

# NEED FOR INNOVATION IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT OF THE LANDSCAPE DURING THE MATURE STAGE OF THE DESTINATION: PIE DE LA CUESTA, ACAPULCO, MEXICO

KARLA ROSALBA ANZALDÚA-SOULÉ<sup>1</sup>, MIRELLA SALDAÑA ALMAZAN<sup>2</sup>,  
MA. ELVIA CHAVARRÍA SOLÍS<sup>1</sup> & CESAR DANIEL AGUILAR BECERRA<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Facultad de Turismo, Universidad Autonoma de Guerrero, México

<sup>2</sup>Centro de Ciencias de Desarrollo Regional, México

## ABSTRACT

The district of Acapulco de Juarez in the state of Guerrero, Mexico has experienced a growth in tourism infrastructure that is reflected in its different stages of modernization (traditional or nautical, golden, and diamond). Urban evolution has brought impacts in the form of landscape alterations, social tension, and pollution amongst others. The Sectorial Plan for Tourism Development of the Metropolitan Area of Acapulco recently incorporated a fourth zone: Pie de la Cuesta that protects an environment of tranquility only some 10 km from the traditional area. Recent studies of the landscape and tourism enabled the revision of development, from a sustainable perspective, of elements from the landscape that hold an attraction motivating tourist displacement. The report mentions both considerations, valued in the diagnostic results based on Butler's Life Cycle theory, where the destination is reported as being at a mature stage with evidence of decline. The objective of the investigation derived from the article is the evaluation of landscape resources at Pie de la Cuesta with the aim of maximizing tourism potential to strengthen the services offered through new activities, without reducing resource quality in the long term.

*Keywords: landscape, tourism development, Life Cycle, Pie de la Cuesta.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The district of Acapulco de Juarez represents the 2.95% of the area with the highest growth of touristic activity in the state of Guerrero [1]. Gómez and Aldama [2] remind us that in the 1950s it was a small, quiet village full of traditions, with a strong cultural identity and an impressive natural environment, while for the 1970s, Acapulco was known nationally and internally as a tourist destination.

This expansion increased until the 1980s, which brought with it continued urban growth which was the object of tidying up at various times, giving as a result an uneven spread of services in distinct areas, favoring those needs of mass tourism. Among the effects of said transformation are alterations to the countryside/landscape, social tension, and pollution, a consequence of unplanned growth [3].

As Gordon [4] mentions, this type of tourism has a principal characteristic – unequal growth, as reflected in the infrastructure concentrated around the urban center: Acapulco. The city boasts 42% of hotels, 63% of hotel rooms, and the largest earnings through tourism in the whole state of Guerrero [5]. Tourist activity is the most important to the districts economy and is concentrated primarily in and around Acapulco Bay, the beaches of Island de la Roqueta, la Quebrada, Puerto Marquez, Pie de la Cuesta and the historic fort of San Diego.

A natural consequence of the bifurcation of the peninsular and the Coyuca Lagoon, Pie de la Cuesta maintains a peaceful atmosphere only 10 km northwest from the traditional zone and



nautical area of Acapulco's port. Its main access is from the Federal Acapulco-Zihuatanejo and Mexico-Acapulco highways [6].

Pie de la Cuesta lacks, among others, the infrastructure for mass tourism. Affluence figures and hotel occupancy rates are not registered in divided terms as is the case in the rest of the tourist areas in the district [7]. Only recently was it incorporated as the fourth zone by the Sectorial Plan and Tourism Development to the metropolitan area of Acapulco.

While the Tourism Secretary's page recommends Pie de la Cuesta as a place to appreciate a sunset it lacks better information about the natural resources that include – the 6 km extension of beach territory, its strong waves favored by expert surfers and admirers of the imposing Pacific Ocean and the recreational activities on offer around Coyuca Lagoon that belong in part to the districts of Acapulco and the adjacent Coyuca de Benitez.

These resources highlight natural, cultural, and historic characteristics that are partially taken advantage of by tourism service providers forming an incipient compliment offered to the visitors of Acapulco. In addition, the beach, surf, sunsets, and lagoon offer a cultured landscape that distinguishes Pie de la Cuesta from the rest of the municipality.

The cultural landscape establishes a study subject that is represented as a functioning site of interaction between people and their environment, both maximizing the activity steadfastly associated with society: tourism. The local inhabitants are involved in this evolution of tourist activity, giving it meaning and uses as well as change, also brought about by the visitors.

## 2 SOCIAL AND TOURIST ANALYSIS OF PIE DE LA CUESTA

The municipal government of Acapulco de Juarez plans tourist activity by means of the area: Traditional, Golden, Diamond, and the fourth zone Pie de la Cuesta [8]. The latter is a recent inclusion, and as a result, actions are unclear or in a stage of proposal. An example of this is the failure to pursue the concerns voiced by the Propietarios de Negocios y Vecindados de la Franja Turistica, a workshop offered by the Promotion and Impulsion of Competition Commission [9] which seeks to obtain information on service providers with the aim of analyzing the situation and visualizing it for the future, for example proposing alternatives for a better development of tourist activity. Said workshop is part of the Programa Nacional para el Desarrollo y Fortalecimiento Empresarial (National Business Development and Fortification Programme).

The proposals and unrest of association members, in turn, incorporated new activities that generated special interest among visitors by enjoying places built during the long history of the community: requiring the unification as mentioned by Álvarez [10] constructing an agreement between the interests of the while trying to conserve authenticity, as a system of resources and tourist attractions that transcend the real worth as one attraction more. Also, in the case of Pie de la Cuesta, a guaranteed preservation of the countryside and its identity is required as part of essential tourism development. Such a guarantee provides elements to differentiate the service and the supposed projects of the communities that possess a strong sense of identity and their own cultural worth, legacy, and lifestyle. They are then better placed to fulfill the development of tourism formed by their own sense of worth in the community and integrating attractions for potential tourists [11].

The previous is relevant with regard to social, economic, and environmental problems surrounding Acapulco and the results diagnosed based in Butler's Life Cycle theory where the destination is reported in an advanced stage with signs of decline [12]. In this way, valuing the country-side as a heritage for all, according to the Corporacion Patrimonio y Paisaje de Chile (The Countryside and Heritage Corporation of Chile) [13], facilitating the sustainability of social initiatives to improve the quality of life, increasing the possibilities for better behavior and stimulating a sense of belonging, dignity, and pride to live there.



The lack of clarity within community efforts increases the shortfall of data registry of visitor satisfaction and hotel occupancy in the tourist regions. Such a shortage of information could lead to different impacts in at least two different ways.

1. The promotion of Acapulco as a destination, where Pie de la Cuesta is aforementioned as a place to enjoy sunsets, where the official page of Acapulco's Municipality neglects to mention the existence of 35 hotels and 45 restaurants that make up the place: ignoring distinctive parts that could attract new demand. An example can be seen in Fig. 1 – the Coyuca de Benitez Lagoon, a swamp/mangrove ecosystem that measures 10 km in length east to west and more than 5 km wide, flowing west in a channel to the mouth of the river with the same name. Coyuca Lagoon is a central element to the population; well known by professional water-sports enthusiasts for skiing, kayaking, and rowing amongst others [6]. It's also home to endemic species incorporated into legends and cuisine by locals that shelter and the islands of Montosa and Presido. Here boat tours are given while guides tell stories of ancient families that used to inhabit the islands. (One of which was once used as a provincial prison.)
2. In Table 1, which relates to the correlation of available rooms and their occupation from 2015 to 2018 [14], the services maintained growth despite occupancy not recovering. From the other three destinations that surpass Acapulco in the offer of available rooms, only Mexico City shows a marginal positive variation, while Cancun and the Mayan Riviera present distinctive stages and implemented strategies to achieve development of their areas.

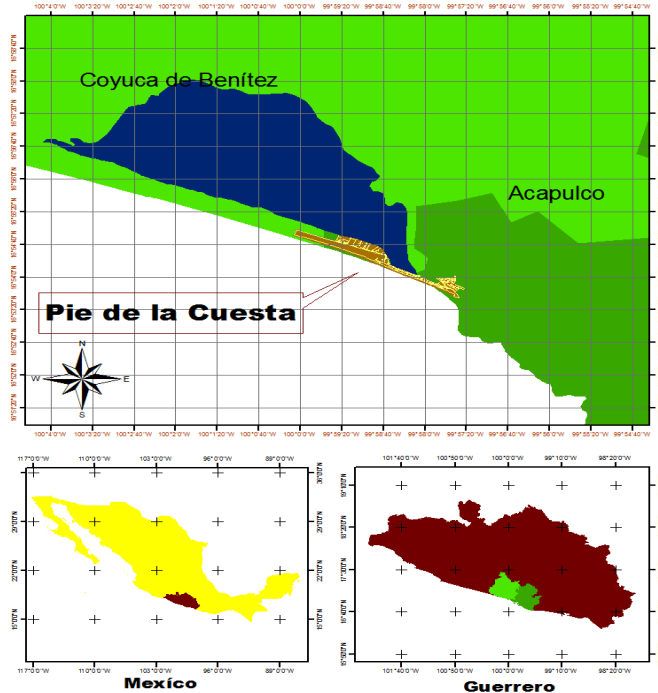


Figure 1: Study area.

Table 1: Hotel activity in selected tourist centers. (Source: data from the hotel monitoring system DataTur from the Federal Government's Tourism Secretary.)

Hotel activity in selected tourist centers												
Tourist destination	Average available rooms						Occupied rooms					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	Variation		2015	2016	2017	2018	Variation	
					15–16	17–18					15–16	17–18
Riviera Maya	36,524	37,336	41,554	43,598	2.2%	4.9%	29,699	29,950	34,234	34,740	0.8%	1.5%
Cancún	31,815	31,662	33,486	34,922	-0.5%	4.3%	24,520	24,315	25,707	26,065	-0.8%	1.4%
Acapulco	18,591	18,573	18,827	18,972	-0.1%	0.8%	7,444	7,473	8,188	8,847	0.4%	8.1%
Ciudad de México	49,819	51,777	51,420	51,344	3.9%	-0.1%	33,438	34,548	33,756	33,453	3.3%	-0.9%

On the other hand, there's no record of the number of visitors who use the condominium and second residences offer, which in the case of Acapulco is also vital information, because it is very handy for national tourism's accommodation. Both the increased offer of available rooms and second residence favor the motel of micro tourist sites, places where tourists find all the services, without contact with the local population that is segregated.

With regard to these previous considerations, the principal question that the investigation seeks to answer is if the natural, cultural and historic characteristics that possess the resources making up the landscape of Pie de la Cuesta could be used to strengthen the existing services with new activities, without reducing the resource quality in the long term?

For this reason, we try to explore Pie de la Cuesta's landscape potential as part of its real worth, as described by Bourdieu [15, p. 54].

"Certain features which appear inherent to the person as well the agent, such as authority, prestige, reputation, credibility, fame, notoriety, honor, good taste, etc. Understood like this, symbolic wealth is no more than economic or cultural capital in how much is known and recognized".

In this manner, the symbolic wealth contributes to the development of the area more than proportioning an image to brand the region, towns, areas and countries, surpassing Álvarez's comment in relation to tourism's contribution to the image of these distinct areas twofold; the general image and the specific image from tourism development [10].

### 3 THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR DECLINE OR REJUVENATION

Theoretical planning, open to continuation is useful in order to outline topics such as the development of the landscape as symbolic wealth; sustainability (environmental, economic, and social) and in addition contributing both empiric and theoretical elements that permit investigation and intervention within a mature destination.

In the investigative part of the hypothesis, one of the instruments used to bring about sustainable development is the analysis or model – The Cycle of Life, proposed by Butler regarding tourism. This theory seeks to analyze the behavior of demand, the carrying capacity of the tourism centers and tries to forecast the positive relationship between the increase in visitor numbers and tourism development. Butler [16] predicts an evolution in the development of a destination where it is possible to follow up to six stages or phases: discovery or exploration, beginning or implication, development, consolidation, stagnation, and post stagnation.



The original Life Cycle model was inspired by ecological models, also mentioning the word “evolution” with respect to the problems of tourism [17] for which the use of said term has been criticized for the comparison of centers to living entities and their capacity for change. However, the term is used to refer to the process of change, apparently natural or out of control, as foreseen in the original model, thus showing a way to survive in a competitive environment [18]. Butler [16] maintains as a principle argument in his theory that if a tourist center is not constantly changing, it is open to financial obliteration (economic death) and in his article “Implications for Management of Resources”, reveals that those tourist centers not taking measures to adequately manage their resources to maintain competitive in the market, don’t progress and will only have the deliberate actions of people, which is to say that those who don’t achieve adequate intervention can provoke a stage of decline in the destination.

Criticism of the first theory created by Hovinen [19], attributed to Wall [19] focused on the conception of the carrying capacity of the tourist areas and the application of the development cycle. Other investigators have championed the for the rejection of the Life Cycle for Tourist Areas (CVAT) such as Leiper [19] and Aguiló et al. [20] arguing that such a model is purely theoretical.

Confronting these opinions, Getz [21] supports the theory and explains that the relevance resides in tourism planning, while Prosser [19] arrived at the conclusion that the criticism formed against the model is due to its complicated concept, despite it still being used in its original form and offering perspectives in development. Papatheodorou’s case [22] holds that the development and competition within a tourist destination changes greatly between individual companies at distinct levels, and that this relates to changes in preferences and tastes of the visitors. For this reason, the policies of managing demand in the Life Cycle should be planned in an integrated manner to promote the service(s) on offer. Following the same route Coles [23] placed the Life Cycle analyses in a sales context related to marketing models. This showed that criticism, in particular, referred to the lack of stage definition, a lack of validity for all classes and forms, that the products are live beings and that the participation of this in any one moment could be suitable. What’s more, that the CVAT implies that the nearing of the final phase of any destination is accredited to a perceived reduction in attractiveness on the part of the customers or its inability to remain competitive on a local, regional, or global scale. For this reason, it’s additionally important to pay close attention to the opinions of local residents in particular in a political context, as highlighted by Gale and Botterill [24].

During a destination’s life cycle, apart from changes that occur in the number of visitors or in the composition of tourists and travelers in relation to the costs and benefits offered, the vulnerability of the heritage is also changed which allows the beginning of sustainability inside the destinations. Actually this theme is taken into account in the development of tourist destinations at local, municipal, state, national, and worldwide levels, owing to the high state of degradation suffered by resources as a result of not being developed in a balanced manner.

This inadequate use of the environment causes the site to advance rapidly through what is referred to as the distinct phases of the life cycle until a stage of decline is reached. Such is the case of Acapulco which is/was analyzed using Butler’s model for the years 1945 to 2005, in which geographical, demographical, urban, and touristic changes were studied along with the development of the different zones (traditional, golden and diamond). The analysis results found that the port is currently in a phase of maturity with respect to the Destination Life Cycle, with indications of decline [12].

Priestley and Mundet [25] proposed adding a restructuring stage after the stagnation phase of the site, with the aim to prolong its life, while Baum [26] proposes including a reinvention stage during the final declining phase, promoting a change in the product and an



economic, social and environmental balance at local, municipal and state level. In the same way, the National Development Plan [27] promotes local tourism development in the areas and municipalities of Mexico with the aim to harness natural resources with strict care being taken to conserve the environment, while designing strategies that generate high-level social benefits in areas of tourism potential.

In this manner of thinking, the landscape is the major resource of most importance to tourism now that it's of particular interest for the activity and can also be taken as part of three dimensions: cultural, eco-geographical and visual aestheticism [27] so much so that one of the first things to determine which elements of the landscape were to be incorporated corresponds to definitions created by Benseny [28] such as elements that possess high value and motivation for tourist displacement, including in equal measure cultural and historic resources that make up the area. Generating tourism development of said elements in Pie de la Cuesta with the objective of helping to counteract the decline of Acapulco, requires the structuring of activities that manage to transmit aesthetic, geographical, historical, and cultural characteristics from a sustainable perspective. Successful cases based on this approach include; The Belgian Landscapes (Saint Nazaire and Keroman Base in France; Atlantik Wall, in Denmark; Karlkriese and LichterfeldeSud, in Germany) and also Gaucho's Way (that extends from Laguna in Brazil to the Silver Sea in Argentina) amongst others. Both cases achieved the revaluation of their resources through a cohesion in a community aware of its value and responsibility in protecting it, in order to promote the areas of potential tourism to local and regional levels [29].

Investigations into destination, tourist area, and product complexities and/or problems that apply the CVAT concept, all relate to a fundamental element in common – "control", however all differ in the levels of its handling. Clear examples are the tourism destinations which owing to them being made up of many elements of different sizes, ambitions, and approaches, reflect a notable lack of capability to coordinate, while in the case of the product through changes and improvements that are easy to obtain.

In the case of a destination in decline, according to Brougham and Butler [19], the interest in new development is not found in the tourism center but in its surroundings that share characteristics similar to the original state of the area. For this reason, numerous applications exist for the tourism area's Cycle of Life from different perspectives, despite tourism being an activity that by its very nature is in a state of constant change. Kapczynski and Szromek [30] state that Polish water resorts in the last half-century have followed the life cycle stages and managed to overcome the decline phase and enter an expansion stage in the last few years. Cohen-Hattab and Shoval [31] indicate that the cause of a destination arriving at its final stage could be the result of failure to follow policies established during planning, which is demonstrated in their investigation of Israel. In the context of tourism and wine, Tomjenovic and Razovic [32] examined the Life Cycle concept in the development of Croatia's tourist regions, with the innovation of incorporating the ideas and attitudes of the owners of wine warehouses. Whitfield [33] applied the model in the Tourism Convention in the UK, focusing on the use of renewable activities for rejuvenation and concluded it could be applied to tourism centers. In the case of Duffus and Dearden [19], the model was applied to illustrate how changes in demand could affect specific products and help the management of wildlife resources.

The case of Las Vegas represents a destination depending on the marked stages of the life cycle. Today should show a decline, however its constant renewal and renovation could place it as a representative model to prolonging life. However, Las Vegas can't represent a central model as its development is based on cunning sustainability.



After the numerous applications mentioned above, it is impossible to leave to one side the debates that have sprung up surrounding the accuracy of the Life Cycle in the development stages of a mature destination. Agarwal [19] proposed an additional phase of restructuring or reorientation which is added to the stagnation period. From the same perspective, Priestly and Mundet [25] also discuss the need to add it after the stagnation phase to indicate that they are targeting an ever-more sustainable market, only that the lengthening of the life cycle depends on development time and the existence of a market for local activities. If this period of reorientation wasn't accepted, then it would have to be placed at the final stage and named reinvention, consisting of a complete change to the service [26]. However, although this wouldn't avoid, after some time, the arrival of the period of decline, now the issue is that if the destination is regenerated quickly, it will have an existence that much shorter [34]. To avoid this, it is suggested that the application of indicators helps to predict stage movement which in turn helps to take measures to prolong the life of a destination. In order to understand the development of a destination, according to Hall [19] it is necessary to understand the life cycle and tourism in general. A theme that has been of interest in tourist areas in recent years is the changing of attitudes of local residents [19], as they also participate in the development of tourism, causing changes without giving them consideration [35]. Other players who also participate in destination development are the tourists themselves, who facilitate ways to obtain what's needed, now that tourism has become fragmented, tourist centers have become more complex and predicting phases of their development more difficult. For this reason the prediction application has been shown by Berry [36] and on the same line Manente and Pechlaner [37] have integrated an early warning system, however, if the predictions are not accurate it won't serve for much. Liu et al. [38] observed that actually few destinations have carried out profound research and fought to prolong their life cycle like Hawaii [38], which is an area of multiple destinations that can avoid arriving at the rejuvenation stage, thus avoiding decline. However, even when existing investigations are complete and surrounded by policy, their application is frequently ineffective [19].

However, there are studies that recognize that even though each beach tourist destination stands out for its economic activity based on the exploitation of natural, cultural and historical resources, there is a certain relationship between competitiveness and quality of life. Some examples are: the beach destinations Puerto Vallarta and Mazatlán who presented some lags, while Acapulco ranks as the most laggard and least competitive. It seems that the environmental and social exploitation of traditional tourist destinations such as Acapulco, shows an exhaustion of the dominant tourist model based on the use of natural, cultural and historical wealth. What seems that as an alternative to prolong the life cycle of a destination it should be developed with greater inclusion, well-being of the communities and that is considered sustainable [39].

#### 4 CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES OF TOURISM

The Acapulco tourist destination, recognized worldwide, grew in an unplanned way, in the heat of the fashion for sun and beach tourism focused on international tourism, imposed around the 1940s [40]. Currently, it has become a national destination with an offer for all socioeconomic levels.

The evolution of the Acapulco life cycle has not been positive, since it is in the stage of maturity with a tendency towards decline [41]. What is perceived at this stage is their loss of competitiveness for various reasons such as serious environmental and social problems. In the short term, there are no strategies' insight to revive this most important sun and beach destination in the country and in Latin America [42].



In this sense, Pie de la Cuesta can contribute to strengthening the tourist offer of Acapulco, promoting a balanced use of the landscape, generating tourist activities compatible with long-term development, in order not to reduce the quality of the landscape resource and promoting a new stage of rejuvenation for Pie de la Cuesta and against the decline that Acapulco is experiencing.

Some key aspects to promote the healthy tourist development of Acapulco are the use of the main emblematic landscapes of the Pie de la Cuesta area (the sunset and the Coyuca de Benitez lagoon) that must be done from a low perspective. Impact, since the area, does not have a regulation of uses and restrictions for tourists and even for service providers themselves, so it becomes essential to correct or take measures as soon as possible so that they are not demerited.

The main tourist receiving the Pie de la Cuesta area is national, local, and incipiently international. National tourism is the one that makes the highest tourist spending, followed by international and finally local [43]. It is evident that the national market must be analyzed to know the main tourist demands and seek to make the use of resources compatible in a balanced way.

The challenge will be the creation of tourist activities related to the three dimensions of the landscape (cultural, ecological-geographic and visual aesthetic) for; Strengthen the current tourist offer of Pie de la Cuesta, generate jobs and reinforce the self-esteem of the community, helping to value their beliefs and customs so that they shape a better tourist future and do not make the same mistakes as in tourist areas (Traditional, Gold y Diamond) of the port of Acapulco.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

In synthesis, the suggestions and concerns of the Asociation de Proprietarios de Negocios y Avencindades de la Franja Tourista (The Association of Business Owners and Neighbourhoods of the Tourism Strip) members need the integration of customer satisfaction registry and an appraisal of the resources that make up the cultural landscape. Such an integration is needed to form new scenes of development merged with the interests of the community. Patronizing new offers of services and renovating existing activities is the rejuvenation that would allow Pie de la Cuesta to survive amidst the declining environment of Acapulco. On the other hand, should the current political will to incorporate it as a newly installed tourism area continue to cause increases in hotel numbers (and consequently occupancy) thus losing beach and coastal views, it will be orchestrating the demise of one of the few original attractions that remain in the area. Increased awareness of the value of their natural landscape from local residents during this phase is one of the strengths that can redirect or reposition the cycle. Overcoming the decline of Acapulco as a tourism destination is urgent for the economy of Guerrero with measures emerging immediately for the inhabitants around the municipality.

Acapulco as a tourist destination in a phase of decline must take advantage of strategies for the use of areas with sustainability criteria. In which actions that achieve significant improvements in the conservation of natural resources and valuation of culture and history are constantly carried out to strengthen the current offer and plan future tourist activities.

It is urgent to start combating social, economic, and environmental problems such as public insecurity, high levels of marginalization, educational backwardness, and environmental contamination that for years has continued to increase and consequently shores the tourist destination to the stage of decline.





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