

Plog in Public
Taking Tourism Theory to Practice

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Abstract

An important subject in teaching tourism is how destinations change but because of the temporal component of change, that is not always easy to do in the classroom. *Plog in Public* is a teaching activity that takes the student out of the classroom to observe and explore the ways tourists drive destination change. The activity is based on the work of Plog's (2002) model of venturesomeness, which provides a theoretical framework on four levels, ideal for instruction. The model presents the psychographic profile of the population at home, the psychographic profile of the population as travellers, their likely destinations and the likely direction of change for destinations. Using the model as the theoretical underpinning, the activity involves facilitated student observations with guided de-briefing in an experiential manner. This activity can be carried at the home city or during field school programs.

Keywords: *Experiential education, destination change, tourists, psychographic segmentation, Plog*

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Introduction

The fact that we all experience leisure and travel at some level makes teaching the subject innately relevant. The ability to deconstruct everyday experiences inevitably results in students' adopting new lenses on the world. Within the field of leisure, tourism is likely never to have been more relevant to young people than today. The young adult market has grown to \$203 billion worldwide (Jones, 2009) and it is increasingly important for students of leisure and tourism to gain first hand global understanding (Orahood, Kruze, & Pearson; 2004).

An important part of tourism education is to understand the connection between tourists and the destinations they choose to visit. A related area of interest to students is the way destinations change over time and become more and less popular with different groups for example, it's common to witness backpackers populate a destination early in its tourism development while older crowds seeking premium comforts can dominate the landscape later on. Destination change can be difficult for students to grasp because the temporal element is not conducive to examination within the parameters of a typical semester-long course. There are a variety of models of destination change such as Butler's Lifecycle Model (1980), Doxey's Irritation Index (1975) Boomtown Communities (Perdue, Long, & Kang, 1999). However, Plog's (2002) revised model of allocentricity and psychocentricity links psychographic tourist segmentation with destination change, and thus provides a strong model for teaching seminal concepts. The learning activity presented combines the popular travel activity of 'people watching' with a theoretical framework in an inductive manner, such that tourism phenomenon can be deconstructed and explored.

Plog in Public as a learning activity for undergraduate students of leisure, tourism and related disciplines allows for connections between conceptual foundations of tourism to real life situations. It allows students to understand the present, and methodically gaze into the future to visualize change, and perhaps see their role in that change. *Plog in Public* requires minimal pre-activity preparation and a public space populated by tourists to make the activity feasible for coursework. The activity is particularly adept at making complex issues of global travel relevant to the current generation of students.

Theoretical and Practical Foundation

Stanley Plog began writing about tourists and related travel patterns of Americans more than 30 years ago as a way to understand Psychographic Personality Types, delineating between flyers and non-flyers. His work originally referred to non-flyers as psychocentrics and flyers as allocentrics but he later modified these terms to dependables and venturers (Plog, 2002) (Figure 1). Plog's work in psychographic segmentation of tourists is considered to be seminal in the understanding of tourist behaviour and intentions. Although it has been criticized for its inability to reliably predict where travelers actually travel, it provides a strong conceptual framework to understand which types of tourists would like to travel to which types of destinations (Litvin, 2006).

From a teaching perspective the model is especially useful. Plog's (2002) Psychographic Personality Types presents useable information on four levels of touristic comprehension. The first level of comprehension is the psychographic profile of individuals in their daily life as Dependables and Venturers (Table 1). This is important because everyday life can be the backdrop for our travel experiences (Suvantoal, 2002). Secondly, Plog's (2002) model provides the psychographic profile of the Venturer and Dependable as travelers, so we can make the connection of everyday life to a traveler personality (Table 2). Thirdly, Plog's work presents likely destinations for each of the types (Table 3), so the connection can be extended from one's approach to daily life through to the likely

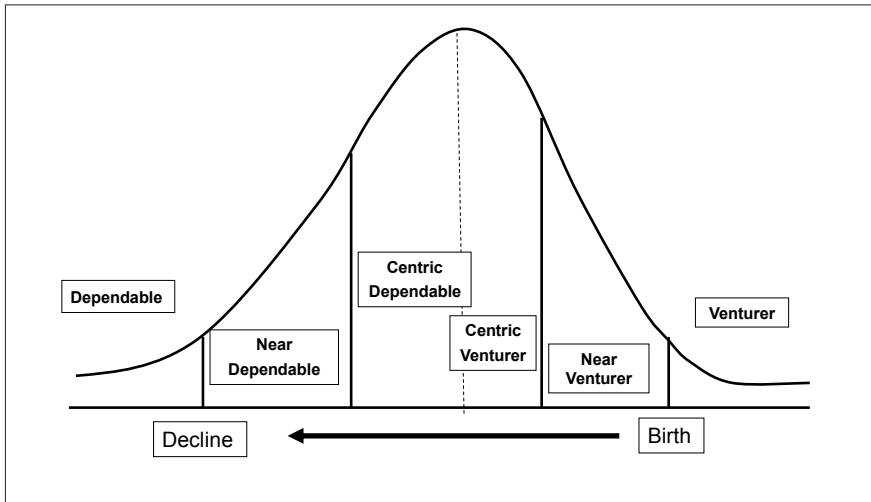


Figure 1. Modified Psychographic Personality Types (Plog, 2002)

Table 1

Psychographic Description of the Dependable at Venturer at Home (Plog, 2004)

Dependable at Home	Venturer at Home
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-traveling type • Are somewhat intellectually restricted • Are more cautious and conservative in their daily lives • Are more restrictive in spending discretionary income • Prefer popular well known brands of consumer products • Face daily life with less self-confidence and activity levels • Often look to authority figures for guidance and direction in their lives • Are more passive and non-demanding in their personal lives • Like structure and routine in their relatively non-varying lifestyles • Prefer to be surrounded by friends and family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are intellectually curious and exploring • Make decisions quickly and easily • Spend discretionary income more readily • Like to choose new products shortly after introduction into the marketplace • Face everyday life full of self-confidence and personal energy • Look to themselves, rather than authority figures for guidance and direction • Are very active and relatively aggressive in their daily lives • Prefer a day filled with varying activities and challenges • Often prefer to be alone and somewhat meditative

Table 2

Psychographic Description of the Dependable at Venturer as Travelers (Plog, 2004)

Dependable at Travel	Venturer at Travel
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel less frequently • Stay for shorter periods • Spend less per capita • Prefer to travel by family car/camper/etc than by air because can take more things • Low cost, mobile homes, stay with friends • Prefer highly developed tourist spots – over development implies comforts of home • Select recreation activities at destinations that are more familiar (video games, mini-golf) • Prefer sun’n fun spots that allow for lower activity levels • Like escorted tours • Buy souvenirs that offer a strong visual representation of where they have been • Are likely to return to the same place over and over 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel more frequently because travel is an important part of exploring the world around them • Take longer trips • Spend more pre capita on daily basis • Fly more to avoid tiresome aspect of travel • Strongly prefer unique, underdeveloped destinations that have retained native charm – avoid crowds • Gladly accept less convenience for unique experience • Prefer to participate in local activities than to touristy activities • Prefer to be on their own (FIT) on international trips, even when don’t speak the language – high confidence • Purchase mostly authentic goods and souvenirs • Tends to seek new destinations on a regular basis

destination. Lastly, Plog’s (2002) Psychographic Travel Personality model posits that destinations visited by the extreme Venturer will likely, providing the right mix of variables, move leftward across the model to be the destination of choice by Near Venturers through to possible Dependables. Plog’s (2002) model of Psychographic Travel Personalities allows for conceptual connections to be made, using a psychographic framework from the individual at home, to the individual as a traveler, to the likely destination choices of that individual, to the possible transformation of that destination.

Complete Description of the Learning Activity

Overview

Students are situated as observers surrounding a bustling tourist space, diligently observing the throngs of travelers and systematically labeling their selected tourists as one of the Plog types. Following approximately two hours of data collection, students are asked to review their work and address basic questions such as: Who (Plog types) did you find in this site? And, what is about this

Table 3

Psychographic of Positions from 1972 and 2003 (Plog, 2004)

Dependable	Near Dependable	Centric Dependable	Centric Venturer	Near Venturer	Venturer
Psychographic Position of Destinations 1972					
Coney Island	Miami Beach	Most of United States, Florida, Honolulu, Caribbean	Northern Europe, Hawaii outer islands, Central Mexico and Southern Europe	Japan, Asia	South Pacific, Africa
Psychographic Position of Destinations 2003					
Branson, Atlantic City, Orlando Beach Resorts, Indian Casinos	Hollywood, Las Vegas, Theme Parks, Florida, Mexican border, Caribbean cruises, Escorted tours in the US and Europe	Alaskan cruises, Ontario, US Parks, Rome, Israel, Hilton Head, Chicago, Caribbean, Kentucky, Georgia, Washington DC	Northern Mexico, Arizona, Washington St., Paris, Oregon, English countryside, Quebec, Wyoming, Brazil, Bermuda, NY City, Hong Kong	Russia, New Zealand, Costa Rica, Chinese cities, Scotland, Egypt, Kenya, Australia, Expedition travel, Thailand	Alaskan wilderness, Guam, Fiji, Hard adventure, Interior China, Antarctica, Tibet, Vietnam, Amazon

location that would attract certain Plog types? These questions and more are then addressed in a guided manner by the facilitator to deconstruct touristic phenomenon at the destination.

Detailed Outline

Plog in Public is a learning activity most useful for a leisure, tourism and/or travel study course in a field setting either in one’s home-city or in a travel program. It involves a theoretical framework, observational research and guided de-briefing by the facilitator.

Step 1. Present and review Plog (2002) and (2004) such that students possess an understanding of the four components of the model. The basic elements are found in Figure 1 and Tables 1 through 3.

Step 2. Select a site known for its abundance of tourists, and locations amenable for student observation of tourist traffic.

Step 3. Create and distribute to the students a simple observation guide. The observation guide should include the Plog types with ample space for notes for the student to explain rationale for labeling, and additional notes about one or two aspects of the subject's behaviour and provide some guidance on how to make reliable observations.

Step 4. Direct students, in small groups, to find a place to view tourists in the space. Have students visually spot a particular traveler for observation, label the traveler as a Plog type and note the rationale for the specific labeling. It is important to visually follow the traveler, for a minute or so, to observe any discerning behaviour, such as if they appear to be in a group tour or traveling on their own, the way the individual speaks to local vendors (engagement or avoidance), what is the subject carrying (types of souvenirs, etc.), overall appearance of comfort, and related demographic variables. It is impossible to predict all tourist characteristics so students are generally asked to provide their own rationale for labeling each of their subjects as a particular Plog type. Students tend to be remarkably creative in their observations.

Step 5. Ask students to review their data by two basic questions. First, what type of tourist (Plog type) did you witness at the site? This question allows for assumptions surrounding push aspects of travel when combined with the Plog home and traveler profiles (Figures 2 and 3 combined). Second, what is it about the site that would attract the individuals (Plog types) spotted? This question allows for assumptions about pull factors specific to the destination.

Step 6. The facilitator will then debrief the exercise in a guided manner. In a small group setting, students are asked to discuss the first two basic questions (Step 5) with input from the group. Facilitator questions may include: What is the consensus of the types of tourists here? What are the critical features of the destination attract this type of tourist? What may be the connection between this types' 'home-life' and this particular destination? What features of the destination would need to be different in order to attract different tourist types? Where did you see local – tourist contact and how would you characterize the contact? How do you think local–tourist contact may change with evolution along the Venturer to Dependable continuum? As a marketer, how would you change the destination to attract different Plog tourist types? The possibility of further guided questioning is virtually limitless, depending on the background and observations of the facilitator and student discursive contributions.

Desired Outcomes for Learners

The desired outcomes for learners are ultimately to realize the intricate and dynamic relationships between tourists and residents and the effects of tourists on the destination and residents of the area. More specifically:

- To have students understand concepts of psychographic segmentation and the psychographic link between the home–individual and the traveling individual.
- To have students experience the connection between theory (concepts of tourists and destination change) and practice (how destinations change through market forces).
- To have students provide peer based learning and guide their own education.
- To have students understand the processes of destination change in a practical manner such that it may be applied to other settings.

Recommendation for Its Use by Others

Plog in Public is a learning activity that may be carried out in a variety of settings to enhance student engagement in learning about the nuances of tourism. The activity does not require ethical

review because there is no recommended contact with tourists—all data collection is observational. Because of its observational nature, it does not require foreign language skills. The value of this learning exercise is primarily in the facilitated debriefing discussion and the rich student discussion of their observations. By altering the emphasis of the facilitated discussion the learning activity may be useful in different educational settings for instance. *Plog in Public* can be useful for introductory tourism courses if the facilitator selects debriefing questions that emphasize basic connections between traveler, destination, travel flows, and change. The learning activity can be useful for leisure/tourism marketing courses by selecting debriefing questions emphasizing the ways in which the destination may control its own change to attract selected types of tourists. *Plog in Public* can be useful in a leisure/tourism travel study program setting because it allows students to learn about their particular destination in a deep manner.

In recent years, I have carried out *Plog in Public* in the central tourism plaza (the plaza de Armas) in Cusco, Peru. I have also carried it out along beaches and market areas in Belize and Mexico and it is easily as feasible along the main street of Banff, Alberta (a mountain resort community). It is helpful for the instructor to possess a good understanding of the area and its tourism elements.

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