

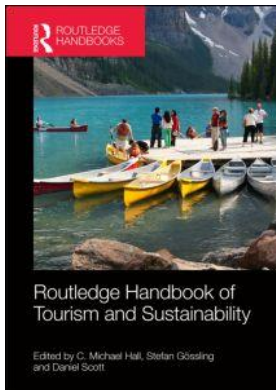
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Destination tourism

Critical debates, research gaps and the need for a new research agenda

Bruce Prideaux

Destination A formal or informal spatial unit in which a number of businesses either formally or informally cooperate to attract tourists by offering a range of experiences grouped together to create a unique image. The term resort is often used interchangeably with destination.

Introduction

Destinations are central to the tourism experience and, for this reason, present researchers with a large range of issues to investigate. As the following discussion highlights, issues related to growth, function and spatial relationships have been of particular interest. It is also apparent that many gaps remain in our understanding of the destination phenomenon. This chapter will briefly consider factors that currently influence the direction of destination development, the antecedents of our current understanding of destinations, highlight the current direction of research and suggest destination-related issues that need to be considered in the future.

Before engaging in a discussion on destinations it is essential to take a step back and consider the role of destinations in the broader context of global tourism trends and the international economy. The current structure of the global industry is to a large extent a reflection of the growth in leisure travel in the developed economies. Europe, North America and, more recently, Japan dominated post-World War Two tourism flows until the late twentieth century. The destinations that emerged during that period reflect the origin of the customers they were built to serve. In the twenty-first century the engine room of tourism growth will shift away from the West towards the newly developing economies of Asia, Africa and South America. A recent forecast by the UNWTO (2011) predicts that past patterns of growth in international arrivals will continue with international arrivals predicted to reach 1.8 billion by 2030, up from 1 billion in 2012 and 277 million in 1980 (see Chapter 1). In a parallel trend, urbanisation of the global population continues at a rapid rate. By the end of the twentieth century, 80% of the population of developed countries lived in cities in contrast to 30% in many developing countries. By 2030 the UN (2012) predicts that 61% of the world's population will reside in cities.

From the early 1980s onwards, debate began in earnest about concerns over mass tourism, carrying capacity and sustainability. The terms ‘post-modern’, ‘post-fordist’ and the ‘new’ tourist entered the research vocabulary. In the decades since, international arrivals have more than tripled, neoliberal economic policies have continued to promote economic growth and new terms such as the experience economy and wellness have become topics of interest. Climate change has emerged as a major issue (Gössling *et al.* 2012) and concerns about sustainability are becoming more pressing. These issues pose critical questions about the future structure of global tourism flows. For example, will the manner in which governments and consumers respond to these issues lead to the emergence of post-carbon tourism and post-carbon destinations?

The magnitude of growth in international arrivals and global urbanisation will generate a range of problems that the tourism literature has barely begun to acknowledge. Beyond issues related to growth and urbanisation are changing patterns of demand for tourism products and experiences and, importantly, the problems that will be caused by climate change. When considered in this context it is apparent that the future role of destinations in the global tourism industry needs to be re-evaluated particularly in relation to concerns about mass tourism, carrying capacity and sustainability.

As Povilanskas and Armitiene (2011) observed, changing consumer demand and preferences have led to increased competition and shortened life cycles. This trend is likely to continue as the ‘post-carbon’ destinations of the future begin to take form and struggle with the factors outlined above. While the literature exhibits a growing understanding of many of the components of the destination system including marketing and many aspects of consumer behaviour, demand for travel, distribution systems, image, segmentation analysis, accommodation, events and shopping, there remains a vigorous debate over our theoretical understanding of the destination phenomenon. Significant gaps in knowledge remain including our understanding of the policy environment, governance, post-carbon destinations, tourism’s role in very large cities and threats. In the near future a range of factors including rapidly growing tourism demand, urbanisation, loss of global biodiversity and climate change may force a reordering of the international economy as the desire for growth is increasingly constrained by the ability of the global environment to meet the demands placed on it. Viewed from this perspective there is an urgent need to advance our understanding of destinations.

Modelling destination development

The most obvious issue relating to destinations is what are they? Academic, travel trade and consumer views differ. Academic discussion may for example commence with questions of definition, insights from model building, scale, economic structures and function. Butler’s (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle provides one start point. Another might be Ritchie and Crouch’s (2003) model of destination competitiveness and sustainability that offers a comprehensive review of the interrelationships that exist between elements of the destination system. Other possible start points could be planning, marketing or policy issues. From a consumer perspective, the travel section in any good weekend newspaper is likely to offer numerous suggestions to this question. The list of destination types from the consumers’ perspective is extensive and may be activity or place based. There may also be little consistency in how destinations are described and promoted with the terms *destination* and *resort* at times used interchangeably. Paralleling the inconsistency in the travel trade’s definition of destination are academic understandings of destinations which as applied in the literature may range in scale and function from a small rural town to the state or province it is located in, to country scale

or even groupings of countries. Does this matter? From the perspective of the tourist as a consumer, probably not; from a research or planning perspective, most definitely.

Academic definitions of destination often reflect disciplinary perspectives with geography, economics, history and management providing the bulk of contributions. A definition emanating from a management perspective may focus on destinations as a product, organisation or network (Haugland *et al.* 2010) while a geographic perspective will often include territory and spatial relationships. From an economic perspective Andergassen *et al.* (2013: 86) building on an earlier definition by Candela and Figini (2012) suggest that a destination is 'a territorial system supplying at least one tourism product able to satisfy the complex requirements of the demand for tourism'. This multiplicity of definitions illustrates the complexity of the destination phenomenon.

While the disciplinary-based approach of the past has added to our understanding of destinations the failure to develop a stronger multi-disciplinary perspective has placed limitations on the scope of previous research, often channelling it into specific forms of destination enquiry such as coastal resorts while neglecting other areas such as large cities. This blindness of the literature was succinctly described by Ashworth (2003: 143) in the following way: 'Those studying tourism neglected cities while those studying cities neglected tourism.' There is an obvious need to move beyond disciplinary-based understanding and also beyond disciplinary boundaries to explore opportunities for multi-disciplinary understandings of destinations. This point will be revisited later in the chapter.

Since its publication in 1980 Butler's seminal paper and Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model has underpinned much of the discussion that has followed in relation to destination and resort development. Early attempts to explain the destination phenomenon can be traced back to 1939 when Gilbert examined the growth of English seaside health resorts and inland towns (see Hall & Page 2014). Other contributions to this question that appeared before Butler include Christaller (1963), Plog (1974), Stansfield (1978) and Miossec (1976). The TALC model and its many modified versions continue to be widely used to explain how destinations evolve, decline and rejuvenate. The model has been widely applied to explain aspects of destination and resort development (Agarwal 2002; Tooman 1997). The TALC has also attracted a number of critiques, many of which focus on its descriptive and its deterministic nature (Baidal, Sanchez & Rebollo 2013) and limited usefulness as a planning model.

Another problem with the model is that it is largely concerned with destinations where tourism has been a key driver in their evolution. The majority of studies using the TALC model have taken this approach. However, a significant proportion of tourism now occurs in cities where tourism is often a relatively small part of the overall economy. Thus, while the TALC might have some applicability in explaining how tourism has evolved in the Gold Coast (Russell & Faulkner 1999), one of Australia's leading beach destinations, it has less use in explaining how major international destinations such as London, New York and Beijing have evolved. While useful for understanding growth in leisure tourism is destinations that have a significant tourism economy it has less applicability in destinations where business travel constitutes a significant percentage of arrivals or where tourism is a small part of the urban economy. In response to the many criticisms and suggested modifications, and to bring together a coherent collection of research on the TALC see Butler (2006a, 2006b).

Despite its limitations the TALC continues to attract significant interest and a growing number of attempts have been made to extend the model. For example, in a commentary on the TALC Hall and Page (2009) stated that the model remains a clear indication of the importance that theory has in underpinning research. Recent work by Giannoni and Maupertuis (2007) into the dynamics of infrastructure investment, policy choice and environmental quality

has provided additional theoretical rigour to the TALC model while Lozano *et al.* (2008) built a theoretical model that is consistent with the TALC model. However, as Andergassen *et al.* (2013) point out, these models have no micro-economic foundations which they argue is an essential element of understanding destinations (although see several of the chapters in Butler 2006a, 2006b). In a study of Tenerife in the Canary Islands, Oreja *et al.* (2008) sought to integrate technological perspectives with the TALC. Taking a multi-disciplinary historic approach Garay and Canoves (2010) sought to 'revision' the TALC using it in conjunction with regulation theory to create a framework for describing and understanding the history of Catalonia and its role as a regional tourism destination.

In a move away from the TALC approach to resort development and following a management approach Haugland *et al.* (2010) suggested an integrated multi-level framework based on destination capabilities, coordination at the destination level and inter-destination bridge ties. To date, this model has yet to be tested. More recently Baidal, Sanchez and Rebollo (2013) suggested a new approach to evolutionary analysis of coastal resorts intended to complement previous theoretical models including the TALC.

Other models (Young 1983) and suggestions to explain the destination phenomenon have appeared in the literature. Prideaux (2000), for example, suggested a multi-model approach that included historic, planning and economic elements. In the most recent attempt to explain destination development Ma and Hassink (2012: 90) suggested the use of an evolutionary economic geography (EEG) approach which focuses 'on how the spatial economy transforms itself through irreversible dynamic processes from within over time'.

From a micro-economic perspective Andergassen, Candela and Figini (2013) brought together tourism product and territory (resource empowerment and organisational structure) to analyse destinations as meta-economic organisations. Further work in this area is likely to augment existing research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the destination phenomenon. Povilanskas and Armaitiene (2011) suggested that changing consumer demand has generated increased rivalry between destinations and shorter life cycles resulting in what Conti and Perelli (2006) describe as greater attention being paid to territories and networks of attractions rather than on the monoculture economies that are a characteristic of traditional mass tourism destinations. In a re-examination of the resort-hinterland relationship Povilanskas and Armaitiene (2011: 1157) employed actor-network theory (ANT) to replace previous notions of 'geographical determinism (centre-periphery, foreground-background, near-distant and macro-micro) with spatial relativism and the notion of networking as the underlying principle of space and mobility ordering'. In another recent contribution to the debate on aspects of destination development Agarwal (2012) observed that although a number of papers had considered exogenous factors such as labour and property markets little attention has been given to endogenous factors such as the economic interdependence that operates between destinations and sectors of the destination economy.

Scale continues to occupy the attention of researchers. Globally, city destinations are growing in size, function and complexity forcing a re-evaluation of the significance of geographic, economic and political boundaries. A recent paper by Agarwal (2012) provides a new perspective on scale and the relationship between place and near-far relations citing a shift in human geography from the discourse on scalar and territorial relativisation toward spatiality where the linear distinction between space and place are rejected. Borders thus become less important while greater value is placed on socio-spatial relations. Given the growing connectiveness of many destinations, particularly large cities, and changes in political arrangements where borders are becoming less important, the shift to spatial planning opens new avenues for understanding how destinations will evolve in the future. There is also an

urgent need to consider the scale of tourism's contribution to the GDP of cities. Compared to the significant role of tourism in the economies of the coastal resorts that have been subject to intense scrutiny by researchers, the contribution of tourism to the economies of many large cities is relatively small.

The foregoing discussion indicates that the intellectual struggle to understand the many issues related to destinations has generated a lively ongoing debate in the literature. It is also apparent that much of this discussion has focused on relatively small destinations where tourism activity has often been the major element of the local economy. Beach resorts in the UK, Spain and the Mediterranean have provided much of the evidence used in the models and theories suggested. In the year that the TALC was published global arrivals were in the order of 277 million. By 2012 arrivals had exceeded one billion and were expected to continue climbing. Unfortunately, the literature shows little evidence that it has recognised the need to move beyond the patterns of growth that the TALC was developed to explain and refocus on large cities such as New York, London, Beijing, São Paulo and Tokyo which now form the epicentre of a significant percentage of domestic and international tourism flows.

The failure of the literature to take a broader view of destinations has contributed to the current failure to develop a more comprehensive understanding of destinations and how they may respond to the almost tidal wave-like surge in growth forecast over the next two decades. For this element of our theoretical understanding of destinations to progress, more attention needs to be given to alternative approaches including models from other disciplines and the use of multiple linked models to explain various aspects of the destination system.

As suggested above, a multi-disciplinary or even a multi-model approach offers new avenues for understanding. For example, Prideaux (2009) demonstrated how the use of a multiple model approach (including the Beach Evolution Model (Smith 1992), the TALC model (Russell & Faulkner 1999), chaos theory (Russell & Faulkner 1999) and the Resort Development Spectrum) to study destination growth on the Gold Coast of Australia was able to provide a more holistic and multi-dimensional view than could be provided by a single model.

Comparative and competitive advantage and the role of competitiveness

In many countries neoliberal views (Dredge 2010) on economic growth prevail, a position that may explain the hesitancy of many economies to accept the need to give serious consideration to climate change. Growth remains a common mantra while lip service is given to concerns about long-term sustainability. Until there is overwhelming evidence that climate change is a serious challenge this attitude is likely to dominate public and private sector thinking. Irrespective of the prevailing worldview, the fundamentals of the market economy will continue to govern destinations in the future. From a destination perspective measures of success will continue to include yield and profitability regardless of the external policy environment that may range from promotion of growth in the neoliberal worldview of the present to a more sustainable economic model in the future. For this reason it is important to consider issues related to comparative and competitive advantage and the role of competitiveness as they apply to destinations.

In a competitive world all destinations strive to out-compete competitors, often with little thought to implications for long-term sustainability. In the most exhaustive examination of the issue of competitiveness and sustainability to date, Ritchie and Crouch (2003) undertook a comprehensive analysis of competitiveness and sustainability. Their model is arguably the most comprehensive analysis of the interlinking elements of the destination system but, as pointed out previously, does not provide a theoretical exploration for growth.

Destinations need to be mindful of the resources that provide them with opportunities to build on areas of comparative advantage, how these may be developed into a competitive advantage and ensuring ongoing competitiveness. However, as Dwyer and Kim (2003: 373) caution 'it (competitiveness) is a complex concept because a whole range of factors account for it'. The importance of competitiveness is that it enables a destination to create value-added products enabling them to maintain or improve their market position relative to competitors (Hassan 2000: 239). As Prideaux *et al.* (2012: 15) note 'competitiveness in its most basic form is the ability of a destination to identify its key selling propositions, identify markets that are likely to purchase these propositions, create a market space where these products are able to be purchased, identify change and future threats, and have the ability to maintain this process over a long period of time in a manner that is both environmentally and economically sustainable'. Ritchie and Crouch (2000: 5) add that unless a destination is sustainable 'competitiveness is illusory'.

While there is a growing literature on the issue of competitiveness, comparative advantage and competitive advantage, a generally accepted definition of competitiveness has yet to emerge and there has been little headway made in building a more comprehensive model than that advanced by Ritchie and Crouch (2003). Issues raised in the literature in relation to destination competitiveness that require further investigation include the role of innovation, networking, governance and government regulatory activities. For example, it can be argued that innovation lies at the core of ongoing competitiveness. As new cohorts of tourists emerge, either because they have entered a new stage in their family life cycle, or are from new generating areas, new or refreshed products and experiences may be required. Equally, tastes change and once fashionable places and experiences are superseded as consumers seek novelty and inclusiveness in adopting the latest fashions and trends.

Innovation, although arguably a key driver of long-term economic sustainability, is only one of many related factors. Ritchie and Crouch (2003) identify five major groupings of factors and 36 sub-factors each of which has a role to play. In reality, in a system of the nature of a destination, it is difficult to single out one factor as being more important than others because each has a critical role irrespective of apparent importance. Crisis management, for example, becomes important only when a shock is experienced by a destination and must be responded to in a manner that facilitates recovery and resumption of growth. If not responded to adequately the destination may suffer over the long term. As Gurtner (2007) argued in the case of the 2002 Bali bombing, without speedy post-disaster marketing the destination could have suffered long-term decline. Image is almost always important particularly when shocks such as a disaster are experienced but image without adequate attention to infrastructure maintenance will fail to maintain let alone enhance competitiveness.

Sustainability

While academics have long recognised the importance of sustainability, particularly in natural areas, the neoliberal endorsement of growth as a key indicator of national success has often resulted in tourism development that is not sympathetic to its surrounding environment. This is despite an emerging consensus that unless areas visited by tourists are sustainable over the long term, visitor numbers will decline as the quality of the experience deteriorates. While there remains considerable debate about the precise meaning of sustainability and how it may be achieved (Navarro Jurado *et al.* 2012) it is clear that it is an important issue. On the issue of sustainability and its manifestation as the triple bottom line approach Hall *et al.* (2013: 114) observe that 'the continuing contribution of a growing tourism industry to resource consumption

and environmental change raises a clear question as to whether “balanced” sustainable tourism or “green economy/growth” approaches are actually achievable’. Given the predicted doubling of tourism flows by 2030 this statement has a great deal of relevance to destinations. It might, for example, lead to a re-evaluation of which destination types are sustainable and which are not. Interventions by governments concerned about climate change may also place limits on tourism activity, particularly mobilities. This is an area that warrants further research.

One factor that has been identified but never satisfactorily defined as having a considerable influence on sustainability is carrying capacity. As Navarro Jurado *et al.* (2012: 1338) observe, the difficulty with applying the concept of carrying capacity is that ‘prevailing economic ideology (has) denied the existence of limits’. The recent rapid growth in mainland Chinese visitors to Hong Kong illustrates the issue of social carrying capacity and the ability of host populations to absorb large numbers of visitors (Siu *et al.* 2013).

In recent years a number of authors have raised concerns about the impact that climate change (Pang *et al.* 2013) will have on destinations. Low-altitude ski destinations will face a decline in snow depth and length of season (IPCC 2007) and many natural areas will experience a decline in the complexity of their ecosystems as some species become extinct, others migrate out or migrate in. In a marine context Poloczanska *et al.* (2013) reported that the leading-edge marine species is migrating towards the poles at a rate of about 30–72 kms per decade, much faster than terrestrial species that are migrating towards the poles at a rate of about 6 kms per decade. Destinations that rely on adjoining natural areas as their main ‘pull’ factors are likely to suffer as the quality of the ecosystem declines. Fortunately a number of researchers are now beginning to look at this issue from a destination perspective (Scott *et al.* 2012; Wong *et al.* 2013).

Conclusion

This brief review of the current state of research into the destination phenomenon indicates that many issues need further investigation and that while there is a growing literature on many of the aspects of destinations our understanding of destinations remains limited. As this chapter has highlighted, there is an urgent need to pay more attention to the challenges of the future. This suggests that far greater emphasis is required on destination research that examines the impact of future growth, change in functions and climate change in terms of planning, policy, governance, infrastructure provision and aspects of consumer demand. As the global economy begins to move to a post-carbon model of growth where our understanding of sustainability will have to evolve to deal with new relationships between economic, social and environmental priorities, the manner in which destination tourism is planned, managed, operates and is demanded by the next post-carbon generation of consumers will require a radical redirection of thought and scholarship.

Moreover, the literature needs to shift its focus from the very narrow definition of destination used in the past to refocus on a broader interpretation that includes cities. As Ashworth (2003) noted, cities have received little attention. With the shift of tourism activity into cities and concerns about sustainability, the future agenda for destination research needs to reflect the new centrality of tourism activity.

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