

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

R.W.BUTLER

University of Western Ontario

Report Introduction: "The concept of a recognizable cycle in the evolution of tourist areas is presented, using a basic curve to illustrate their waxing 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."

SYNOPSIS:

For a particular tourism area, you can collect data to locate its position in Butler's model of tourism development. Start by studying each of the stages below and then consider the types of data you might collect that are relevant to the Butler model.

Butler explains his concept of a tourism cycle of evolution:

"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."

[Butler, 1980. \[FULL REPORT\]](#)

Butler quotes the German Geographer, Walter 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 traveling 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." Christaller, 1963.

The Six Stages of Tourist Area Evolution

1: The Exploration Stage

- Small numbers of tourists
- Based on primary tourist attractions. These may be natural or cultural.
- No secondary tourism attractions.
- Tourism has no economic or social significance to local residents.

2: The Involvement Stage

- Local residents become involved in tourism
- Emergence of secondary tourism facilities such as guest houses.
- A tourism season may develop.
- Pressure develops for governments to improve transport for tourists.

3: The Development Stage

- High numbers of tourists that may exceed the local population during peak periods.
- Heaving advertising will create a well defined tourist market.
- Local involvement and control of tourism declines rapidly.
- External organizations will provide secondary tourism attractions.
- Natural and cultural attractions will be developed and marketed.
- Local people experience physical changes to the area that they may not approve of.

4: The Consolidation Stage

- Tourism growth slows but the numbers of tourists exceeds the local population.
- The area's economy is tied to tourism
- Marketing and advertising will be wide-reaching.
- Major franchises and tourism chains will be represented.
- Resort areas will have a well-defined recreational business district.
- Tourism arouses opposition and discontent from some local people.

5: The Stagnation Stage

- Visitor numbers have reached their peak.
- Carrying capacity has been reached or exceeded.
- Tourism causes environmental, social and economic problems.
- The resort becomes divorced from its geographic environment.
- Artificial tourism attractions now supersede the original primary attractions.
- Area has well-established image but will no longer be fashionable.

The Final Stage of the Butler Model

After reaching stagnation, Butler saw that rejuvenation or decline as possible alternatives. The last stage of his model offers five scenarios between complete rejuvenation and total decline:

A: Successful redevelopment leads to renewed growth.

B: Minor modifications to capacity levels lead to modest growth in tourism.

C: Tourism is stabilized by cutting capacity levels.

D: Continued overuse of resources and lack of investment leads to decline.

E: War, disease or other catastrophe causes an immediate collapse in tourism.

Stage 6: The Decline Scenario

- Unable to compete with newer tourism attractions
- Holiday makers replaced by weekend or day-trippers.
- Tourism facilities replaced by non-tourism activities.
- Hotels may become retirement homes or flats for local residents.
- Ultimately, the area may become a tourism slum or drop out of the tourism market completely.

Stage 6. The Rejuvenation Scenario

- Requires a complete change in tourism attractions.
- Previously untapped tourism resources maybe found.

According to the 1980 Butler model, tourism areas leaving stage five, will either decline or rejuvenate - either way, the tourism area has evolved into the sixth stage of its development. It is misleading to identify a seventh stage in Butler's model.

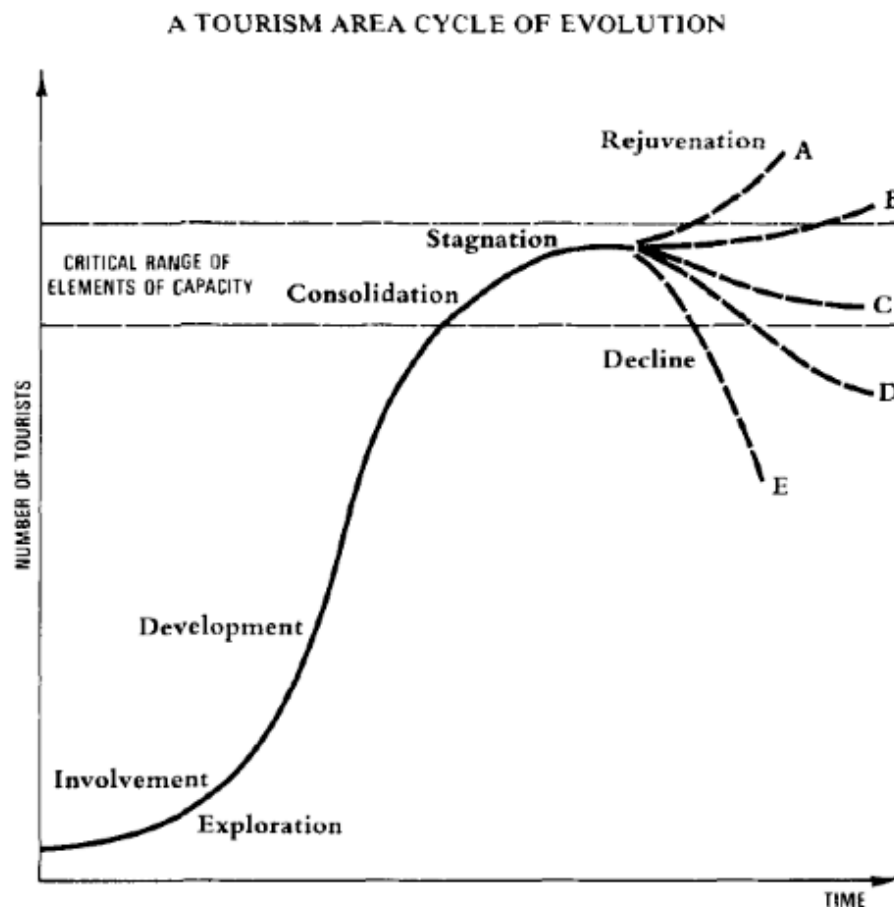


Fig. 1 - Hypothetical evolution of a tourist area. Butler, 1980.