

Chapter 35

The Life Cycles of Destination Life Cycle Models: A Critical Comparison and Synthesis in the Context of Destinations in Asia

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ABSTRACT

Product Life Cycle (PLC) has always been a hot topic in the tourism literature. Butler's Tourism Area Lifecycle model and Plog's destination life cycle model have both been applied and analysed extensively in tourism destination development and lifecycle studies. This study attempts to offer a critical conversation on the similarities and differences as well as the strengths and weaknesses of these two widely referred generic models of destination life cycle. It also identifies some recent socio-political, economic, and technological developments that have changed the nature of tourism destination development in many parts of the world and in particular to Asia and the implications of these developments upon life cycles. Based on more recent research, the present authors suggest that the reality of destination development lies somewhere in between, as a resultant of interaction with the processes laid out by Plog and Butler.

INTRODUCTION

In marketing, *product lifecycle management* refers to the process of managing an enterprise's products from inception to demise and possible resurrection (Stark, 2015). In tourism, tourism destination is an important class of products to be managed. Tourist destination life cycle has been an area of extensive research since the last 40 -50 years (Alemeida & Correia, 2010; George, Henthorne, & Williams, 2013). Studies on tourism destination lifecycle have taken various approaches and have been done from various perspectives. Many studies have taken sociological, economic as well as business and marketing

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approaches to destination life cycle (Butler, 2009, 2011; McKercher, 1995; Plog, 2001; Prideaux, 2000). Various studies from all these perspectives have used and tested different models on different life cycles developed by researchers and academics in the past (George & George, 2004). Many of such models used have been commended theoretically but have also been found to be empirically challenging (McKercher, 2005a, 2005b; Prideaux, 2000). Yet such models are continued to be used in present research in spite of being debatable in terms of its practical application.

Destination Management Organisations have looked into destination life cycle aspects and used models for marketing, demand forecasting as well as for other strategic purposes (Agrusa et al., 2011; Edward & George, 2008). Many researchers who developed destination life cycle models have considered tourism destinations as products and brands (Butler, 2011; Plog, 2001; McKercher, 2005a, 2005b). As a result, destinations life cycles have been compared with product life cycles and similarities between the two have been drawn (Butler, 2011; McKercher, 2005b).

The most widely used models on destination life cycle in tourism research have been the Plog's life cycle which was developed more than 3 decades ago and the Butlers life cycle model also developed a little over 3 decades ago (Butler, 2009 ; McKercher, 2005 ; Plog, 1974). Both of these models consider tourism destinations as products (Butler, 2011; McKercher, 1995; Plog, 2001). Both models have been suggestive of a destination life cycle which starts from a stage of low tourist activity then moving to a stage of high tourist activity and ending at a stage of decreasing tourist activity resulting from negative environmental and cultural impacts of high volume tourist activity (Butler, 2011 ; Plog, 2001). Between the two models, based on literary evidence, Butler's model appears to be more relevant and acceptable than Plog's model. However, this does not mean that the models are at loggerheads. As evidenced in the recent research by George, Henthorne, & Williams (2013), a synthesis of these two generic models might help to substantially increase our understanding of the dynamics of destination life cycle.

BUTLER'S TOURISM AREA LIFE CYCLE (TALC) MODEL

Butler's model of tourism destination lifecycle also known as Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) is one of the most widely used models in several studies as well as one of the most highly cited (Diedrich & Garcia-Buades, 2009; McKercher, 2005b; Prideaux, 2000). The Tourism Area Lifecycle was first introduced in a paper written in 1980 at an Australian CAUTHE Conference (McKercher, 2005b). The model was significantly based on the theory of product life cycle (McKercher, 2005b).

Model Specifics

Considering destinations as products, the model suggested that destinations or tourism areas evolve through different stages which are "exploration", "involvement", "development", "consolidation", "stagnation" (Alameda & Correia, 2010 ; Butler, 2009 ; Butler, 2011 ; McKercher, 2005b). These stages are quite identical to the stages through which products advance in the product life cycle which are – "introduction", "growth", "maturity" and "decline" (Butler, 2009; Butler, 2011; McKercher, 2005b). Followed by the stagnation period are 5 alternatives which are rejuvenation, reduced growth, stabilisation as well as decline and immediate decline. See Figure 1.

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