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# Complexity of Acapulco Evolution as a Tourist Destination

## La Complejidad de Acapulco Evolución como Destino Turístico

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**Abstract:** The paper analyzes diachronically the evolution and complexity of tourist activity in Acapulco, which was a very significant part of the history of Mexico in the 20th century and even centuries before, it was configured as Mexican icon of tourism for the world. This study is supported by evolution and complexity theories. The research presented is qualitative, inductive, diachronic and hermeneutical; relies on heuristics, criticism and synthesis. Applied materials were documentary, bibliographic and historical sources and statistical records on tourist activity. It is concluded that Acapulco, throughout the evolution history, has been an important factor in the economic, social and historical development, related to tourism, arising as an enclave of freedom, fantasy, imagination and hedonism, located on a life cycle of replenishment or rejuvenation in a sub-stage of stagnation although that is not what strategists, society and private initiative want, due changes in market behavior, complex actions are demarcated, they are not sustainable but still are being applied.

**Keywords:** tourism, evolution, complexity

## Introduction

Acapulco has been for centuries an iconic site due its contribution to the history of Mexico, for some vestiges that anthropologists have considered the oldest living on the American continent, for its role in Mexican War of Independence, and Mexican Revolution, also for being an international pioneer of exclusive tourism, mass tourism, freedom, pleasure and seduction.

Tourist activity has been an ancient practice, but also a characteristic dimension of modernity (Cuvelier, 2015). Acapulco is an international laboratory for growth, evolution and development of tourism infrastructure and services. To understand what is happening with the tourist evolution and complexity of a destination like Acapulco, it is necessary to refer to its evolution from a theoretical and methodological perspective, considering the concepts of leisure and tourism to understand a destination considered a paradise and its evolution as an urban development binomial with a set of traditional tourist destinations in which several important moments for national economy, social movements and the consolidation of a beach destination of international and national size have occurred.

## Reviewed Literature

The study is based on theories of evolution and complexity, Rivas-Tovar (2009), refers to their effects on human beings, organizations, systems, (products, services and tourist destinations), they tend to develop to grow or evolve but also tend to fall into a state of entropy (state of disorder) and at the same time still develop or evolve.

It is important to highlight ten fundamental notions to understand the complexity theory: non-linearity, chaos, strange attractor, self-organization, coevolution, emergence, networks, hierarchies, autopoiesis and complex adaptive system (Rivas-Tovar, 2009).

Some authors, such as Beer (1972), explain that understanding the structure of the system and its interconnections expound complexity; for Glouberman and Zimmerman (2002) complexity exists in structure and results, Battram (2001) in understanding behavior, Senge (1990) and Allen (2011) explain that the classification of complexity is conceived in understanding the system, structural models and behavior.

Tourism policy is an early subdivision of general economic policies and has been the object of continuous theoretical debates that occur in the economic theory of tourism, since researchers cannot forget that tourism policy is a bridge to move from theory to practice (Pulido-Fernández, 2015).

The theory of complexity is like an emergent theoretical body, which allows us to understand insufficiently explained phenomena and is the door to understand the theory of chaos, fractals and concepts of integration and difficult understanding in the social sciences, as strange attractors. The complex system is one whose properties are not in their elements but in their interactions (Rivas-Tovar, 2009).

The review of the economic evolution of the tourist destinations leads us to the approach of Milton Friedman, who coined in 1965: *Now we are all Keynesians* (Panitch and Gindin, 2015).

According to Schumpeter (2008), in his book *History of economic analysis*, the economy belongs to, essentially, a unique process through historical time. No one can understand economic phenomena of a particular period, neither the current time, unless they possess an adequate mastery of historical facts and a historical sense (Cuvelier, 2015).

## Methods and Materials

Analyzing the evolution and complexity of the tourist activity in Acapulco in a diachronic way is the objective of this research. The study has a qualitative character (Martínez-Miguel, 2004), analyzing diachronically (Abad, 2004; De-Saussure, 1945) relevant events in the history of Acapulco, supported by heuristics (Matute, 1999), criticism and the synthesis, as well as analyzing the content of statistical tables and hermeneutics of them. The materials that were used were bibliographic sources: an exhaustive review of documents related to the subject has been realized to show how the concept of tourism has evolved and developed.

## Finding of the Investigation Population Evolution

Since the federal route overture and due the beauty of Acapulco, the joint activities of the ludic, hedonic and service are developed in the sun, sea and sand model, which are a determining factor for the economy of resident families and the growth of a population from 5,768 inhabitants in 1921, to a population of 21,239 inhabitants for the 1930 census, a growth of almost 300 percent.

In the following decades it is recorded (table 1) how the population growth was gradually increasing, to 29,312 inhabitants in 1940, to 55,892 inhabitants in the census of 1950, to 81,967 inhabitants in the census of 1960, to 174,378 inhabitants according to the census of 1970, to 301,902 inhabitants according to the census of 1980, to 515,374 inhabitants according to the

census of 1990, to 620,656 inhabitants according to the 2000 census, to 78,991 inhabitants according to the 2010 census (Salgado and Alcaraz, 2012).

**Table 1. Evolution of the population of Acapulco**

Year	Habitants
1921	5,768
1930	21,239
1940	29,312
1950	55,892
1960	81,967
1970	174,378
1980	301,902
1990	515,374
2000	620,656
2010	789,971

**Source:** INEGI, 2010.

## Diachronic of Acapulco

Acapulco is a human settlement with more than 2500 years of existence (Clark, 1994). Evidence of this exists on the slopes of the bay and beyond. There are also petroglyphs and cave paintings that show the Olmec presence in its initial stage; with its sculpture of jaguar (Olmec symbol), which is a monolith several meters high (Cabrera, 1990).

The presence and beginning of Mesoamerica’s mother culture are certified in Acapulco, prior to their migration to the center of the country and after their maturity stage in the Gulf of Mexico. Therefore, today it is possible to assert that Olmecs (mother culture of the Americas) leave Acapulco towards the east of Mexico (Reina and Manzanilla, 2005). Later Acapulco was populated

by the Yopes, an ethnic group descent of Tlapanec that knew how to resist the Aztec empire's siege but Spanish conquest also; preferring death instead of submission to invaders (Alessio, 1976).

The discovery of America and the Spanish conquest of continental lands became the New Spain's Colony, a privileged territory, rich in virgin lands, natural resources and scenic beauty suitable for indigenous kings or emperors as for Spanish viceroys.

According to Escudero (1997), there are records from 1531 of the order given by Cortés of the construction of a bridle path to communicate Mexico City with Acapulco, later the Viceroy Luis de Velasco y Castilla in 1592, allowed a formal communication route, "the camino real".

Acapulco served as basis point of the Spanish Empire for the exploration of the "South Sea" and its route to the east. In 1565, Legazpi and Urdaneta established, with the "turnaround", the route to the Philippines, Acapulco was then the only port in America with legal rights to trade with the East accepted by the Royal Spanish Crown (Escudero, 1997).

With the Galleon from Manila (Benitez, 1991), colonists arrived for the administration of the port and the construction of the fort that protected the harbor and its merchants. Many characters from Asia took this route to attend meetings with the kings of Spain and the Vatican in Italy such as the Japanese mission of the Lord of Sendai in Japan. Later, Baron Humboldt arrived from South America to Acapulco on his way back to Europe (Von-Humboldt, 1827), all of whom collaborated with the comments for the port (Escudero, 1997).

In Mexico's War of Independence, Acapulco was a scenario of battles against the colony and the liberation of the nation. Independent rebel leaders such as Morelos, Guerrero, Galeana's Brothers and others besieged and took the port (Gutiérrez, 1983).

In the Reformation wars (Separation of Church and State), Acapulco served as a refuge on the Juan Álvarez's farm to draft the Reformation laws (Gutiérrez, 1983), coming from different parts of the country and abroad, ideological

collaboration and weapons, the creation of the Ayutla Plan (Illiadés, 2000). Later in Acapulco it was overlooked for a long time (Martínez-Miguel, 2004).

There were unsuccessful attempts to improve roads from Acapulco to Mexico city in the years 1842 to 1854, due to lack of resources. There were new attempts later, however, the 1910 Mexican Social-Agrarian Revolution made this impossible (Liquidano Doria and Liquidano, 1994).

During this new Revolution, Acapulco took part in the social movement, a struggle that will continue in the Agrarian Reform (Liquidano Doria and Liquidano, 1994).

Acapulco was abandoned by the federal authorities provoking the local Spanish merchants to appropriate its development, reproducing schemes of colonial presentations, from the political, economic, social, religious and judicial patterns (Martínez Carbajal, 2005).

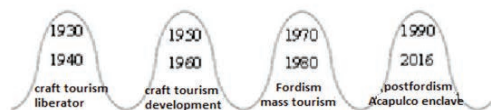
It is until 1920, after the civil war when Álvaro Obregón, president of Mexico, agrees to improve the roads; those works were suspended after his murder and only continued until 1925. Finally until 1931 the Mexico-Acapulco highway was completed (Gobierno de Guerrero, 2012).

## Acapulco Paradise of Freedom

Between the two World Wars, Acapulco (1918–1939) was the destination where Hollywood artists, could find the lost paradise, an under archetype in the unconscious of humanity. For its climate, vegetation, small population that lived in a vernacular way, in addition to its bay, the space allowed a wide playful place. Stories and legends are intertwined describing this bay of Acapulco.

After World War II, Mexican investors also came to develop residential and tourist areas; tourism increased, transforming Acapulco as the tourist destination of the wealthy class of Mexico City (Note figure 1).

**Figure 1: Life Cycle of Acapulco 1930–2016**



**Source: Bergeret, 2007.**

McCarthyism's repressive policy (the anti-communist persecution promoted by Senator Joseph McCarthy) in the United States of America (1909–1957) during the Cold War period triggered many American artists, producers and film directors to find a ludic space and feel comfortable in Acapulco, to inhabit it or take refuge.

Because of the political scenario in Cuba, American companies turned their eyes towards Mexico, allowing to arise mass tourism as a stage of liberating tourism in Acapulco (Bergeret-Muñoz, 2007).

All aforementioned information about Acapulco and its late incorporation to the national development due the modern highway in 1927, and concluding with the decade of forties, Acapulco was chosen to propose a tourist development model (Clancy, 1999); owing to the constant visits of actors and directors of Hollywood who found in the bay of Acapulco their "lost paradise" or the playful space of the permissiveness collaborating in the birth of the tourist sector with investors like Albert B. Pullen, Wolf Scheonborn who created and developed the first two residential and tourist units (Escudero, 1997).

The dynamic economy is a key feature of the economic development of the United State of America, it was the use of cutting-edge technologies to deepen internal capitalist accumulation through intensive growth, while an unprecedented extensive growth was facilitated by the expansion of the territory under its sovereignty (Panitch and Gindin, 2015).



## Golden age of Acapulco

In the decade of the fifties, the Mexican Federal Government supported tourism development by establishing the Federal Committee for the Improvement of Materials.

In the decade of the seventies, the federal government developed a Tourism Destination Plan in Acapulco with emphasis on supporting peripheries where worker class live, as strategy against the insurgency of Castro.

In the decade of the eighties, the federal Mexican government, owing the insistence of the U.S. government and transnational airlines such as American Airlines, Western Airlines, Braniff, Easter etc. and hotels such as American Hotel, Hyatt, Holiday Inn, Marriott, Ramada Inn, Princess hotels, etc., transformed and occupied the coastal area of the Acapulco Bay in what is now called Acapulco Dorado, adding to the development of the Hotel Pierre Marques at the Revolcadero beach, a property of oil tanker Paul Getty (Carr, 2010).

In the seventies and early eighties, the World Bank canceled loans for tourism development for countries; subsequently, other international financial organizations in tourism followed the restriction. The three main reasons cited by the director of the World Bank Robert MacNamara (Hawkins, 2007) in the memorandum to the Council to close the project department were: the high cost of labor and the difficulties of coordination, as a result of the nature complex and intersectional projects.

Those resources and other sources of funding were available for other issues considered priorities; also the end users of the investments were not poor in the host country.

Braudel (1968) conceives capitalism as the upper stratum of a three-level structure in which, like all hierarchies, the upper strata could not exist without the inferior ones they depend on (Arrighi, 2015).

In the nineties, Acapulco produced a reinforced growth in the district known as Acapulco Diamante. Nowadays, a second residence space has

been consolidated in the same district, generating new tourist tactics and strategies for the destination.

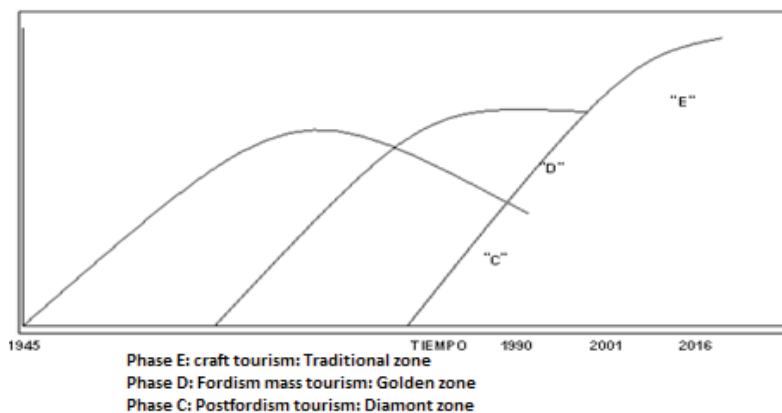
The applications of the evolutionary models to the study of specific tourism modalities address the changes observed in the structure and characteristics of the destination spaces such as the Gormsen models for coastal tourism or Lundgren for the case of the evolution of the second residence tourism.

In metropolitan areas, some specific applications of evolutionary models for the analysis of destinations have proven to be useful in operational terms for specific tourism modalities. For this purpose, Smith (1992) proposes a model of evolution of the tourist destination of beaches; meanwhile Androtis & Vaughan (2003) taking Butler's model as a starting point, argue that the morphology of a tourist destination evolves following different predictable phases from a pre-tourist situation to a dynamic of high urbanization density.

For the historical cities (Ashworth and Page, 2010), it has been established that the evolution of a historical-tourist city is constructed from the superposition of the spatial patterns of the historical city and the tourist city (Vera, Lopez-Palomeque, Marchena and Anton-Clavé, 2013).

In the figure 2 it is pointed how the life cycle of Acapulco decays by determined conditions evolving to a new stage, the Acapulco Dorado, which pushes the initial tourist zone, known as traditional, through the passage of time. New demands arise and it allows another new stage and tourist zone that is Acapulco Diamante to emerge.

Figure2. Acapulco 's tourism life cycle 1945–2016



Source: Bergeret, 2007.

The tourism mentioned by Vicérait (2001) became an economic and social liberating activity for the native population, because it is a continuous process and is linked to the practice of the tourist services providing mutually recognition of their own dignity and the strength that this interrelation contains once it is discovered, which motivated an interest in the local population for this activity, which was initially ruled out by the merchants of the port (Kreth, 1990).

Development and commercialization are today the main axes of tourism strategies. In a highly demanding and competitive international market; The competitiveness of destinations becomes crucial for survival and to reach adequate levels of positioning such as the S's management model in Acapulco that allows analyzing aspects under the vision of sea, sand, sun, sex, safety, sustainability, services, strategy, sales, satisfaction, seduction and smart (Bergeret-Muñoz and Gordillo-Escalante, 2014).

Acapulco was a preeminent national and regional destination for many years with some presences of the “jet set” that considered the bay of Acapulco as its leisure space or lost paradisiacal land (Pintos, 1949), and as mentioned (Kripendorf, 1998), “to travel is to extend its horizons with all the freedoms of

social and moral values". The arrival of the "jet set" promoted mainly by the wife of Scheonborn in the in the decade of the fifties (Carr, 2010).

Fidel Castro's seizure of power in Cuba accelerated the presence of American companies in the Acapulco bay, locating this destination within the geography of mass international tourism (Gomez-Jara, 1979; Ravelo, 1982; Fernández, 2004).

In the decade of the sixties the contrast of economic development due to tourism generated a type of "leftist" guerrilla of the Castro model, owed to social and economic inequalities (Díaz, 1989).

## Evolution of hotel supply

With the construction of Federal Route 95 México city-Acapulco the wealthiest inhabitants invested in building hotels. In the same way, new investors arrived to the bay for similar purposes. In further decades over 100 hotels were built. Fifties, sixties and eighties were the most important decades of this process. Observe table 2.

**Table 2. Opening of Hotels by Area (1930–1996)**

YEARS	TRADI- CIONAL	%	DO- RA- DO	%	DIA- MANTE	%	TO- TAL	%
1930–1939	4	02.47					4	1.46
1940–1949	19	11.73	3	3.13	1	8.33	23	8.52
1950–1959	33	20.37	5	5.21	1	8.33	39	14.44
1960–1969	30	18.52	15	15.63	2	16.67	47	17.41
1970–1979	38	23.46	37	38.54	2	16.67	77	28.52
1980–1989	22	13.58	27	28.13	2	16.67	51	18.89
1990–1996	16	09.88	9	9.38	4	33.33	29	10.74

**Source: on the basis of SECTUR.**

**Table 3. Tourism in Acapulco in the years 1960-1971**

AÑO	ACA-PULCO	TURISTAS INTERNACION-ALES	TURISTAS NACIONALES	INTERNACION-ALES (%)	NACIONALES (%)
1960	308 200	139 900	168 300	45.39	54.61
1961	329 400	153 300	176 100	46.54	53.46
1962	332 400	153 300	179 100	46.12	53.88
1963	355 800	193 800	162 000	54.47	45.53
1964	458 200	227 900	230 300	49.74	50.26
1965	465 600	241 400	224 400	51.85	48.15
1966	578 300	339 700	238 600	58.74	41.26
1967	695 300	367 200	328 100	52.81	47.19
1968	782 400	406 500	375 900	51.96	48.04
1969	880 200	466 200	375 900	52.97	48.04
1970	993 800	526 800	467 000	53.01	46.99
1971	1 135 500	605 800	527 700	53.45	46.55

**Source:** INFRATUR, Banco de México, Booz Allen and Hamilton de México, S.A. de C. V. y Development Research Associates, México, 1972. (From 1975 there was a methodological change in the national tourism statistics, so it is impossible to unite the statistical tables.).

## Evolution of tourist demand

The statistical compilation shows that there is a gradual but constant growth of national tourism in a percentage manner, which allows speculating the existence of two hypotheses:

H1. The more mature the tourism product becomes, the greater will be the national demand.

H2. The more mature the tourist product becomes, the lower the international demand will be.

These hypotheses are verified by analyzing Table 4, which shows how national tourism has been increasingly mutating from less to more tourists, and international tourism shows that it has also been evolving in a decreasing manner.

**Table 4. Acapulco in national and international tourism 1975–2014**

Año	Total Demand Acapulco (Miles)	Nacional Demand Acapulco (Miles)	Nacional cuote Acapulco %	Internacional Demand Acapulco (Miles)	Internacional cuote Aca- pulco %
1975	1485.5	807.8	54.34	677.7	45.62
1976	1476.5	843.2	57.11	633.3	42.89
1977	1455.5	839.2	57.22	627.4	42.78
1978	1513.4	824.7	54.45	688.7	45.51
1979	1440.5	785.1	54.51	655.5	45.5
1980	1384.1	754.3	54.47	629.8	45.5
1981	1350.3	735.9	54.44	614.4	45.5
1982	1385.8	700.8	50.53	685	49.43
1983	1588	953.3	60.01	634.7	39.97
1984	1451.1	825.2	56.92	624.9	43.06
1985	1616.8	1094.6	57.7	522.2	32.3
1986	1645.6	1130.8	68.69	514.8	31.28
1987	1785.1	1103.8	61.76	682.3	38.2
1988	1611.1	972.6	60.37	638.5	39.63
1989	1551.4	943.7	60.44	617.7	39.56
1990	1455.3	1049.2	71.55	417.1	28.45
1991	1580.7	1251.6	79.18	329	20.82
1992	1783.9	1415.6	79.35	358.3	20.65
1993	1901.5	1592.2	83.73	309.2	16.27
1994	1930.8	1617	83.78	313	15.22
1995	1781.7	1406.3	78.93	375.4	21.07
1996	1912.2	1577	82.39	335.9	17.51
1997	1859.7	1513.4	81.38	345.3	18.62
1998	1896.7	1662.4	87.56	236.2	12.44
1999	4225.4	3664.9	86.71	561.5	13.29
2000	2178.4	1777.2	81.58	401.2	22.57
2001	2543.1	1844.9	72.51	696.1	37.84
2002	1977.5	1742.1	88.11	235.3	13.5
2003	1724.6	1500.5	87	224	14.93
2004	3531	3147.4	89.12	383.6	12.18
2005	3775.5	3617.3	95.81	158.2	4.37
2006	4162.5	4100.1	98.5	62.4	1.52
2007	4659.7	4589.6	98.49	70.1	1.52
2008	5454.4	5188.3	95.12	266.1	5.12
2009	4876.3	4761	87.83	115.3	2.42
2010	4890.4	4756.7	92.05	133.7	2.81
2011	3903.8	3791.5	97.12	112.2	2.95

2012	4782.2	4643.5	18.34	138.6	2.96
2013	4634.2	4500.4	97.12	133.8	2.88
2014	4590.9	4481.1	97.63	109.7	2.37

Source: CIETAL-Touristic Observatory UAGro, MAGESTUR UAGro, SECTUR 2015.

## Evolution of tourist structure

The structure of the tourism model is characterized by its standardization of services such as large hotels and restaurant chains.

Technological advances had an impact on the standardization of tourism-related services such as aircraft or telecommunications, as well as “oil price declines”, the circulation of credit cards for vacations, government incentives for tourism projects and economic prosperity in developed countries, as many other aspects permitted the development of massive tourism demand (Maldonado-Alcudia and Bergeret-Muñoz, 2016). This situation is also observed in the type of construction as represented in the photographs of the figure 2.

Figure 2. Divergence on hotel structure and architecture (photographs)



Foto 1: Hotel El Mirador, 1929



Foto 2: Hotel Oviedo, 1949



Foto 3: Hotel Flamingos, 2009



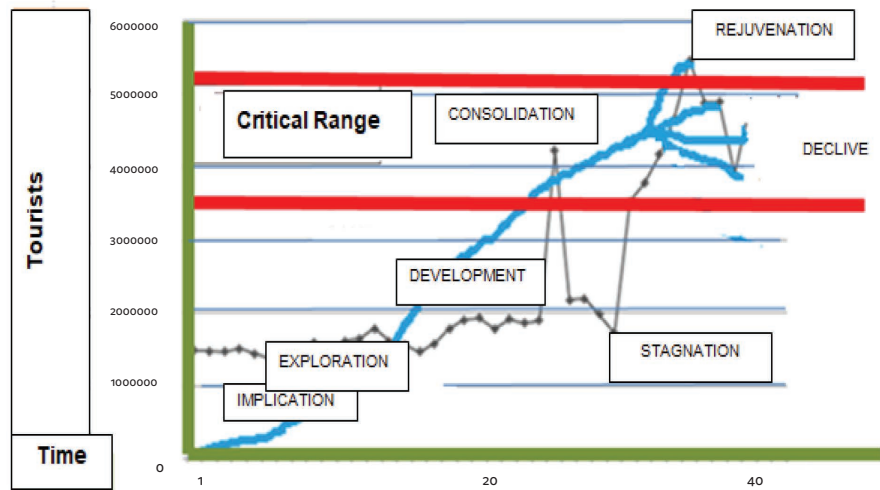
Foto 4: Bahía de Santa Lucía: Área de la Condensa, 2016

Source: CIETAL-Touristic Observatory UAGro, MAGESTUR UAGro, SECTUR 2015.

## Evolution of the Cycle Life of Acapulco

Acapulco according to data has gone through the stages of involvement, exploration, development, consolidation, stagnation, rejuvenation and decline, as shown in Figure 3, from 1945 to 2014.

Figure 3. Evolution of the cycle Life of Acapulco



Source: Quintero-León doctoral thesis, 2015.



Figure 4. Evolution and transformation of the tourism model in Acapulco



## Conclusions

This study succinctly develops the evolution of Acapulco since records allow to refer and points according to the sources that Acapulco was a path for people from Asia transited to America, as well, it makes reference to the importance of the site as the first connector of the Philippines with America, and of the great participation in the wars of the independence of Mexico, of the War of Reform, Mexican Revolution and of being the icon of tourism before the world in the last century.

The study also considers why it is an icon of sexual freedom and shows how the tourist phenomenon has evolved without contemplating the determinism of chaos, because it continues to be visited by nearly five million tourists and

travelers a year, because despite the global insecurity and meteorites that have damaged the great tourist city.

The Acapulco brand remains in the minds of citizens of Mexico and other countries, even though there are other destinations that sell and promoted sea, sand, and sun. Currently the destination is on a critical route, so the demand evolves and goes down, sometimes it arises, even when there is a strong competition with other sophisticated beach destinations.

The beauty of Acapulco, the warm waters of the sea and its orography that allows the spectator to have a view of the landscape, continue to affect the national market positively, creating fantasies, imaginings, seductions and keep looking for the hedonic, without forgetting that Acapulco is one of closest tourist destinations of the Valley of Mexico and other priority cities, of the center of Mexico.

In relation to the complexity in which the destination is located it is important to point out that Acapulco is a capitalist entity where the investments arrived, but also left (Hilton, Hyatt, Howard Johnson and others), a territory where capitalist and business were developed, that generate land alienations, in which the population statistics reveals a rampant migration, and not letting aside that there is the wealthy coexisting with the discouraging extreme poverty.

Since the beginning of the past century and its incorporation into modern tourism phenomena Acapulco has been constantly evolving, adapting its management and geographic space to both tourist development and periphery, where native population (that works directly, indirectly and induced in tourism activities) lives.

Acapulco as tourist destination has gone through stages of mutation and adapted the development to the models of tourist tendencies.

The tourism management in Acapulco has committed the same mistakes over and over again in its planning evolution and development, due to not contemplating the complexity of the tourist activity.

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