: 22), reviewing the biological origins of systems theory, noted it begins with the assumption that anything complex can be conceptualised as a series of interrelated systems that can be arranged in a hierarchy so that each system has its subsystems and superior systems. He then proceeds to state that elements are the basic building blocks of systems, and do not need to be further dissected to understand what the system is and how it works. Essentially, two types of systems were proposed in the early days of tourism scholarship. On the one hand, closed systems argued that there was little interaction with the environment, while open systems suggested tourism could have predictable outcomes.

While Serra (2016) notes that systems thinking recognises the interdependence among the elements of a system, all too often a reductionist approach is taken, whereby the system is broken down into its component parts and each is examined individually. The traditional Newtonian-Cartesian approach serves a purpose of identifying constituent elements of any tourism system, but does not explain how the system functions as a holistic whole.

It is for this reason that traditional systems approaches seemed flawed, for as Leiper (2004) noted, many models had become nothing more than a set of elements that came into play when people went on trips. Today, tourism is now recognised as an adaptive, open complex system guided by the rules of complexity theory (Baggio, 2008; Faulkner and Russel, 1997; Zahra and Ryan, 2007). The reason is that complex systems do not have predictable reactions, cannot be decomposed, have nonlinear interactions, high sensitivity to initial conditions, are dynamic, adaptable to the environment, produce emergent structures and behaviours, and can become chaotic (Jere Jakulin, 2017:209). We will discuss this issue in greater detail in Chapter 9, where understanding complex systems helps us to understand the evolution of destinations.

Gunn's Functioning Tourism System

Clare Gunn, one of the pioneers of tourism developed a Functioning Tourism System model in the early 1980s and then modified it slightly over the years. His model (Figure 3.1) highlights the fact that every part of tourism is related to every other part (Gunn and Var, 2002: 34). He feels the two main drivers of tourism consist of a demand and supply side and that in order to satisfy consumer demand the destination must perceive a range of developments and services to cater to their needs.

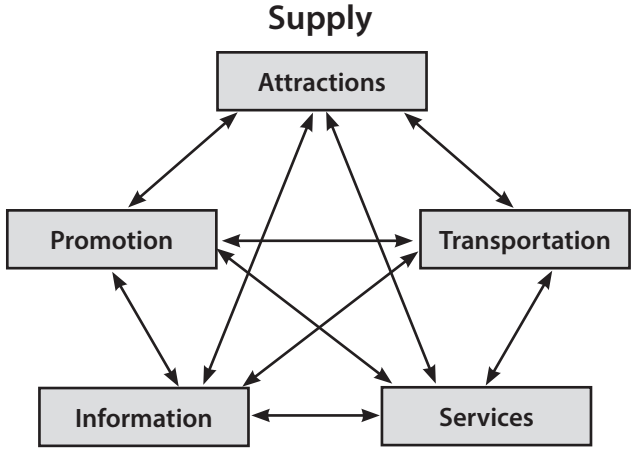

Figure 3.1: Gunn's Functioning Tourism System. *Source*: Gunn and Var, 2002.

The demand side of tourism involves four major factors. The tourist must be motivated to travel, have the financial ability to pay for goods and services, and have the time and physical ability to travel. These considerations, directly or indirectly, also result in the identification of ideal geographic or demographic market segments.

Supply side components are somewhat more straightforward and typically represent the five As of tourism. Destinations must have suitable attractions. Attractions are the most powerful component of the tourism system, for they provide the pull to satisfy the tourist's push. Everything else acts as a facilitator to enable consumption of attractions and is positioned in a subordinate place in the model and categorised under the broad term of services.

None the less, travel service businesses represent the greatest economic contributor to tourism. They include accommodations, food service, transport, the travel trade and other ancillary businesses. Information acts as the catalyst that links the consumer to the attraction and/or the destination. Information includes standard promotional material, but also, Gunn emphasises it also involves interpretation, environmental messages and the like.