THE CONCEPT OF A TOURIST AREA CYCLE OF EVOLUTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES

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The concept of a recognizable cycle in the evolution of tourist areas is presented, using a basic s curve to illustrate their waving and waning popularity. Specific stages in the evolutionary sequence are described, along with a range of possible future trends. The implications of using this model in the planning and management of tourist resources are discussed in the light of a continuing decline in the environmental quality and, hence, the attractiveness of many tourist areas.

Le concept principal de cette communication est que les endroits touristiques ont leur propre cycle d'évolution. Le concept se traduit en modèle théorique, qui utilise une courbe s pour démontrer l'accroissement et la diminution subséquente de la popularité d'endroits touristiques. La communication se concentre sur certains stages, les plus importants, de l'évolution, et vise à établir une gamme de directions éventuelle qui pourront être suivies par ces endroits. On examine les implications de l'utilisation de se modèle dans l'aménagement de resources touristiques, surtout dans l'optique des problèmes causés par la diminution de la qualité de l'environnement et, par suite, de l'attraction de beaucoup d'endroits touristiques.

There can be little doubt that tourist areas are dynamic, that they evolve and change over time. This evolution is brought about by a variety of factors including changes in the preferences and needs of visitors, the gradual deterioration and possible replacement of physical plant and facilities, and the change (or even disappearance) of the original natural and cultural attractions which were responsible for the initial popularity of the area. In some cases, while these attractions remain, they may be utilized for different purposes or come to be regarded as less significant in comparison with imported attractions.[1] The idea of a consistent process through which tourist areas evolve has been vividly described by Christaller:

> The typical course of development has the following pattern. Painters search out untouched and unusual places to paint. Step by step the place develops as a so-called artist colony. Soon a cluster of poets follows, kindred to the painters: then cinema people, gourmets, and the jeunesse dorée. The place becomes fashionable and the entrepreneur takes note. The fisherman's cottage, the shelter-huts become converted into boarding houses and hotels come on the scene. Meanwhile the painters have fled and sought out another periphery – periphery as related to space, and metaphorically, as 'forgotten' places and landscapes. Only the painters with a commercial inclination who like to do well in business remain; they capitalize on the good name of this former painter's corner and on the gullibility of tourists. More and more townsmen choose this place, now en vogue and advertised in the newspapers. Subsequently the gourmets, and all those who seek real recreation, stay away. At last the tourist agencies come with their package rate travelling parties; now, the indulged public avoids such places. At the same time, in other places the same cycle occurs again; more and more places come into fashion, change their type, turn into everybody's tourist haunt.[2]

While this description has most relevance to the European and, particularly, to the Mediterranean setting, others have expressed the same general idea. Stansfield,

in discussing the development of Atlantic City, refers specifically to the resort cycle,[3] and Noronha has suggested that 'tourism develops in three stages: i) discovery, ii) local response and initiative, and iii) institutionalized 'institutionalization).'[4] It is also explicit in Christaller's concept that types of tourists change with the tourist areas. Research into the characteristics of visitors is widespread, but less has been done on their motivations and desires. One example is a typology conceived by Cohen, who characterizes tourists as 'institutionalized' or 'non-institutionalized,' and further as 'drifters', 'explorers,' 'individual mass tourists,' and 'organized mass tourists.'[5] Research by Plog into the psychology of travel, and the characterization of travellers as allocentrics, mid-centrics, and psychocentrics, substantiates Christaller's argument.[6] Plog suggests that tourist areas are attractive to different types of visitors as the areas evolve, beginning with small numbers of adventuresome allocentrics, followed by increasing numbers of mid-centrics as the area becomes accessible, better serviced, and well known, and giving way to declining numbers of psychocentrics as the area becomes older, more outdated, and less different to the areas of origin of visitors. While the actual numbers of visitors may not decline for a long time, the potential market will reduce in size as the area has to compete with others that are more recently developed. Plog sums up his argument thus: 'We can visualize a destination moving across a spectrum, however gradually or slowly, but far too often ineroxably toward the potential of its own demise. Destination areas carry with them the potential seeds of their own destruction, as they allow themselves to become more commercialized and lose their qualities which originally attracted tourists.'

While other writers, such as Cohen,[7] have warned against the problems of unilinear models of social change, there seems to be overwhelming evidence that the general pattern of tourist area evolution is consistent. The rates of growth and change may vary widely, but the final result will be the same in almost all cases.

A HYPOTHETICAL CYCLE OF AREA EVOLUTION

The pattern which is put forward here is based upon the product cycle concept,whereby sales of a product proceed slowly at first, experience a rapid rate of growth, stabilize, and subsequently decline; in other words, a basic asymptotic curve is followed. Visitors will come to an area in small numbers initially, restricted by lack of access, facilities, and local knowledge. As facilities are provided and awareness grows, visitor numbers will increase. With marketing, information dissemination, and further facility provision, the area's popularity will grow rapidly. Eventually, however, the rate of increase in visitor numbers will decline as levels of carrying capacity are reached. These may be identified in terms of environmental factors (e.g. land scarcity, water quality, air quality), of physical plant (e.g. transportation, accommodation, other services), or of social factors (e.g. crowding, resentment by the local population). As the attractiveness of the area declines relative to other areas, because of overuse and the impacts of visitors, the actual number of visitors may also eventually decline.

The stages through which it is suggested that tourist areas pass are illustrated in Figure 1. The *exploration stage* is characterized by small numbers of tourists,

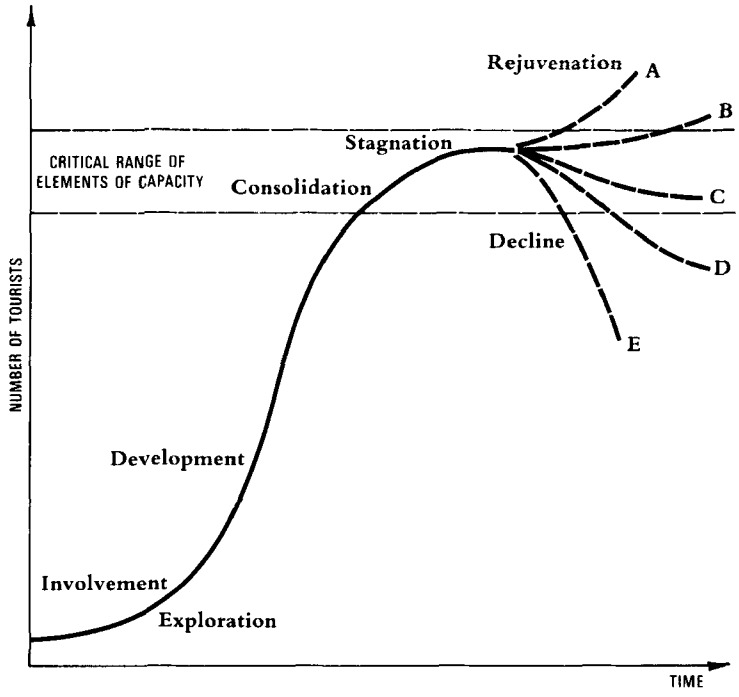

FIGURE 1. Hypothetical evolution of a tourist area. (For explanation of A–E see 'Implications.')

Plog's allocentrics and Cohen's explorers making individual travel arrangements and following irregular visitation patterns. From Christaller's model they can also be expected to be non-local visitors who have been attracted to the area by its unique or considerably different natural and cultural features. At this time there would be no specific facilities provided for visitors. The use of local facilities and contact with local residents are therefore likely to be high, which may itself be a significant attraction to some visitors. The physical fabric and social milieu of the area would be unchanged by tourism, and the arrival and departure of tourists would be of relatively little significance to the economic and social life of the permanent residents. Examples of this stage can be seen in parts of the Canadian Arctic and Latin America, to which tourists are attracted by natural and cultural-historical features.

As numbers of visitors increase and assume some regularity, some local residents will enter the *involvement stage* and begin to provide facilities primarly or even exclusively for visitors. Contact between visitors and locals can be expected to remain high and, in fact, increase for those locals involved in catering for visitors. As this stage progresses, some advertising specifically to attract tourists can be anticipated, and a basic initial market area for visitors can be defined. A tourist season can be expected to emerge and adjustments will be made in the social pattern of at least those local residents involved in tourism. Some level of organization in tourist travel arrangements can be expected and the first pressures put upon

governments and public agencies to provide or improve transport and other facilities for visitors. Some of the smaller, less developed Pacific and Caribbean islands exhibit this pattern, as do some less accessible areas of western Europe and North America.

The *development stage* reflects a well-defined tourist market area, shaped in part by heavy advertising in tourist-generating areas. As this stage progresses, local involvement and control of development will decline rapidly. Some locally provided facilities will have disappeared, being superseded by larger, more elaborate, and more up-to-date facilities provided by external organizations, particularly for visitor accommodation. Natural and cultural attractions will be developed and marketed specifically, and these original attractions will be supplemented by man-made imported facilities. Changes in the physical appearance of the area will be noticeable, and it can be expected that not all of them will be welcomed or approved by all of the local population. This stage can be seen in parts of Mexico, on the more developed Pacific islands, and on the north and west African coasts. Regional and national involvement in the planning and provision of facilities will almost certainly be necessary and, again, may not be completely in keeping with local preferences. The number of tourists at peak periods will probably equal or exceed the permanent local population. As this stage unfolds, imported labour will be utilized and auxiliary facilities for the tourist industry (such as laundries) will make their appearance. The type of tourist will also have changed, as a wider market is drawn upon, representing the mid-centrics of Plog's classification, or Cohen's institutionalized tourist.

As the *consolidation stage* is entered the rate of increase in numbers of visitors will decline, although total numbers will still increase, and total visitor numbers exceed the number of permanent residents. A major part of the area's economy will be tied to tourism. Marketing and advertising will be wide-reaching and efforts made to extend the visitor season and market area. Major franchises and chains in the tourist industry will be represented but few, if any, additions will be made. The large numbers of visitors and the facilities provided for them can be expected to arouse some opposition and discontent among permanent residents, paticularly those not involved in the tourist industry in any way, and to result in some deprivation and restrictions upon their activities. Such trends are evident in areas of the Caribbean and on the northern Mediterranean coast. The resort cities will have well-defined recreational business districts,[8] and, depending upon the length of time involved, old facilities may now be regarded as second rate and far from desirable.

As the area enteres the *stagnation stage* the peak numbers of visitors will have been reached. Capacity levels for many variables will have been reached or exceeded, with attendant environmental, social, and economic problems. The area will have a well-established image but it will no longer be in fashion. There will be a heavy reliance on repeat visitation and on conventions and similar forms of traffic. Surplus bed capacity will be available and strenuous efforts will be needed to maintain the level of visitation. Natural and genuine cultural attractions will probably have been superseded by imported 'artificial' facilities. The resort image becomes divorced from its geographic environment.[9] New development will be peripheral to the original tourist area and the existing properties are likely to

experience frequent changes in ownership. The Costa Brava resorts of Spain and many cottage resorts in Ontario manifest these characteristics. The type of visitor can also be expected to change towards the organized mass tourist identified by Cohen and the psychocentric described by Plog.

In the *decline stage* the area will not be able to compete with newer attractions and so will face a declining market, both spatially and numerically. It will no longer appeal to vacationers but will be used increasingly for weekend or day trips, if it is accessible to large numbers of people. Such trends can be clearly seen in older resort areas in Europe, such as the Firth of Clyde in western Scotland. Miami Beach would also appear to be entering this stage. Property turnover will be high and tourist facilities often replaced by non-tourist related structures, as the area moves out of tourism. This latter factor, of course, is cumulative. More tourist facilities disappear as the area becomes less attractive to tourists and the viability of other tourist facilities becomes more questionable. Local involvement in tourism is likely to increase at this stage, as employees and other residents are able to purchase facilities at significantly lower prices as the market declines. The conversion of many facilities to related activities is likely. Hotels may become condominiums, convalescent or retirement homes, or conventional apartments, since the attractions of many tourist areas make them equally attractive for permanent settlement, particularly for the elderly. Ultimately, the area may become a veritable tourist slum or lose its tourist function completely.

On the other hand *rejuvenation* may occur, although it is almost certain that this stage will never be reached without a complete change in the attractions on which tourism is based. Two ways of accomplishing this goal can be seen at present. One is the addition of a man-made attraction, as in the case of Atlantic City's gambling casinos. Obviously, though, if neighbouring and competing areas follow suit, the effectiveness of the measure will be reduced; a major part of Atlantic City's anticipated success is the element of uniqueness which it has obtained by the change.

An alternative approach to rejuvenation is to take advantage of previously untapped natural resources. Spa towns in Europe and the summer holiday village of Aviemore in Scotland have experienced rejuvenation by a reorientation to the winter sports market, thus allowing the areas to experience a year-round tourist industry. The development of new facilities becomes economically feasible, and simultaneously serves to revitalize the older summer holiday trade. As new forms of recreation appear, it is not impossible that other tourist areas will find previously unappreciated natural resources to develop.

In many cases, combined government and private efforts are necessary, and the new market may be not the allocentric section of the population (which would suggest a recommencement of the complete cycle), but rather a specific interest or activity group. Ultimately, however, it can be expected that even the attractions of the rejuvenated tourist area will lose their competitiveness. Only in the case of the truly unique area could one anticipate an almost timeless attractiveness, able to withstand the pressures of visitation. Even in such a case, human tastes and preferences would have to remain constant over time for visitors to be attracted. Niagara Falls is perhaps one example. Artificial attractions, such as the spectacu-

larly successful Disneyland and Disneyworld, may also be able to compete effectively over long periods by adding to their attractions to keep in tune with contemporary preferences. Many established tourist areas in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere attract visitors who have spent their vacations in these areas consistently for several decades, and the preferences of these repeat visitors show little sign of changing. In the majority of cases, though, the initial selection of the area to be visited by these people was determined by cost and accessibility rather than specific preferences.

IMPLICATIONS

Although a consistent evolution of tourist areas can be conceptualized, it must be emphasized again that not all areas experience the stages of the cycle as clearly as others. The establishment of what has become known as the 'instant resort' is a case in point. The process whereby areas for development, such as Cancun in Mexico,[10] are selected by computer from a range of possibilities allowed by certain preselected parameters has meant that the exploration and involvement phases are probably of minimal significance, if they are present at all. Under these circumstances the development phase becomes the real commencement of the cycle. Even here, however, it can be argued that, at the national scale, Mexico is experiencing the cycle illustrated in Figure 1. Perhaps the later stages of the cycle are more significant, then, because of the implications which they hold for tourism in general and for the planning and arrangement of tourist areas in particular.

The assumption that tourist areas will always remain tourist areas and be attractive to tourists appears to be implicit in tourism planning. Public and private agencies alike, rarely, if ever, refer to the anticipated life span of a tourist area or its attractions. Rather, because tourism has shown an, as yet, unlimited potential for growth, despite economic recessions, it is taken for granted that numbers of visitors will continue to increase. The fallacy of this assumption can be seen in the experience of older tourist areas, such as those of southern Ontario, over the past two decades.

The process illustrated in Figure 1 has two axes representing numbers of visitors and time. An increase in either direction implies a general reduction in overall quality and attractiveness after capacity levels are reached. In the case of the first visitors, the area may become unattractive long before capacity levels are reached and they will have moved on to explore other undeveloped areas. It can be anticipated also that reaction to the visitors by the local population will undergo change throughout this period, a process suggested by Doxey in his 'irridex' (index of tourist irritation); the scale progresses from euphoria through apathy and irritation to antagonism.[11] More recent research has shown that resident reaction to tourists is not necessarily explained by increasing contact with visitors or increasing numbers of visitors alone. It is a more complex function, related to the characteristics of both visitors and visited, and the specific arrangements of the area involved.[12]

The direction of the curve after the period of stabilization illustrated in Figure 1 is open to several interpretations. Successful redevelopment, as for example in At-

lantic City, could result in renewed growth and expansion as shown by curve A. Minor modification and adjustment to capacity levels, and continued protection of resources, could allow continued growth at a much reduced rate (curve B). A readjustment to meet all capacity levels would enable a more stable level of visitation to be maintained after an initial readjustment downwards (curve C) Continued overuse of resources, non-replacement of aging plant, and decreasing competitiveness with other areas would result in the marked decline (curve D). Finally, the intervention of war, disease, or other catastrophic events would result in an immediate decline in numbers of visitors (for example, Northern Ireland from 1969), from which it may be extremely difficult to return to high levels of visitation. If the decline continues for a long time, the area and its facilities may no longer be attractive to the majority of tourists after the problem is solved.

To date, the arguments put forward in this paper are general and are only now being substantiated in terms of quantifiable data. A major problem in testing the basic hypothesis and modelling the curve for specific areas is that of obtaining data on visitors to areas over long periods. These are rarely available, and it is particularly unlikely that they will date back to the onset of tourist visits. However, those data which are available for a few areas for periods in excess of thirty or forty years substantiate the general arguments put forward in this paper.

At the same time, of course, the shape of the curve must be expected to vary for different areas, reflecting variations in such factors as rate of development, numbers of visitors, accessibility, government policies, and numbers of similar competing areas. It has been clearly shown, for example, that each improvement in accessibility to a recreation area results in significantly increased visitation and an expansion of the market area.[13] The development of resorts in Britain, France, Ontario, and the north-eastern United States bears witness to this process.[14] If development of facilities and accessibility is delayed, for whatever reason (e.g. local opposition, lack of capital, lack of outside interest), the exploration period may be much longer than anticipated. In the case of new 'instant' resorts, where tourist facilities are established in an area in which there has been little or no previous settlement, the first two stages in Figure 1 may be of minimal significance or absent, a situation noted by Noronha as particularly applicable to some developing nations.[15] The classic, well-established tourist areas of the world (i.e. those which have been popular over several decades), frequently reveal evidence of having passed through all of the postulated stages. The resort areas of the northern Mediterranean, Britain, the north-eastern seaboard of the United States, and parts of Florida have moved steadily through an evolutionary sequence. Other areas, such as Hawaii, the Caribbean and Pacific islands, and the resort areas of north Africa, are in earlier stages of the cycle, but the pattern of visitation strongly approximates the curve illustrated in Figure 1.

These observations also suggest that a change of attitude is required on the part of those who are responsible for planning, developing, and managing tourist areas. Tourist attractions are not infinite and timeless but should be viewed and treated as finite and possibly non-renewable resources. They could then be more carefully protected and preserved. The development of the tourist area could be kept within predetermined capacity limits, and its potential competitiveness maintained over a

longer period. While the maximum number of people visiting an area at any one time under such arrangements may be less than most present policies of maximum short-term development, more visitors could be catered for in the long term. In a few localities already, limits to the growth of tourism have been adopted, chiefly because of severe environmental damage to attractions (e.g. the erosion of Stonehenge in England, or the damage to prehistoric cave paintings in Spain and France). Unless more knowledge is gained and a greater awareness developed of the processes which shape tourist areas, it has to be concluded, with Plog, that many 'of the most attractive and interesting areas in the world are doomed to become tourist relics.'[16]

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