# Enigma Variations? The TALC, Marketing Models and the Descendents of the Product Life Cycle.

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'We come out of the dark and go into the dark again, and in between lie the experiences of our life.'

Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain* (1924).

## INTRODUCTION: THE TALC AND THE GRAND MODEL BUILDING TRADITION

One of the features of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model which is often overlooked is the context of its appearance and its intellectual setting. Most of us who have used the model in classes, in our reading, or in our research will immediately recognise that it appeared in the *Canadian Geographer* in 1980 (Butler, 1980). Many readers may be asking themselves at this point what is so significant about apparently anodyne bibliographical details? First, this enduring set of ideas was in fact published in a geographical, not a tourism-related journal by a practising geographer; and second, it appeared at a time of profound intellectual development and paradigmatic transition in the discipline of (human) geography.

As in all the major social sciences, geography's practitioners have been constantly questioning the methods, techniques, approaches and philosophical underpinnings to their research. The 1970s were no different and they were notable for intense skirmishes on the philosophical battleground between advocates of long established paradigms and the proponents of new, radical epistemologies (Johnston, 1991). Among the former were the supporters of logical positivism, an enduring approach which had been inspired by the Quantitative Revolution that took place in the 1950s and 1960s. Support for the

Quantitative Revolution centred on its aims to locate geography as a social science, and hence to search for models of spatial structure (Gregory, 1994). The desire to make the discipline scientifically relevant -and recognised as such- manifested itself in what became a long standing commitment to logical positivism. According to Gregory (1994 : 350), logical positivists recognised only two types of statement as scientifically meaningful: empirical statements, the truth of which had to be established by verification; and analytical statements of logic and mathematics, which were judged to be true by definition. Model-building was a key pursuit in this era and it offered geographers a medium to express their ideas. Put simply, a model is an abstracted, idealized and structured simplification of a complex reality. In their ground-breaking collection, Chorley and Haggett (1967) noted that model-building depends on 'analogue theory'; that is, as selective representations and through the elimination of incidental detail, models allow the fundamental, relevant or interesting aspects of the real world to be revealed in a generalized form. Models were deployed by geographers in more complex exercises to reveal the full intricacies of idealized landscapes and to write a series of definitive, universal, scientific statements about their structure and composition. Often, as was the case with the TALC, models were lent from one discipline and adapted for use in another. In the case of the TALC, the Product Life Cycle model, which had become a mainstay of marketing science (cf. Dean, 1950), was tailored for use in the geographical study of tourism (Butler, 1980: 6).

Model-building and its logical positivist context, although dominant in the 1960s and 1970s, did not go unchallenged (Johnston, 1991). A number of critiques were advanced, not least the call for more structuralist modes of interpretation (cf. Cloke et al, 1991; Johnston, 1991). In brief, structuralists argued that it was important to move beyond visible, quasi-mathematical, universal 'truths' and to explore the human being as an active subject with conscious designs and to expose the logic which binds those designs together. Logical positivism in its willingness to let the 'facts' speak for themselves reduced the role of the individual human being to one of a passive receiver of stimuli which it dutifully processed and used to determine its activity patterns in a predictable manner. In contrast, structuralists were suspicious of the notion that human agency in its unbounded form was the basis for explanation of activity. Rather, structures of various forms constrained and shaped the outcomes of human actions over space. In the 1970s and 1980s, the structuralist agenda was advanced by further theoretical engagement with the ideas of realism, political economy and Marxism (Gregory, 1994 : 599)

Philosophical skirmishes have continued unabated in human geography to the present day. In the late 1980s and 1990s, geographers embraced the concepts associated with post-modernity and started to abandon the idea of grand, or meta-theories espoused by their predecessors (Cloke et al, 1991). As a consequence of the greater degree of theoretical plurality and sophistication over the past quarter of a century, as an activity model-building has been increasingly marginalized within human geography. This is in spite of its continued popularity in what has become known more recently as 'tourism studies' and other (inter-) disciplinary study areas in social and management sciences.

The purpose of this potted history of geography is to contend that the TALC was published at an important moment within geography; that is, towards the end of the classic model building era, at the threshold of a phase when models became largely unfashionable. As Shaw and Williams (1994, 2002) note, in the early 1980s tourism research, especially in geography, started to embrace new conceptual agendas (see also Hall and Page, 1999). Inspired by the work of de Kadt (1979), by and large geographers started to build a more critical approach, which first of all addressed the political economy of tourism (Williams and Shaw, 2002; see especially Britton, 1991).

Set against this background, this chapter has two main purposes. The first is to explore the intellectual genealogy of the TALC above all by tracing its origins and the nature of its adaptation of the Product Life Cycle (PLC) model. The PLC has been the focus of rigorous criticism and of adaptations in other subjects. Inter-disciplinary retail studies is one such area to have widely used and modified the PLC to explore institutional and locational change. Usage in this manner, as will be revealed below, has distinct similarities with the conversion of the PLC into the TALC. However, a quite different approach has been taken to adapt the

PLC to talk to retail debates. Predicated on an assessment of its limitations, tourism research has dogmatically focused on making the TALC operational for particular destinations and/or modifying it to meet the distinctive conditions in localities. Unlike the TALC experience and unencumbered by the theoretical inquisition apparent in geography, critiques of the PLC in retail studies precipitated alternative models to address the new concerns. Here, it is argued that the way in which the TALC has emerged, debate over the application and relevance of the TALC has progressed, and alternatives in retail studies have emerged -hitherto unrecognised within tourism studies- are all functions of their distinctive intellectual settings. In the case of the latter, the proposal of alternative models has, in turn, precipitated a further round of criticism which raises interesting research questions for tourism studies. Thus, the second aim of this chapter is to showcase some of these models, to explore their potential relevance to tourism research, and hence to advance reasons why they have not as yet made their way into tourism studies.

## 'MARKETING MYOPIA': THE PRODUCT LIFE-CYCLE IN RETROSPECT

Butler (1980: 6) explicitly identifies the PLC as the inspiration for the TALC. As Davidson *et al* (1976: 90) recognise, the emergence of the PLC in North American marketing thought can be traced back to the 1950s (Dean, 1950). For them, its beauty lies in its ability to inform product line discussions, particularly in the consumer packaged goods field. By recognising that change is inevitable within the market place, it offers marketing managers the opportunity to monitor the performance of their products and to make strategic business decisions based on the possible trajectories of sales.

The basics of the PLC are that it attempts to map sales (sometimes cumulative) against time over the duration of the product's marketing. Hypothetically at least, the PLC is argued to have a classical s-shape (figure 1). A biological metaphor is adopted to explain how the product progresses over time through four distinctive stages: introduction, growth, maturity and decline. Put prosaically, each product is considered to have a distinctive lifespan, each is born (i.e. introduced), each progresses through its adolescent growth to adult maturity, each eventually stagnates and declines in the twilight of its years, and - in theory at least- each product should eventually die out. As Kotler (1976: 230) puts it, ‘new products are launched by companies in the hope that they will enjoy a long sweet life of growing sales and profits. Some do, but along the way many more meet all kinds of problems that threaten to end the product’s career prematurely.’

In terms of the detailed mechanics of the cycle, Baker (1991: 6) notes more fully that,

> ‘at birth or first introduction to the market a new product initially makes slow progress as people have to be made aware of its existence and only the bold and innovative seek to try it as a substitute for the established product which the new one is seeking to improve or displace.’

The precise time taken for take-off will depend on the product itself, its qualities and their appeal (or not) to the first innovative consumers. In general early progress is tardy but,

> ‘[A]s people take up the new product they will talk about it and make it more visible to non-users and reduce the perceived risk seen in any innovation. As a consequence, a … bandwagon effect will be initiated as consumers seek to obtain supplies….and producers recognizing the trend, switch over to making the new product in place of the old. The result is exponential growth.’

While strong and continued growth is considered a virtue, inevitably all markets are finite entities and the rates of sales growth will begin to slow as the market becomes saturated. As he notes,

> 'Thereafter sales will settle down at a level which reflects new entrants to the market plus replacement/repeat purchases which constitutes the mature phase of the product life-cycle.'

Profits peak in the maturity phase according to Kotler (1976: 231). In narratives of the PLC, the presence of competition is usually invoked at this stage as a precursor to a hypothesised potential decline; death, that is withdrawal from the market, is not normally considered (Kotler, 1976; Baker, 1991).

Consumers are assumed to be inherently lacking in loyalty to products and brands. In general, they are perceived to be motivated by self-interest and the desire to obtain the best deal possible. As such, they are quite willing to switch allegiances should they perceive a better deal elsewhere (Baker, 1991). Without action to maintain the product's appeal, quality and/or competitiveness a gap in the market appears which other businesses may exploit. By taking advantage of complacency through the introduction of an appealing, alternative product, the competition erodes the extant business' sales, market share and ultimately profit in that product. Where action is taken to shore up the product, this frequently takes the form of increased marketing outlay in the mature phase. Costs of this type erode the profitability of the product, but may preserve or indeed help reinvigorate sales. Somewhat inevitably, products may not be maintained indefinitely through marketing and a decline period (eventually) sets in. Sales continue in a downward drift and profits erode rapidly towards the zero point (Kotler, 1976: 231).

By invoking the metaphor of life, it is easy to be drawn into an unduly optimistic reading of the PLC as a business tool: namely, it exists to facilitate and to sustain the life of the product. One of the most frequent misuses of the model arises when businesses try to deploy the PLC as a specific predictive device (Baker, 1991). In fact, the PLC is better interpreted as a warning against complacency among marketing executives with established products and brands, or a guard against what Levitt (1960) terms 'marketing myopia'. In a stinging polemic of business practice, Levitt (1960: 47) believes the PLC embodies a 'self-deceiving cycle'. At the heart of his criticism is that short-sighted managements threaten their businesses and that there is no such thing as a growth industry. He contends that,

> 'the history of every dead and dying "growth" industry shows a self-deceiving cycle of bountiful expansion and undetected decay. There are four conditions which usually guarantee this cycle:
>
> 1. The belief that growth is assured by an expanding and more affluent population.
> 2. The belief that there is no competitive substitute for the industry's major product.
> 3. Too much faith in mass production and in the advantages of rapidly declining unit costs as output rises.
> 4. Preoccupation with a product that lends itself to carefully controlled scientific experimentation, improvement and manufacturing cost reduction.'

As Baker (1991: 5) notes, the second belief has never been true. However, it does point to the fact that, as a conceptualisation, the TLC implies competition and competitors in the wider market place, but these are never represented in the model explicitly. They are practically invisibly, somewhere in the background of this introspective projection of the fortunes of a solitary product by a single business. By invoking a wealth of business history exemplars Levitt contends that it is plain to see that the fortunes of many have been dictated by poor decision-making. After the struggles of introduction and stimulating growth, producers sit back and relax when they become established leaders in mature and profitable markets (Baker, 1991). They believe they know what the consumer wants. Instead of making consumer-oriented decisions, they make product-oriented decisions. The latter may be more convenient for the business, but less relevant to consumers and their needs. Hence, such imperfect operations open the business to threats from competitors who are more in tune with changes in consumer demand and capable of exploiting the associated niches. This leads Levitt (1960: 45) to conclude that '[i]n every case the reason growth is threatened, slowed or stopped is *not* because the market is saturated. It is because there has been a failure of management.' (emphasis original). Charting the life of products leads him to believe that the future of the business is reliant on the quality of human organization and leadership in a business, the vision and will to succeed, and by the recognition that producing goods and services is ultimately about buying customers.

The PLC is a straightforward model but much of the critical discourse surrounding it centres on its deterministic and reductionist nature, and whether such a simple concept is capable of dealing with the complexities of the 'real world' of commerce (Cox, 1967; Polli and Cook, 1969; Dhalla and Yuspeh, 1976; Rink and Swan, 1979; Day, 1981; Bennett and Cooper, 1984; Mercer, 1993) . Given the definition of models proposed above, this may appear intrinsically tautological. Nevertheless, to recall Mann's comments, we know that all living things are born and they die, but it is the complex pathways of life in between that are most difficult to rationalise, understand and explain. The same can be said of the PLC. All products are introduced and all products will (eventually) be withdrawn. What is less certain, critics would argue, is what happens in between.

Standard appraisals question the shape of the curve, the timing of change based on the particularities of individual marketing experiences and market conditions, and the identification of the boundaries between different stages (Cox, 1967; Dhalla and Yuspeh, 1976; Kotler, 1976; Baker, 1991; table 1). More intricate rebuttals focus on the additional, implied features of the model that have to be grafted on to compensate for its inherent simplicity and thus inability to deal with different types and sizes of business (see Kotler, 1976: 237-238 ; table 2). Others note variations in strategy, marketing approach and operational context which are hidden by the simple line to denote sales versus time (Dhalla and Yuspeh, 1976; Porter, 1980). Most vociferous among the critics of the PLC, Dhalla and Yuspeh (1976) extolled their readers to 'forget the product life cycle'. Thomas (1991: 288) summarises their emphatic confutation of the PLC as exposing its inherent weaknesses in two key areas, its conceptual and operational arguments. Finally, historical evidence questions the validity of the PLC. In an early commentary on the PLC, Cox (1967) describes six different product life cycle patterns. The most notable variant is that of the second cycle (or first recycle stage) in which sales oscillate once more. This is ascribed to a promotional push in the decline stage which rejuvenates sales (Kotler, 1976). Based on marketing evidence, Day (1981) identifies the timeless consumer product, the multiple function product, technological substitution processes, and sequentially unfolding segments as foci that have fuelled doubts on the PLC. More recently, Mercer, (1993) reveals that a two decade test of the UK leading brands does not substantiate the more abstract PLC.

## THE PROGENY OF THE PLC: SPACE, PLACE AND THE 'LIFE METAPHOR'

The TALC adapts the ideas of the PLC by assuming that particular spaces and their local characteristics, features and traits may be commodified as distinct place products to be bought and consumed by visitors and tourists of all types. According to Butler (1980: 6), the PLC has much to offer tourism through studies of destination evolution because precisely the same procedure is followed by place products as the PLC predicts so that,

> '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. .... 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.'

For Agarwal (1997: 67), ' the [TALC] model provides a conceptual framework for understanding change within destinations'. As is the case with the PLC, the TALC is a poor forecasting tool, but very effective for planning and control purposes (Kotler, 1976). Similarly, at the time of its appearance it had a powerful message pertaining to self-deception, complacency and the inappropriateness of product-oriented delivery given the delicate position in which many destinations found themselves as the restructuring of society and economy was underway in the early 1980s

Not surprisingly due to the close correlation between the PLC and TALC, many of the same criticisms have been made of the TALC as of the PLC. Other contributions in these two volumes will describe in detail the difficulties associated with the TALC. However, suffice to say that there has been a strong body of work which has examined whether the TALC can in fact be made operational. Questions of its determinism, whether an area has to pass through all six phases, the shape of the curve, the differentiation between stages, the *exact* identification of the position at which a destination is located, the availability and application of empirical data, and the relevance of the number of visitors, not sales on the y-axis all have a familiar feel when compared with discourse on the PLC (Haywood, 1986; Choy, 1992; Cooper, 1990, 1992; Shaw and Williams, 2002). Similar criticisms have been made of the conceptual aspects of the TALC. For instance, in view of the articulated nature of the tourism 'product' and its assembled components in the spatial container that is the destination (Holloway, 1994; Hall and Page, 1999), is it appropriate to consider to try to apply a single curve? Fundamentally is the destination a single, coherent *product* that depends on the synergies among its constituent elements or is it a series of *products* in a loosely linked local configuration? Debbage (1990) notes the TALC focuses on the internal dynamics of specific resorts at the expense of external features such as the structure of the tourist industry, the market and competition from other resorts (Porter, 1980). Agarwal (1994, 1997, 2002) argues that the post-stagnation phase of the curve is in need of reformulation. Instead of a discrete trajectory in post-stagnation, regeneration, rejuvenation and restructuring are on-going processes so that must be continually undertaken, and perhaps commence in a distinct 're-orientation phase' (Priestley and Mundet, 1998: 87; Agarwal, 1994). Reinvention of a single place product in this way contrasts with one of Baum's (1998) hypothesised trajectories beyond stagnation. He suggests that reinvention results in a series of s-shaped curves as a destination reinvents itself with a series of new products, each of which has its own life cycle.

What becomes clear from commentaries addressing the TALC is that in spite of the difficulties and shortcomings associated with this descendent of the PLC, it has been, and continues to be, one of the most enduring and frequently deployed concepts within tourism studies. As Agarwal (1997: 65) notes, this is 'despite the large volume of research reviewing the resort cycle, its validity, applicability and universality have yet to be successfully proven.' Furthermore, Prideaux (2000: 227) notes that there has only been some limited debate over whether any single model can explain tourism development (Bianchi, 1994; Choy, 1992; Prosser, 1995). To this end new forays into destination development modelling have been recently attempted to explain the unfolding temporal fortunes of tourism spaces (Prideaux, 2000; Weaver, 2000). However, over the last two decades the TALC has been breathtakingly dominant in our understanding of unfolding tourism place products of different types.

Why this should have been the case is an immensely difficult question. One answer is that in a self-fulfilling logic, the basic simplicity of the model as a representation has engineered its appeal to a great many readers and, as Weaver (2000: 217) implies, its contentiousness borne of its simplicity has inspired a great many commentators to devote their academic labours to its authentication, albeit without categoric acceptance or rejection. Notwithstanding the value of corroboration, it is curious that criticism has been highly introspective and sharply focused on the model itself rather than its relative merits versus possible alternatives. It is clear that tourism academics have been aware of the misgivings of the PLC in the marketing literature (cf. Prideaux, 2000 and Hart *et al*, 1984). As such, they must have been aware that marketing scientists have attempted to advance product theory and concept further. None the less, there have been precious few attempts to build on recent progress in marketing to further the tourism agenda.

Such tactics place tourism studies at odds with the approach taken in retail studies. There the PLC has been used a means to explore the lifecycle of retail organizations (or 'retail institution' to use North American terminology) such as supermarkets, discount stores, and department stores. Faithful to the PLC, Davidson *et al* (1976: 90-91) identify a 'retail life cycle' (RLC) for each institution comprising the four very similar stages of 'early growth', 'accelerated development', 'maturity' and 'decline'. In this conceptualisation the retail institution becomes the proxy for the product and, like the products they represent, the institutions pass through an identifiable life cycle. Herein lies the similarity with the commodification of place in tourism. A retail organisation merchandises a number of products under roof; that is, similar in concept at least to the resort, it bundles a number of items together in one contained, bounded space and it is this assembly that functions to attract (or not) customers. The product is actually the space and place, the territory occupied by the retail organisation as well as the meaning and importance attached to it by the consumer. Product as institution, just as destination as product, evolves and the internal characteristics of the product are refined to their final mature format (cf. Baum, 1998: 170). Just as the economic fortunes and physical manifestation of the destination reflect its popularity among visitors and tourists, the commercial destiny and its nature and form reflect its acceptance and usage by consumers. Further extensions of the retail life cycle and other similar models teased out their geographical connotations (Brown, 1987). As a retail organisation develops towards maturity, it changes its locational preferences to occupy prime sites to reflect its commercial omnipotence. As decline sets in and the retail organisation is challenged by a successor spatial shift takes place. The prime site of the current retail organisation may not correspond with the locational preferences of the new thrusting competition leading to a diversion of trade and contributing to a loss of profitability. As Knowles and Curtis (1999) demonstrate, precisely such a scenario of spatial shifting has been played out in the geography of mass tourism consumption and production in post-War Europe.

## WHEEL OR CYCLE? SAME DIFFERENCE?

The retail life-cycle is frequently invoked as an alternative to the 'wheel of retailing'. Originally devised by Malcolm McNair (1958), the 'wheel of retailing' postulates that a retail institution starts life as a cut-price, low-cost, narrow margin operation which subsequently 'trades up'. Improvements in display, more prestigious premises, increased advertising and the provision of credit, delivery and many other customer services all serve to drive up expenses, margins and prices. Eventually they mature as high-cost, conservative and 'top heavy' institutions with a sales policy based on quality goods and services rather than price appeal. This effectively creates a niche for the next low-cost innovator. And so the wheel turns, albeit that the 'predecessor' remains in the market, its fortunes waning as those of its 'successor' continually improve (Brown, 1988: 16).

At face value there are certain basic similarities between the RLC and the wheel. Both are essentially deterministic models and rely on the self-deception of complacency. Both suggest that a particular organisational format will eventually run its course after passing through a distinct sequence of changes. They imply that early penetration into the market is slow, that how the concept is brought to the market will influence uptake and growth among the consumer base, and that profitability is strained towards the end of the cycle. Additional services are provided which assume an understanding (false as it transpires) of the market's needs which open niches for the next wave of innovators (N.B. the wheel assumes consumers are precise sensitive primarily). Each identifies embeddedness and implies that an inability to respond to change effectively precipitates decline in both relative and ultimately absolute measures. Together they imply a spatial shift in the location of the principal consumption paradigm. However, there are also key differences. Price and its variation over time are central ideas of the wheel but feature less prominently in the RLC and PLC models. Similarly, at each stage of the wheel there is a different relationship between price and non-price competitive measures. Last, and by no means least, the revolution of the wheel is highly dependent on the outcomes of entrepreneurial decisions. Without human agency retail institutions would not emerge, individual businesses would not grow, and decisions about the future would not have to be faced. Unlike the PLC, the RLC and the TALC, the entrepreneur is placed at the heart of the processes of innovation and change.

The wheel is not without critics. Davidson *et al* (1976) argue that it is as difficult to make the wheel operational as the life cycle. Like Hollander (1960, 1980), they also note that historical evidence points to several retail institutions which start their life on a high-cost basis. Within Europe some innovatory forms in their earliest stages adopted non-price competitive measures that are supposed to be characteristic of the maturation process (Coles, 1999a, 1999b). Hollander (1960) thus questioned the universality of the concept as well as the causes for trading up. Brown (1988: 19) identifies two strands: a secular view which sees trading up as a natural and enlightened response to growing consumer affluence and increased demand for a wide range of goods and services; and a competition-oriented view that interprets the process as a defensive mechanism whereby non-price measures are used as a means of creating differential advantage to ward off competition from other businesses in the sector. For all these criticisms, like the PLC and RLC before it, Brown (1998: 19 and 30-31) contends that 'most commentators concur that McNair's hypothesis is valid' and 'one of the five most influential concepts in marketing thought.'

There are fragments of evidence of the wheel operating in existing work on resort evolution, although it is not recognised as such. Baum (1998) suggests that the reinvention of the resort marketing mix to reach new consumer groups may require the total abandonment of the traditional marketing paradigm in favour of an alternative. Some commentators would suggest that reinvention is best represented as an extension or even a second cycle on an extant line (Agarwal, 1997). This, though, implies the current product (i.e. place) is being reinvented which may be disputed. In fact, inspired by criticism of the PLC not advocacy of the wheel, Baum (1998) notes a different set of place characteristics are being bundled together to produce an entirely new, discrete commodity and hence a subsequent sigmoidal curve should be added to the TALC model to denote the subsequent product. An alternative reading here would be that the wheel is revolving based on intra-destination differentiation. An old, tired, unappealing and uncompetitive concept is being superseded (not annihilated) by a new, fresh product. This process is being driven by innovators who recognise the weaknesses in the preceding concepts as an opportunity to enter the market with new, more appealing and entirely different products. Furthermore, spatial shift may be in evidence as the settings for the components of the new product may not be the same as for the traditional paradigm.

## FROM 'WHEELS' TO DIALECTICS AND HYBRIDS: IN SEARCH OF OTHER LONG LOST RELATIVES

Alongside the less conspicuous retail accordion (cf. Hart, 1999), which postulates retail institutions oscillate between general-specific-general merchandising formats, the wheel and RLC form a group of ideas that contend that change takes place in an oscillatory pattern and is characterised by the recurrence of earlier patterns (see also Benson and Shaw, 1999). Intense debate within marketing science and retail studies has focused on two other distinctive categories of theories: the environmental and the conflictual (Markin and Duncan, 1981; Brown, 1987, 1988).

The former refer to the influence on organisational features of the operating milieu, while the latter propose that new retail institutions are in fact the outcome of inter-institutional competition. Both these categories and the respective ideas have their champions and detractors. Environmental theories are valued for their ability to incorporate changes in the economic, demographic, social, cultural and technological conditions are reflected in the retail system and manifested in the evolution of the retail institution (Brown, 1987: 182). In contrast, conflict theories recognise that very few institutional innovations in retailing have been met without protest and dissention. Faced by such a challenge retail institutions must respond or risk failure. Gist (1968) calls for a dialectical theory of retail evolution where an existing 'thesis' is challenged by an 'antithesis' so that a 'synthesis' emerges from the melding of the two. The synthesis becomes the thesis for the new round of negotiation and so the dialectic continues to revolve (Brown, 1987: 189-190). From this process of establishment and challenge, entirely new, hybrid forms of retail institution emerge.

Similarities exist in the assumptions of the theoretical strands. Indeed, attempts have been made to integrate the strands to produce new hybrid forms of theory. For instance, Brown (1988) explores the permutations and possibilities of integrate the various categories because on their own none of the categories or the individual ideas are capable on their own of offering a complete explanation of retail institution change (cf. Prideaux, 2000 above). This sentiment is echoed by Evans *et al* (1993) who argue that an open systems approach is a unifying perspective through which to view theories of retail change (cf. Roth and Klein, 1993).

## DISCUSSION: WHY HASN'T PANDORA'S BOX BEEN OPENED BEFORE?

Detailed testing of such retail marketing ideas in a tourism context is yet to take place (and this is not the context in which to start the process). Evidence can be located to underscore their relevance in advancing our understanding of destination trajectories over time. However, their value extends beyond assembling temporal and spatial chronicles of the destination. From an epistemological perspective, they suggest that retail studies has adopted a more progressive and thorough approach to modelling place and space as product. In fact, Brown (1988) argues that there has been a 'wheel of the wheel of retailing' as explanation of institution change started off with simple propositions (the wheel and RLC), became more intricate and detailed, and in turn this gave way once again to more simple representations as they became academic vogue.

Given the not insignificant level of debate over the modelling of retail evolution, it is curious that these ideas have not as yet been systematically explored in tourism research. Three main reasons immediately propose themselves. First, as discussed above, the highly contestable nature of the model has lent itself heavily towards sustained discussion and analysis. Second is the changing nature of tourism studies. To parallel an expansion in interest in the 1990s, the research agenda has progressed to explore the panoply of issues associated with the late-twentieth century restructuring of society, culture and economy, the new, alternative modes of tourism consumption this have precipitated, and the unfolding outcomes and impacts of change. In relative terms, resort management and destination evolution are not as conspicuous as they once were. The stagnation of British resorts in particular during the 1980s as a result of shifting social, cultural and economic conditions (environmental theory?) forced the TALC towards the forefront of the agenda (Williams and Shaw, 1998). Due to its implications for resort management, the TALC retained its relevance at a time when the model-based approach was being abandoned as a mode of enquiry for policy-oriented research especially in (human) geography. In the 1990s the sustainable tourism paradigm and its attendant intellectual baggage has dominated academic discourse in no small measure. While the TALC may have application in understanding some aspects of the sustainable tourism management (WTO, 1998; Swarbrooke, 1999), for the investigation of many additional modes of consumption it has only marginal relevance. Equally, other models, were they to have been abridged from marketing science would have had only limited relevance to the programme of the 1990s.

And finally, such alternatives have not been of a sufficiently high profile in marketing science and retail studies to force tourism research workers to take note of them. As this chapter has indicated, modelling organisational change became a major topic in retailing during the late 1980s and early 1980s. This was, however, a time when the TALC was courting strenuous debate within tourism over its applicability and intricacies, and hence an ideal moment when they could have been accessed by tourism discourse. However, this was also a time when the first signs of an epistemological change within retail studies manifested itself. Models of commercial space and place of this type are still frequently applied and taught in retail management programme. Nevertheless, new modes of understanding were evolving, driven not least by further paradigm shift within retail geography. In keeping with the development of geography more widely, Wrigley and Lowe (1996) argued that a model-based approach was incongruous with the imperatives of the late twentieth-century world. Simple supply-side explanations were inadequate. Rather, they proposed, and continue to advocate (Wrigley and Lowe, 2002), the abridgement of ideas from the so-called 'new economic' and 'new cultural' geographies of the late 1980s and 1990s into retail research. In short, these pursue more aggressively such themes as corporate culture and interests in the manufacture of major sites of consumption;

the spatial switching of retail locations; the persistence of under-performing stores; the sub-optimality of retail spaces and the reasons, often cultural, behind them; and the political economy of supply chains with their associated policy contexts and implications (Wrigley, 1992, 1998; Langston *et al*, 1997, 1998; Wrigley and Lowe, 1996; 2002).

Perversely, the new agenda in retail studies does warn of the limitations of models and hence their potential adaptation for tourism research. However, the possible adaptation of these newer ideas themselves should not go unnoticed. Why do small- and medium-sized enterprises stay in business when so many of them are so obviously sub-optimal in performance? Lifestyle entrepreneurship may be one explanation (Ateljevic and Doorne, 2000); emotional and historic family ties may be another (Baum, 1998: 170). However, could it be because they have no exit strategy and/or that they are locked into the resort because of their sunk costs (Wrigley, 1992, 1998)? Do resorts in their current constellation exist not for positive reasons but as a consequence of highly embedded private capital that can't be released; that is, practically through a social tourism of production in which their marginal operation becomes a *de facto* ersatz for the welfare state? Exit has been discussed by Baum (1998). However, his interpretation views exit as part of a destinations exit portfolio, an element of a strategy recommended and facilitated in a top-down fashion by governors on local economy and society. Although this view has merit, the integration of these new critical approaches into tourism analysis would help develop a much fuller understanding of the embeddedness and endurance of sites of tourism 'consumption'. Top-down structural approaches may provide the first impetus towards wholesale change but ultimately it is individual businesses that will have to disengage with tourism to enable systemic exit to become a more realistic outcome.

## CONCLUSION: OPENING PANDORA'S BOX?

For more than two decades since its first appearance the Tourism Area Life Cycle model has been a highly conspicuous feature of tourism enquiry. It has been the subject of many an academic paper and a proliferation of theses, dissertations and course papers at doctoral, master's and undergraduate levels. As with all good models, it is a neat simplification of a complex reality. Published towards the end of the golden age of model building in human geography, it adroitly takes concepts from marketing science on the development and longevity of products and adapts them to the production, evolution, transformation of tourism space. As this chapter has demonstrated, if Butler's approach were to be repeated now, there are several models of product and institutional evolution and development from marketing science and retail studies that have as much, if not in some cases more, to offer the study of the unfolding temporal and local features of the tourism place commodity. For instance, as capable as the TALC may be, it lacks consideration of price in the changing life stages of the resort; it relegates the importance of individual human agency and entrepreneurship in resort change; it struggles to integrate external (environmental) influences on destination outcomes; and it flounders when trying to explain the presence of alternative types of tourist experience in the traditional mass tourist destination where a dialectic reading may offer greater insight. Moreover, in an almost Popperian sense, as models of institutional change have been rejected in new approaches to retail studies in the 1990s, there exists the possibility of capitalising on fresh, new perspectives on space, place and consumption to explore the trajectories of tourism destination development.

That Butler's approach hasn't been repeated may be a function of the model itself, the debate it has provoked, and wider disciplinary transformations. The latter raises two broader sets of concerns about tourism research. The first is that many of the grand and celebrated ideas in tourism (as well as recent, innovative ones) are frequently divorced from their temporal and disciplinary origins and contexts. In subjects such as geography and sociology, there have been repeated attempts to trace the intellectual antecedents of contemporary research. Current insight and modes of enquiry in all their complexity are understood to one degree or another to be a consequence of the rise, decline and/or persistence of particular philosophies, theories, concepts, practices, methods and approaches. Questions of how, why and where particular ideas originate offer insights not only into why they emerged, but also why other developments took place perhaps instead or in tandem. A forensic course is pivotal here. The TALC appeared at a transitional moment in (human) geography, when model-building was becoming unfashionable, and when other issues and approaches were being advocated in its place. These same circumstances did not affect other disciplines. Alternatives were proposed to the PLC, but given the development of tourism studies more generally and geography more especially, these have not as yet made their way into tourism discourse. Thus, in order to understand the construction and setting of tourism knowledge, it is crucial to develop a deeper understanding of the outside 'genealogical' influences from other disciplines. Quite frequently the origins of tourism knowledge are taken for granted.

As a second concern, there is a worrying lack of integration and cross-fertilisation of ideas between tourism studies and retail studies. This is simply not just a parochial plea to consider alternative models and formulations to the TALC model. Given the diverse bloodlines cutting through its intellectual genealogy, it is somewhat unexpected that tourism has not drawn more heavily from retail studies. Ideas from new economic geography agenda have started to permeate their way into tourism more widely (cf. Ioannides and Debbage, 1998) and destination research in particular (Agarwal, 2002). In contrast, their adaptations in retail geography have been remarkable for their absence. This shortcoming is compounded by the observation that the relationship between tourism, shopping and leisure is read –rightly or wrongly- as practically axiomatic (Coles, 2003). In spite of the multiple dimensions associated with tourism shopping events, there has been an unwillingness to explore them in favour of other more fashionable thematic 'priorities'. As demonstrated by the limited corpus on the topic, the relationship between tourism, shopping and leisure is far from straightforward (cf. Timothy and Butler, 1995), and it lacks a full treatment of retailing (Coles, 2003). Thus, there seems little doubt that in the future ideas from retail geography may help progress our understanding of tourism spaces and places.

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Figure 1: The Product Life-cycle

Source: abridged from Baker (1991)

Table 1: Dhalla and Yuspeh's (1976) Criticisms of the PLC

**Conceptual Arguments**

- Products are not living things, hence the biological metaphor is entirely misleading
- The PLC is the dependent variable, a function of the way the product is managed over time. It is not an independent variable as implied by the model.
- The PLC cannot be valid for product class, product form and brands.
- Fitting the PLC to empirical sales data is a sterile exercise in taxonomy

**Operational Arguments**

- The four phases or states in the life cycle are not clearly definable.
- It is impractical and impossible to identify precisely a product is on the curve at any given moment in time.
- Thus, the concept is redundant as a planning tool
- Evidence exists of businesses who have used the PLC for planning have made false and erroneous decisions based on a false confidence in the model and an incorrect interpretation of data. This has caused them to miss particular opportunities, abandon existing products and brands too early, and to pioneer new products when considerable potential still existed with their extant portfolio.

Source: abridged from Thomas' summary (1991: 288)

Table 2: Kotler's (1976) early elaborations of the PLC stages

**Introduction Stage**

In launching a new product can adopt one of four alternative strategies,

- *High-profile strategy* (high price, high promotional level)
- *Selective penetration strategy* (high price, low promotion, expenses low)
- *Pre-emptive penetration strategy* (low price, heavy promotion, fast market presence)
- *Low-profile strategy* (low price, low promotion, price as attraction)

**Growth Stage**

**Maturity Stage**

By virtue of the shape of the curve, maturity is an uneven phase with three distinct sub-phases:

- *Growth maturity*, where growing still but slowly as laggards enter market, but most demand from present customers
- *Stable maturity* (saturation) with sales at a constant level and consisting of almost entirely replacement demand
- *Decaying Maturity*, when absolute sales starts to decline as customers gravitate towards other products and substitutes.

To address the slow down in the rate of sales growth in a state of relative maturity, product managers may wish to engineer,

- *Market Modification*, where opportunities to find new buyers are explored through new segments, increased usage and/or repositioning
- *Product Modification*, whereby attempt to release from stagnant sales by initiating changes to the product through quality improvement, feature improvement and/or style improvement
- *Marketing-mix Modification*, where attempts are made to stimulate sales by altering one or more components of the marketing mix.

**Decline Stage**

A business faces a number of task and decisions to ensure effective handling of ageing products:

- *Identifying the weak products*
- *Determining the marketing strategies*
    - *Continuation strategy* – continues previous activities as normal until product declines to the point it is dropped.
    - *Concentration strategy* – resources focused on strongest markets and channels only to secure optimal sales.
    - *Milking strategy* – reduce marketing expenses to increase current profits, but accelerates rate of sales decline and demise of product.
- *Drop decision*

Source: adapted from Kotler (1976: 234-244)