

THE BUTLER MODEL OF TOURISM: APPLIED TO SITGES, SPAIN

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THE BUTLER MODEL of tourism is a way of looking at the evolution of tourism over time, in this unit applied to the coastal resort of Sitges on the Costa Dorada in Spain (Figure 1).

Geographers have long recognised the fact that settlements grow and develop over time. The Butler model looks at this process in settlements that have undergone a particular type of development – that is, as a result of tourism. This has come about because of:

- the increased amount of time people have for leisure and recreation
- an increase in disposable income – that is, money available once all of the necessities of life have been paid for
- the increase in people’s ability to travel to different locations.

Sitges has developed as a tourist resort because of all of these factors. It is a town of approximately 25,000 people located to the south of Barcelona. It is surrounded by the Garraf mountains which

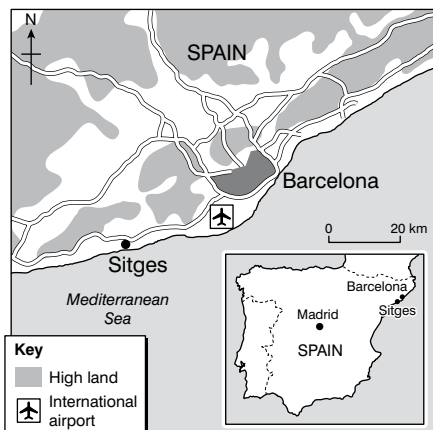


Figure 1: Sitges in Spain

shelter it and give the town its own microclimate. It boasts 300 days of sun per year, and this factor alone has ensured its popularity with people from the city of Barcelona and beyond.

What is the Butler model?

A model is a simplification of reality. The Butler model looks at how resorts grow, develop and adapt to changing market conditions. That is, it represents the life cycle of a resort. The model can be applied to compare the development of a particular resort and the prediction shown by the model.

The Butler model looks at tourist resorts developing along a five-stage pathway (Figure 2).

- 1 Discovery stage:** A settlement is ‘discovered’ or ‘explored’ by a few people, who pass on their enthusiasm about the settlement to others, and they visit in turn. In time, enough people visit to encourage the provision of new services for tourists, initially by local people who see an economic opportunity.
- 2 Growth/development stage:** More and more visitors arrive, encouraged by the word-of-mouth experiences of earlier visitors. They may also be attracted by articles, brochures and tourist guides. As a result of this extra publicity, more hotels, shops and services develop and the resort gains in both popularity and size.
- 3 Success stage:** The resort becomes well-known and the town’s facilities are fully occupied during the main season. As well as attracting tourists, its success attracts migrants who arrive in search of work and personal

advancement. Tourism becomes the major source of wealth for the settlement, often at the expense of earlier industries which may go into decline. The effect of this may be that some of the local people feel they have lost their identity and may see their culture being diminished.

- 4 Problem/stagnation stage:** People become dissatisfied with the congestion and apparent popularity of the resort. In this stage people often comment that a place is ‘not like it used to be’. The result of such negativity is that people search for other destinations to visit and the formerly successful tourist resort goes into decline. The effect of this on the resort is fewer visitors, less economic prosperity, and businesses closing because of a lack of income/profit.
- 5 Decline or rejuvenation?** This period of stagnation and decline can then be followed by one of two stages. The resort can either go into further decline, or it can rejuvenate itself.

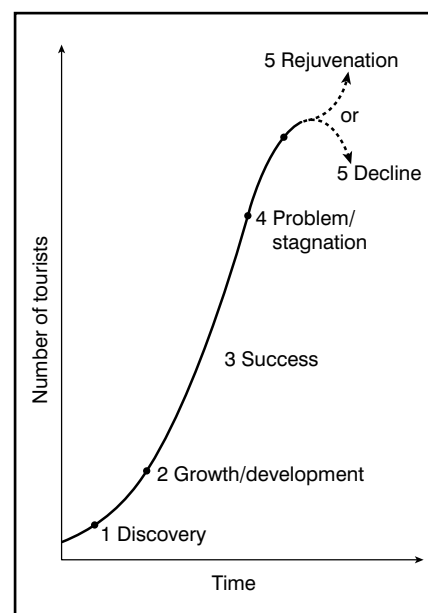


Figure 2: The Butler model

- **Decline** sees the settlement becoming even more run-down and developing a negative image compared with its 'glory days'.
- **Rejuvenation** sees the decline being reversed. The resort has 'a new beginning', with new jobs being created and evidence of a new dynamism as the place develops anew.

Sitges

Sitges is a long-established settlement dominated by the baroque parish church of La Punta (Figure 3), which occupies a coastal knoll separating two of Sitges' main beaches. The old town lies inland and to the east and west of La Punta, and is dominated by narrow streets with many whitewashed buildings. Originally Sitges was a fishing village, and the site has been occupied since Roman times. However, with the opening of the railway line in 1881, it became easy for people from Barcelona to visit the town. At that time and into the 1970s, Barcelona, which lies 36 km to the north-east, was a very polluted city and Sitges was seen as a coastal settlement worth visiting.

1 Discovery

Sitges was at its 'discovery' stage at the end of the 19th century. At this time the town attracted many artists and intellectuals. In 1891, a Catalan artist, Santiago Rusinol,

arrived in Sitges. He brought with him artistic ideas to complement those of a group of Impressionists known as the Luminista who already lived in Sitges. Their Modernist art, including that of painters such as Joaquim Miró, was a major force behind the discovery of Sitges. The arrival of the railway in Sitges therefore enabled the town to develop as a cultural centre, and was a great place for the people of Barcelona in particular to visit (Figures 4 and 5).

2 Growth/development

However, it was the development of international tourism and the invention of the package holiday in the 1960s that brought more people, many from outside Spain, to discover Sitges. This is when the major period of growth took place. This stage was accompanied by the building of larger hotels such as the Terramar and the Calipolis on the sea front, together with smaller, less prestigious hotels within the town. Restaurants and shops also increased in number to cater for the needs of the tourists in the main summer season, extending from May until mid-October.

3 Success

The success that this development brought enabled

the economy of Sitges to grow. This growth was also aided by the number of people who migrated to Sitges, and people who bought second homes in the town. These included wealthy people from within Spain as well as foreigners from all over Europe and further afield. Of the migrants who live there today, 63% are of European origin and 30% are from Latin America.

The increase in population has also meant an increase in retail services. There are over 150 clothes shops and 175 restaurants in Sitges, many of which are high status and serve not only the tourists but also the resident population. Sitges is considered to have four times more of these facilities than would be expected for a town of its size.

4 Problem/stagnation

However, as for all tourist destinations, their success cannot be guaranteed. The spread of tourism across the Mediterranean and beyond means that there are now many more options available to the prospective tourist. So the 'problem' for Spain was that it had to compete in a much bigger market. For smaller settlements such as Sitges, the opening of new destinations saw a fall in



Figure 3: La Punta Church, Sitges

Source: all photos by Paul Sheppard



Figure 4: Paseo Marítimo, Sitges

inclusive-tour holidaymakers. When companies such as Thomson stopped marketing the town, there was a surplus of beds available and a need to re-market Sitges to attract new, more independent tourists.

5 Decline or rejuvenation?

Since the late 1990s Sitges has had to adapt to the new situation. Rather than go into decline, Sitges aims to rejuvenate itself by investing in infrastructure to make the town more accessible, and to diversify from the reliance solely on tourists who visit in the summer months. This has been done by the local council and other Catalan and Spanish agencies together developing a Tourist Excellence Plan. The aim of the Plan is to develop a sustainable tourist model for Sitges. This will enable the town's 8,700 hotel beds to be more fully utilised throughout the year, and provide extra income for other businesses in the town.

Sitges is still a favoured destination for artists and it is considered to be a tolerant, Bohemian place to visit and to live in. It has a large gay community, and a broad range of cultural activities take place in Sitges throughout the year which attract visitors to it. The Tourist Excellence Plan aims to build upon this and ensure that the town's facilities are used more effectively.

The calendar of events (see Figure 6) shows how the organisers are trying to spread events throughout the year, which will attract tourists, both day and overnight visitors, to Sitges.

The effect of such an array of activities is to bring people into the town both to use the facilities and to participate in an event or be a spectator.

The town's closeness to Barcelona Airport and the rise in low-cost airlines such as Easyjet have also enabled Sitges to benefit from the growth in short-term breaks. Sitges is seen by many as an ideal alternative to staying in Barcelona, because of its beach and leisure facilities while allowing the tourist to visit the city of Barcelona, which is only a 40-minute train journey away.

It has also benefited from this locational advantage with regard to conferences: the two largest hotels in Sitges, the Melia and Dolce hotels, provide full conference facilities. These are mostly used outside the main tourist season and so are another way of enhancing Sitges as a successful coastal resort.

Conclusion

The Butler model is a way of looking at the growth and development of a tourist resort. It identifies distinct stages in

the development and possible rejuvenation or decline of a settlement that has seen tourism become a major source of income and employment.

All settlements are dynamic and subject to change over time. Sitges is typical of coastal resorts in Spain and elsewhere that have grown as a result of the boom in tourism but now seem to be suffering a decline. The strength of the euro against the English pound means that it has become more expensive for people to visit Spain compared with Turkey, for instance, which is outside the Eurozone. Sitges is not a typical 'Benidorm' high-rise tourist development where the economies of scale can keep prices low, so it is seen to be an expensive destination.

To counter this, Sitges' marketing and development plan aims to take advantage of its closeness to Barcelona as a way of attracting tourists who want to combine city and beach activities in their holiday plans. Barcelona is a major convention centre, and Sitges markets its closeness to that city as an alternative place to stay. As a location with very good light for painters and artists, Sitges also promotes its cultural diversity. It encourages Barcelonians and people from elsewhere in Spain to visit and it does not rely solely upon international tourism.

Sitges can therefore be seen to be adapting to the challenging conditions faced by tourist resorts in Europe, at a time when the economy not only of Spain but also of Europe and the world is still emerging from recession. As seen using the Butler model, Sitges must adapt and change in order to rejuvenate itself – or face decline and all the negative impacts that would bring.



Figure 5: The main beach at Sitges

Activities

1 Describe the Butler model and its stages of development.

2 How does the Butler model help when looking at the growth and development of tourism?

3 (a) When did Sitges become a place tourists wanted to visit?
(b) What was the reason for this?

4 (a) When did international tourism first reach Sitges?
(b) How did this become possible?

5 (a) At what stage of the Butler model is Sitges now?
(b) Explain your answer.

6 How is Sitges adapting to the new demands facing the tourist industry, as other places become accessible for tourists?

7 What are the problems of relying only on a brief tourist season?

8 Look at Figures 3, 4 and 5.
(a) Note the different features that Sitges has to offer, and then plan a day's activities for a tourist to the town.

(b) Compare the views of Sitges shown in Figures 3 and 5.
(c) Would you like to visit Sitges, or not? Give reasons for your answer.

9 Study Figure 6. What activities does Sitges offer to tourists visiting outside the main tourist season?

10 Do you think Sitges is being successful or failing in its approach to keep its tourist industry healthy?

11 For a tourist resort you know, investigate the resort, bearing in mind the Butler model. Decide whether the resort is in a state of decline or rejuvenation. Explain your conclusions in as much detail as you can.

December–January	Diverse Christmas activities
January 6	Three Kings' Parade
January 11	Sitges Half Marathon
February 19–25	Carnival
March 8	Sitges Vintage Car Rally
March 12–15	Patchwork Fair
March 15	Sitges Stock Fair
March 21–22	Sitges Art Fair
April 10–13	Easter + processions
April 23	Saint Jordi (Saint George)'s Day Book and Rose Festival
April 30 – May 3	Sitges Swing Festival
June–August	Sitges Midnight Concert International Music Festival
June 6	Sitges Preludi 2009 Concert
June 9	Start of Sitges–St Tropez–Monaco Car Rally
June 12–21	70th National Carnation Exhibition + 19th Bonsai Exhibition
June 14	Corpus Christi Festival / 57th Floral Carpet Competition
July–August	Sitges Music Festival
July–September	Cultural activities in the town's museums
July 15–19	16th Sitges International Tango Festival
July 22–30	35th International Chess Tournament
August 9	Circuit Festival
August 21–27	Sitges Saints Day: Firework Festival
September 13	6th Sitges Stock Fair
September 18–20	47th Sitges Wine Harvest Festival and 3rd Sampling Festival
September 22–23	Santa Tecla Second Saints Day Firework Festival
October 1	Festival of Gastronomy
October 2–12	42nd International Film Festival of Catalonia
November 4–8	Sitges International Classic Ballet competition

Figure 6: Calendar of events in Sitges, 2009

Source: Sitges Tourist Office