Late Twentieth Century Cultural Change and the Decline and Attempted Rejuvenation of the British Seaside Resort as a Long Holiday Destination: A Case Study of Rhyl, North Wales

Timothy John Gale
M.A. (Exon)

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Welsh School of Hospitality, Leisure and Tourism Management
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
Colchester Avenue
CARDIFF, UK
CF23 9XR
Abstract

Between 1979 and 1988, the number of visitor nights spent at British seaside resorts declined by 39 million, or 27 per cent (Wales Tourist Board, 1992). Several explanations have been proposed for this relatively sudden downturn in fortunes, ranging from the emergence of competition (within the market for holidays of four nights or more) from overseas resorts offering virtually guaranteed sunshine, to the deteriorating environmental quality of a product built for the nineteenth, as opposed to the twentieth, century. Rarely, however, do these explanations transcend the ‘symptoms’ of resort decline, to interrogate the ‘root causes’.

Accordingly, this study interprets the influence of late twentieth century cultural change (to wit, the transition from modernism to postmodernism as dominant cultural ‘formations’ or ‘experiences’) upon the production of the tourism resource(s) and place image(s) of Rhyl (a traditional resort on the North Wales coast), as mediated by the local state, with a view to identifying those material and symbolic transformations consistent with its decline and attempted rejuvenation as a long holiday destination. This was operationalised via a reading of Rhyl’s townscape and municipal brochure as ‘text’, for the period 1951 to 1996 (using the analytical methods of ‘iconography’ and ‘semiotics’), and a form of records analysis known as ‘tracking’, as applied to the committee minutes of successive local authorities with responsibility for the provision and promotion of the Rhyl ‘product’, namely Rhyl Urban District Council and Rhuddlan Borough Council (pre and post 1974, respectively). The study’s findings were conceptualised in the form of a model, and shown to be consistent with the ontology and epistemology of critical realism (which holds that social reality is not constructed by individuals or science, but by underlying ‘generative mechanisms’).
Declaration

I declare that this work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree. I further declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated (a bibliography is appended). Finally, I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and abstract to be made available to outside organisations.

Candidate

[Signature]
Timothy John Gale

Director of Studies

[Signature]
Prof. David Botterill

Supervisor (Internal)

[Signature]
Dr. Nigel Morgan

Supervisor (External)

[Signature]
Prof. Gareth Shaw
### Contents

1 **Introduction** ................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Background to the subject ....................................................................................... 1
   1.2 Description of the study .......................................................................................... 2
       1.2.1 Aim .................................................................................................................. 6
       1.2.2 Objectives ....................................................................................................... 6
   1.3 Structure of the thesis ............................................................................................... 6

2 **Literature Review** ......................................................................................................... 9
   2.1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 9
   2.2 The rise and fall of the British seaside resort ........................................................... 13
   2.3 Cultural change, postmodernism and the British seaside resort ............................... 27
   2.4 Resort development – the role of the local state ..................................................... 36
   2.5 Selling the seaside – an exercise in place promotion .............................................. 43
   2.6 Theories of resort transformation ............................................................................ 50

3 **Methodology** ................................................................................................................ 61
   3.1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 61
   3.2 Positioning statement ............................................................................................... 61
   3.3 Critical Realism ......................................................................................................... 67
   3.4 Reading the iconography of Rhyl’s townscape ......................................................... 75
   3.5 Semiotics and the Rhyl municipal brochure ............................................................ 81
   3.6 ‘Tracking’ the committee minutes of Rhyl’s local authority .................................... 109

4 **Case Study** ..................................................................................................................... 114
   4.1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 114
   4.2 A brief history of Rhyl (1794 – 2001) .................................................................. 114

5 **Results and Discussion of First Epoch: “An Indian Summer” (1951 – 1960)** ............ 138
   5.1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 138
   5.2 Rhyl and (high) modernism ..................................................................................... 139
       5.2.1 Volume and homogeneity .............................................................................. 139
       5.2.2 Spatial specialisation ..................................................................................... 142
       5.2.3 Habitus and distinction ............................................................................... 148
       5.2.4 Rationalism and bureaucracy ..................................................................... 152
   5.3 Establishing the role of the local state as provider and promoter of services to tourists in 1950’s Rhyl ................................................................. 155
       5.3.1 The council as landlord ................................................................................. 156
       5.3.2 The council as controller of tourism development ........................................ 158
       5.3.3 The council as instigator of tourism development .......................................... 162
       5.3.4 The council as caretaker of the built environment ........................................ 164
       5.3.5 The council as entertainer ............................................................................ 166
       5.3.6 The council as host ....................................................................................... 167
       5.3.7 The council as publicist ............................................................................... 169
       5.3.8 The council as lobbyist ............................................................................... 173
       5.3.9 The council and quality assurance ............................................................... 175
   5.4 The official guide to ‘Sunny Rhyl’ (1951 to 1960) – sign and referent in near perfect harmony ................................................................. 177
       5.4.1 The Official guide (with a capital ‘O’) .......................................................... 177
9 Summary

9.1 Introduction

9.2 Associating late twentieth century cultural change with those material/symbolic transformations consistent with the decline and attempted rejuvenation of Rhyl as a long holiday destination (as mediated by the local state)

9.3 Establishing the relationship between the emergence of postmodernism and the production and representation of tourist space within Rhyl (objective 1)

9.4 Evaluating the interventions of successive local authorities in the post-war provision and promotion of the Rhyl 'product' (objective 2)

9.5 Identifying and explaining any discrepancies that existed between 'sign' and 'referent' with regards to representations of Rhyl in those editions of its municipal brochure published between 1951 and 1996 (objective 3)

9.6 Modelling the link between the transition from modernism to postmodernism and the transformation of Rhyl's tourism resource(s) and place image(s) by its producers and consumers, after Dietvorst and Ashworth (1995) (objective 4)

9.6.1 Model 'A'

9.6.2 Model 'B'

9.6.3 The interactions between model 'A' and model 'B'

9.6.4 Locating the study's objectives and methods within the combined model of late twentieth century cultural/tourism transformations in Rhyl

9.7 What does a critical realist study of tourism look like?

10 Conclusions

10.1 Introduction

10.2 Contribution

10.3 Limitations and recommendations for further research

10.4 Parting thoughts

V
Index of Figures, Plates and Tables

2 Literature Review .................................................................................................................. 9
   Figure 2.1: Map of selected seaside resorts in England and Wales ...................................... 12
   Figure 2.2: The evolution of fashionable maritime resorts since the late eighteenth century... 16
   Figure 2.3: Total visitor nights in British seaside destinations, 1979-1988 ............................. 23
   Figure 2.4: Resort life-cycle models ...................................................................................... 51
   Figure 2.5: Schematic representation of the spatio-temporal development of international seaside tourism ................................. 54
   Figure 2.6: The Beach Resort Model — summary of stages one to eight .............................. 55
   Figure 2.7: Schematic model of an English seaside resort ...................................................... 57
   Figure 2.8: A model of tourism transformations .................................................................... 58
   Table 2.1: Population change in ten English seaside resorts, 1911-51 .................................... 19
   Table 2.2: Local authority functions in a typical seaside resort ............................................ 37

3 Methodology .......................................................................................................................... 61
   Figure 3.1: ‘Horizontal explanation’ — the six cases identified by Bhaskar ............................... 74
   Figure 3.2: Paradigmatic selection and syntagmatic combination ........................................... 86
   Figure 3.3: The sign according to Saussure and Peirce ............................................................ 90
   Figure 3.4: Shannon and Weaver’s model of communication ................................................. 93
   Figure 3.5: Functions and features of communication ............................................................ 94
   Figure 3.6: First and second orders of signification ............................................................... 95
   Figure 3.7: Extract from Rhyl UDC Council Minutes ............................................................ 111
   Plate 3.1: The Victoria Pier, Rhyl, circa 1972 ....................................................................... 82
   Plate 3.2: The original design for the ‘English Riviera’ advertising campaign ....................... 97
   Plate 3.3: Front cover of the 1995 ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ Holiday Guide ................................. 107
   Table 3.1: Methods and relevance to research objectives ....................................................... 65
   Table 3.2: The three levels of reality ...................................................................................... 71
   Table 3.3: Examples of paradigms and syntagms ................................................................. 88

4 Case Study ................................................................................................................................ 114
   Figure 4.1: Rhyl and its surrounding area .............................................................................. 115
   Figure 4.2: Map of Rhyl promenade and central business district, circa 1998 ....................... 116
   Plate 4.1: Two views of Rhyl, circa 1860 .............................................................................. 120
   Plate 4.2: Annotated view of Rhyl promenade, circa 1960 ................................................... 127
   Table 4.1: Number of bedspaces in Rhyl by accommodation type, 1989 and 1995 .................. 135

5 Results and Discussion of First Epoch: “An Indian Summer” (1951 – 1960) ...................... 138
   Plate 5.1: View of Rhyl beach facing west and interior of the Queen’s Ballroom, circa 1950 142
   Plate 5.2: The Pavilion Theatre, Rhyl ................................................................................... 146
   Plate 5.3: Advertisement for the Ocean Beach and Marine Lake Fun Fairs ......................... 148
   Plate 5.4: Inside cover of the 1937 ‘Sunny Rhyl’ Holiday Guide ............................................ 178
   Plate 5.5: Front cover of the 1955 and 1957 ‘Sunny Rhyl’ Holiday Guide ............................. 183
   Plate 5.6: Front cover of the 1953 ‘Sunny Rhyl’ Holiday Guide, with topical cartoon ............ 187

   Plate 6.1: Advertisement for the Marine House Holiday Flatlets, Rhyl ................................. 195
Plate 6.2: Front cover of the 1966 and 1967 'Sunny Rhyl' Holiday Guide

Table 6.1: Number and (total/relative) cost of enquiries for the 1967 municipal brochure (as of 20/02/67), attributable to publications used in RUDC's press advertising scheme

7 Results and Discussion of Third Epoch: “Bringing the Seaside Inside” (1974 – 1988)

Plate 7.1: Rhyl Sun Centre, interior and exterior
Plate 7.2: 'Historic Rhyl' – Rhyl Town Hall and Rhyl Library, Museum and Arts Complex
Plate 7.3: Globalisation at work in Rhyl – the White Rose Shopping Centre and High Street, circa 1988
Plate 7.4: Front cover of the 1983 and 1988 ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ Holiday Guide
Plate 7.5: Front cover of the 1973 and 1978 ‘Sunny Rhyl’/‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ Holiday Guide


Figure 8.1: Primary land uses along West Parade, Rhyl (as of March 1996)
Figure 8.2: Illustrative scheme for Foryd Harbour/Marine Lake Redevelopment
Plate 8.1: Rhyl's latest visitor attractions – the Children’s Village, Sea Life Centre, Events Arena, and Apollo ‘5’ Cinema
Plate 8.2: A proposed renovation scheme for Nos. 77 and 78 West Parade
Plate 8.3: Urban blight in Rhyl – the Pavilion Arcade, Coliseum Theatre and Sussex Pub
Plate 8.4: Front cover of the 1989 and 1991 ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ Holiday Guide
Plate 8.5: Front cover of the 1993 and 1996 ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ Holiday Guide
Table 8.1: Description of those regions that qualify for European Regional Development Fund assistance, under objectives 1, 2 and 5(b)
Table 8.2: Schedule of tourism-related capital projects in Rhyl awarded ERDF grant aid between 1990/91 and 1993/94
Table 8.3: The eight ‘themes for action’ identified by the Rhyl Market Appraisal and Development Opportunity Assessment

9 Summary

Figure 9.1: Model of late twentieth century cultural/tourism transformations in Rhyl
Figure 9.2: Components of model relevant to research objectives and methods/texts
Figure 9.3: Gantt chart of selected attractions in Rhyl, 1951 to 1996
Table 9.1: Linking the four epochs to Rojek’s (1995) periodizing concepts and the latter stages of Butler’s (1980) ‘Tourist Area Life Cycle’
Table 9.2: A ‘stratified’ explanation for the demolition of the Pavilion Theatre, Rhyl

vii
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viii
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the subject

Broadly, it could be argued that most British resorts have come to the end of their useful existence: they have passed from discovery, local exploitation, the attraction of national (but not international) capital, the broadening of markets, and the dominance of the artificial over the natural, to saturation, pollution, stagnation and decline.

(Walton, 2000: p.22)

Several explanations have been advanced for the substantial reduction in tourist trips, nights and expenditure at British seaside resorts, during the late 1970s and 1980s. These include: (i) the emergence of competition from overseas resorts offering virtually guaranteed sunshine, facilitated by the widespread availability of easy-to-book and comparatively inexpensive package holidays; (ii) the growing range of alternative places to visit within the United Kingdom itself (e.g. urban areas, the countryside, theme parks and holiday villages); (iii) the deteriorating quality, not to mention unsuitability, of resort amenities and infrastructures that were built for the 1880s, not 1980s; (iv) a loss of ‘tourism function’, especially with regards to the closure of unprofitable visitor attractions and a reduction in serviced accommodation capacity (as hotels and guest houses are converted to other uses or, worse still, left vacant), and; (v) a negative place image, thanks to supply-side problems such as those detailed under (iii) and (iv) above, and increasing scepticism amongst the general public (for whom the traditional British seaside holiday is now held in low esteem). For reasons that will be explained later, some resorts have fared better than others in light of these ‘challenges’, prompting the likes of Walton (2000) to question whether the British seaside, at least as an ‘institution’, has declined at all. Nevertheless, the volume and value of the domestic market for long holidays at the seaside (i.e. of four or more nights) has most definitely contracted
(although this has been partially compensated by a growth in short breaks and day trips), and it is within this context that later references to the ‘decline’ of resorts are framed.

Unfortunately, much of the existing body of knowledge, from which the above ‘reasons’ for the British seaside resort’s failing fortunes are drawn, is unduly preoccupied with the ‘symptoms’ of this condition, and not the ‘root cause(s)’, to wit, late twentieth century social (i.e. economic, political and cultural) change. Only in the wake of John Urry’s seminal text on ‘The Tourist Gaze’ (1990) did academics begin to appreciate the importance of these ‘deeper structures’ and, even now, accessible works that give due consideration to the circumstances underpinning the decline of the British seaside resort (as with Shaw and Williams, 1997a) are few and far between – a situation that, by and large, inspired the author to produce this doctoral thesis. Specifically, it is premised that the recent passage from ‘modernity’ to ‘postmodernity’ (as ‘historical/sociological configurations’ or ‘periodizing concepts’ – Barker, 2000: p.130) impacted upon the production and consumption of the tourism resources and place images of British seaside resorts in such a way as to diminish their status as mass market, long-holiday destinations. Furthermore, this ‘paradigm shift’ was relatively swift and unforeseen, and by no means inevitable (in other words, a ‘revolutionary’, not ‘evolutionary’ phenomenon), thus challenging explanations of resort decline predicated upon the ‘Tourist Area Life Cycle’ (after Butler, 1980).

1.2 Description of the study

The research reported in this thesis was largely of the ‘testing-out’ variety, whereby one tries “to find the limits of previously proposed generalizations” (Phillips and Pugh, 1994: p.49) – in this case, the theories posited by Urry (1990) regarding recent changes to ‘culture’ (i.e. that
aspect of the ‘social’ concerned with the production of meanings that are pertinent to a given ‘way of life’) and their relevance to the decline of the British seaside resort. The rationale for focussing upon the ‘cultural’, as opposed to the ‘economic’, came out of a desire to redress the imbalance perpetuated within those few studies that have engaged with the ‘root cause(s)’ of resort decline, in respect of their tendency to treat the former (on the rare occasion that it is mentioned) as having been determined by the latter – an unhelpful position known as ‘economic reductionism’.

Apart from the odd reference to Morecambe within ‘The Tourist Gaze’, it seems that Urry’s theories have yet to be ‘tested-out’ on an individual seaside resort, in the form of a case study (defined by Guba and Lincoln, 1981: p.371; as “an intensive or complete examination of a facet, an issue, or perhaps the events of a geographic setting over time”). This is an important ‘oversight’ (if, indeed, it can be described as such) because, in spite of its vastness, cultural change is best witnessed, not at an international, national or (even) regional scale, but at the level of a given locality, for “it is impossible to understand universal processes without appreciating small scale local changes, given the inevitable spatiality of social life” (Cooke, 1987). That said, if places simply emulated these ‘universal processes’, then the choice of case study would be an irrelevance, since the same patterns would be replicated in each and every potential candidate. However, changes to culture per se interact with indigenous social structures, thereby manifesting themselves in ways unique to the place in question, but which can be attributed to the same ‘generative mechanisms’ (a term that will be explained later), as changes noted in other places (Massey, 1978). When taken to its logical conclusion, this may even mark the distinction between success and failure:

The reason why one resort prospers and another is in crisis is due to the complex interaction of global and national shifts in culture and the economics of the tourism industry, and the way that these interact with the local dimensions of
culture, class images, the built environment created by previous rounds of investment, and the capacity of both the local state and private investors to adapt to change.

(Shaw and Williams, 1997a: p.13)

The list of traditional seaside resorts with the potential to be satisfactory case studies for this thesis seemed, at first, to be an intimidating one. Even after excluding those cold water resorts of Scotland (where the seaside is of relatively minor importance to the tourism industry) and continental Europe (e.g. Scheveningen in Holland and Biarritz in France), the author was still left with some seventy recognised coastal destinations in England and Wales alone. However, the criteria for selection were exacting, to say the least, and the eventual choice of case study soon became obvious. The following considerations were of particular importance. Firstly, given that the author hails from Cardiff, and the research project was sponsored by UWIC, it was personally and politically expedient to choose a Welsh resort. There were sound intellectual reasons for this, too, since resorts in Wales have been largely overlooked by the academic literature, which is explicitly English in its orientation (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999: p.4). Secondly, the chosen resort had to be popular with holidaymakers, as well as day visitors, with the capacity to accommodate in excess of 500,000 staying visitors per annum, a figure that was considered to be a suitable ‘bottom line’ for a mass-market destination. This left only two candidates, Llandudno and Rhyl, the remainder comprising (for the most part) small resorts serving niche and local markets (e.g. Aberystwyth, Barry Island). These were deemed unsuitable on account of their limited resources and, correspondingly, their greater resilience to the recent and unfavourable demand and supply-side developments described earlier, which were more relevant to their larger counterparts. Finally, of the two remaining candidates, Llandudno had experienced comparatively little change during the latter half of the twentieth century, and had successfully pursued a strategy of diversification into other visitor markets (e.g. the coach and conference trades). Rhyl, on the other hand, was more
likely to make an interesting case study, given that it had stubbornly refused to redefine itself as anything other than a place dedicated to ‘sun and fun’, in spite of losing much of its long holiday trade. In addition, it was the only Welsh resort of ‘national’ (i.e. British) stature (Wales Tourist Board, 1992: p.17).

Having selected a case study, for which a period of analysis commencing after 1950 and concluding before 2000 was assumed (in the event, one or two years were ‘trimmed off’ the beginning and the end, to allow for the availability of historical data), ‘all’ that remained was to determine the aim and objectives of the research. In accordance with the issues raised thus far, in respect of the study’s background and focal theory, the author resolved to interpret the influence of late twentieth century cultural change (or, to be specific, the transition from ‘modernism’ to ‘postmodernism’ as dominant cultural ‘formations’ or ‘experiences’) upon the production (not consumption) of Rhyl’s tourism resource(s) and place image(s), as mediated by its local political and (to a lesser extent) entrepreneurial structures – with a view to identifying those material and symbolic transformations that were consistent with the decline and attempted rejuvenation of Rhyl as a long holiday destination. This necessitated a number of research objectives, especially with regards to: (i) arriving at a means of associating postmodernism with the production and representation of tourist space within the resort; (ii) evaluating the role of the local state in the provision and promotion of the Rhyl ‘product’; (iii) gauging the level of disharmony between the imagery used to sell the ‘Holiday Playground of North Wales’ to potential visitors, and the tourism resources that it purported to represent (in light of the British seaside’s recent ‘identity crisis’), and; (iv) devising a model that satisfactorily integrated the three major themes of this study, as articulated above, capable of being applied (with minimal modification) to other seaside resorts in the United Kingdom.

The study’s definitive aim and objectives are provided in Sections 1.2.1 and 1.2.2, overleaf.
1.2.1 Aim

To interpret the influence of late twentieth century cultural change upon the production of Rhyl's tourism resource(s) and place image(s), as mediated by the local state, with a view to identifying those material and symbolic transformations consistent with the decline and attempted rejuvenation of Rhyl as a long holiday destination.

1.2.2 Objectives

1. To find and employ a satisfactory ‘way of seeing’ the relationship between the emergence of postmodernism and the production and representation of tourist space within Rhyl.

2. To evaluate the interventions of successive local authorities in the post-war provision and promotion of the Rhyl ‘product’.

3. To identify and explain any discrepancies that existed between ‘sign’ and ‘referent’ with regards to representations of Rhyl in those editions of its municipal brochure published between 1951 and 1996 (inclusive).

4. To modify Dietvorst and Ashworth’s (1995) ‘Model of Tourism Transformations’, so that it reflects the link between the ‘cultural turn’ from modernism to postmodernism and the transformation of Rhyl’s tourism resource(s) and place image(s) by its producers and consumers.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

The standard format for doctoral theses has been observed by the author, comprising: (i) a review of the relevant literature; (ii) an explanation of the methods that were used to
substantiate the above-mentioned objectives; (iii) the reporting and discussion of research results, and; (iv) a summary and evaluation of the main themes that emerged from the study. Allowing for the addition of a separate chapter, which introduces the case study, and the organisation of the material in connection with (iii) and (iv), above, into four and two chapters, respectively, this resulted in a thesis consisting of ten separate chapters (including this introduction), amalgamated into two parts – one setting the context for the research (Chapters 1 to 4), and the other presenting and weighing up its findings (Chapters 5 to 10).

Comprising sections on the ‘rise and fall’ of British coastal resorts, postmodernism and its relevance to their decline as long holiday destinations, the role and involvement of the local state in attracting visitors to the seaside and catering for their needs, the niche occupied by resorts within the broader philosophy and history of place promotion, and the ‘pros and cons’ associated with some of the better-known attempts at conceptualising change within tourist areas, the literature review (Chapter 2) critiques those (seminal and contemporary) works of relevance to this study. This is followed by a thorough account of the study’s methodology (Chapter 3) or, to be more specific, the analytical methods that were employed (i.e. iconography, semiotics and tracking), their relationship to the research objectives, the procedures by which they were operationalised and the manner in which they were consistent with the ontology and epistemology of ‘critical realism’. The ‘context-setting’ component of the thesis is then brought to a close with a brief history of Rhyl (Chapter 4), spanning the entire nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Taking the year 1951 as a starting point (thus excluding the Second World War and the period of austerity that immediately followed), it is possible to identify four ‘epochs’ that capture the spirit of Rhyl’s post-war development as a tourist destination, namely: (i) 1951 to 1960
(Chapter 5); (ii) 1960 to 1974 (Chapter 6); (iii) 1974 to 1988 (Chapter 7), and; (iv) 1988 to (April) 1996 (Chapter 8). Correspondingly, the results and discussion elements of the study were combined into one narrative (as befits research that is qualitatively, not quantitatively, in nature) and then dispersed over the four chapters indicated above, with the findings pertinent to a given epoch located within the equivalent chapter (these were arranged, internally, by objective). The glib epithets bestowed upon them (i.e. “An Indian Summer”, “What a Carry On”, “Bringing the Seaside Inside” and “Costa Del Dole”, respectively) were chosen to convey a broad impression of what was happening in and around Rhyl, during the years in question (each is explained in the introduction to the chapter that bears its name). More importantly, the division between one epoch and the next was calculated to coincide with a critical and meaningful ‘sea change’ within three interrelated domains, to wit: (i) economic, political and cultural circumstances at the global, national and local scales; (ii) the status of the material resources that comprised the Rhyl ‘product’, and; (iii) the concepts and imagery used to promote the resort to prospective tourists. Although by no means perfect, this framework proved to be a remarkably good fit for the ‘mood swings’ of post-war Rhyl.

Finally, the thesis’s findings are ‘summed up’ in not one, but two chapters – an abridged account of the study’s key themes (Chapter 9), and an evaluation of its ‘net’ contribution (i.e. after its limitations have been taken into account) to the body of knowledge described in Section 1.1 (Chapter 10). The former aims to tie up the various ‘loose ends’ left over from the results/discussion portion of the thesis, without being unduly repetitious, whilst the latter assesses the study’s significance and shortcomings, and offers some recommendations for future research in light of its findings.
2 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Towner (1996) remarks that “few places created for the pursuit of pleasure have received as much attention from scholars as the development of the seaside resort” (p.167, emphasis added). Indeed, the seminal works of Gilbert (1939), Hern (1967), Pimlott (1976; orig. 1947), Walvin (1978a) and Walton (1983), have done much to promote an understanding of how these places evolved over two centuries, from ‘blue-blooded spas-by-the-sea’ to holiday centres for the masses. In contrast, coverage of the period after 1950 – where the emphasis switched from growth and prosperity to decline and attempted rejuvenation – was, until recently, remarkably limited and biased towards industry-specific analyses of the demand and supply-side developments responsible for this reversal of fortunes (e.g. Ventures Consultancy, 1989; English Tourist Board, 1991; Wales Tourist Board, 1992; Association of District Councils, 1993). Similarly, there was a tendency amongst those few academics that engaged with this research agenda, prior to the mid-1990s (e.g. Cooper, 1990; Goodall, 1992), to focus upon the most obvious (albeit perfectly valid) reasons for the British seaside’s ‘fall from grace’ (e.g. competition and resource depletion), and ground these explanations within the framework of Butler’s (1980) ‘Tourist Area Life Cycle’, which ascribes a certain ‘inevitability’ to resort decline that does little to tackle the root causes particular to this phenomenon. The solitary exception to this rule was Urry (1990), who hinted at ‘deeper’ mechanisms behind the diminished popularity of resorts, most notably wholesale changes to the British public’s ‘way of life’ (a theme that will be developed, later in this literature review – see Section 2.3).
A major breakthrough came, not before time, with the publication of three texts in the late 1990s, namely Shaw and Williams’ (1997) edited collection of papers on the ‘Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts’, Morgan and Pritchard’s (1999) account of ‘Power and Politics at the Seaside’, and Walton’s (2000) twentieth century history of ‘The British Seaside’, a sequel to his earlier (1983) work (which charted the development of domestic resorts, and Blackpool in particular, up until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914). The first contained a range of contributions that was broad on scope, albeit limited in number, covering issues such as population dynamics at the coast during the period 1900 to 1950 (Walton), parameters and indicators of (and suitable strategies for addressing) resort decline (Cooper), the part played by the emergent ‘service class’ in engendering disaffection with the seaside (Urry), and private sector investment and involvement in coastal tourism (Shaw and Williams). Its significance lay not so much with the papers themselves (which, by and large, simply updated or elaborated previously published works), but in transcending disciplinary boundaries to bring together essential knowledge on the twentieth century history of resorts into one, easily accessible volume. Moving on, the second drew heavily on Morgan’s (1992) doctoral thesis (in which he conducted an in-depth comparison of Torquay and Ilfracombe, and the manner in which their respective local authorities sought to provide and promote amenities and services to tourists that were consistent with the resorts’ ‘social tone’), to offer an historical account of the Devon resorts in the twentieth century that paid explicit attention to “conflict[s] between those seeking to control leisure space and time and those seeking to utilise them” (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999: p.8, p.180). Finally, the third chronicled the twentieth century development of the entire British seaside resort system, along with the holidaymakers who used it, the means by which they travelled to the coast, the many and varied sources of pleasure they encountered upon their arrival, the natural and built environments that formed a
backdrop to their acts of pleasure-seeking, and the economic and political make-up of the towns that comprised this so-called ‘system’. It was notable, above all, for Walton’s impressive grasp of statistical minutiae, parliamentary legislation, events peculiar to numerous resorts (both large and small), and the vast range of references to the seaside in children’s literature, adult fiction, film and stage productions, television programmes and the ‘quality’ press.

However, in spite of the insights provided by Shaw and Williams (1997), Morgan and Pritchard (1999) and Walton (2000), our understanding of resort decline remains unduly preoccupied with the ‘symptoms’ of this condition, and not the ‘root cause(s)’ (as identified in Section 1.1). It is, therefore, appropriate that the following literature review reinterprets the recent history of the British seaside resort as a product of wider shifts in the dynamic relationship between culture and tourism. To this end, it is divided into five sections, reflecting the study’s subject matter, aim and objectives. Firstly, it reviews the literature on the evolution, growth and decline of the British seaside resort (a generic label for places such as those represented in Figure 2.1), concluding with a summary of its prospects in light of recent attempts to overhaul the run-down resources and negative place images of domestic coastal destinations. Secondly, by recognising the existence of ‘postmodernism’, a paradigm set of rearrangements to contemporary culture, it establishes how late twentieth century cultural change has impacted upon the tourist practices specific to seaside resorts, in such a way as to weaken their appeal to British holidaymakers. Thirdly, it evaluates the role of the local state in resort development, emphasising the importance of the land use planning process that has operated in this country since 1947. Fourthly, it explores the philosophy and history of place promotion, the means by which seaside resorts and, more recently, a variety
of other places attract visitors and inward investment. Finally, it critically examines some of the attempts to conceptualise change in tourism destinations, and their relevance to this particular venture. Overall, the intention is to provide a context within which the choice of methodology and case study for this thesis, plus the subsequent analysis, may best be understood and appreciated.
2.2 The rise and fall of the British seaside resort

When the seaside was first ‘discovered’ by painters, amateur geologists and health seekers in the mid-eighteenth century, travel for pleasure was very much an elitist pursuit, influenced as it was by medical orthodoxy and royal patronage (Pimlott, 1976; Walvin, 1978a). Up until this time, these institutions favoured the inland spa towns, with their blend of pump rooms, parks, libraries, assembly halls and theatres (see Alderson, 1973; Denbigh, 1981; Hembry, 1990). However, the aristocracy were becoming dissatisfied with the growing number of visitors, to places such as Cheltenham and Tunbridge Wells, who were not of the landed gentry. Hence, responding to the advice of their doctors (who were of the opinion that sea water possessed restorative properties), and the lead set by royalty (notably George III and his Regent, later George IV), they readily drifted to the coast in search of both cure and pleasure (Gilbert, 1939, Lavery, 1987). In due course, the resorts that evolved to cater for their needs also became popular with the ‘nouveau riche’, once again forcing the privileged few to seek out new exclusive destinations, only this time in continental Europe (e.g. the French Riviera, the Brittany coast).

The proletariat was excluded from such practices, at least until the ‘Industrial Revolution’ of the nineteenth century, and the economic passage from subsistence agriculture into heavy manufacturing. The democratisation of pleasure travel owed everything to particular features of widespread industrialisation, a more thorough account of which is provided by Walvin (1978b), Walton (1983), Urry (1990) and Joyce (1991). In brief, these include: (i) improved incomes for much of the working class population; (ii) greater availability of ‘free’ time due to the restructuring of the working calendar around a five day week, with provision for bank holidays; (iii) a flourishing railway network with high passenger capacity and affordable
fares; (iv) factory owners who, upon noting productivity gains in those returning from a holiday, arranged excursions for their employees, and; (v) the formation of distinct, and highly concentrated, working class communities within the conurbations, with shared attitudes towards work, family, religion and leisure (circumstances that help explain the existence of mutual savings schemes and ‘Wakes Weeks’, which were especially commonplace in the North of England and gave many workers and their families the chance of visiting the seaside). Tourism, as a sphere of activity, developed its own conventions in both time and space (Rojek and Urry, 1997). Its destinations, the product of vast and unprecedented levels of local, and increasingly regional, investment in accommodation, attraction, infrastructure and amenity provision, were separate, both in location and character, from those areas of industrial production. Meanwhile, tourists were treated as an homogenous mass, initially encouraged by the church, philanthropists and temperance organisations to engage in rational pursuits that were seen to contribute to the improvement of the body and mind, but later left to enjoy carefree amusement and the permissible transgression of social norms, which otherwise regulated their behaviour ‘back home’.

The popularisation of the seaside presented a challenge to the residents of the more distinguished resorts whom, perceiving the masses to be rowdy and uncontrollable, feared for the effect this would have upon social tone. Indeed, they were convinced that such an ‘invasion’ would lead to the depreciation of amenities built for those who “expected more than the mere basics of life” (Walvin, 1978b: p.70). Short of preventing the railway companies from running excursions to their resort (a tactic that was actually implemented, on occasions), the answer was found by restricting entry to its most fashionable parts (i.e. the promenade and pier), to those who could afford the necessary tariff (although such policing was nigh impossible on the beach as it could not be privately owned). Later on, it was the
'respected' classes that were displaced, often to dormitory resorts well away from the main railway station and the popular tourist sites. In any case, such conflicts abated towards the end of the century, as the middle and working classes became more tolerant and sympathetic of the customs and expectations of the other (Towner, 1996).

Broadly speaking, by the end of the nineteenth century, the circumstances described above had led to the British seaside resort becoming the venue for the entertainment and hospitality of lower middle class tourists and working class excursionists, although places such as Sidmouth, that lay some distance from the main centres of industrial production, maintained their exclusivity well into the twentieth century (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999). The distinctive natural qualities of the coastal environment (i.e. salt water, sandy beaches, picturesque topography and agreeable climate), blended with the unique forms of pleasure consumption offered by the newly erected piers, theatres, ballrooms, funfairs, aquariums, botanic gardens and bandstands, to create a leisure landscape with few reminders of work. It was, for the majority at least, a place of escape from the harshness and desperation of everyday life in industrial Britain.

Such generalisations disguise "the kaleidoscopic variety of resort sizes, economic structures, aesthetics, visiting publics and levels of sophistication" (Walton, 1997: p.23), that existed between resorts at this time (see Figure 2.2 for some time-specific distinctions). Four factors, in particular, were responsible for this miscellany: (i) topography; (ii) land ownership/tenure; (iii) the availability of capital, and; (iv) the properties of the area from which the majority of visitors were drawn (Walton, 1981; Huggins, 1984; Soane, 1992, 1994; Fletcher, 1993). Firstly, the presence of steep cliffs and sharp gradients not only contributed to a resort's aesthetic appeal, but also gave rise to different forms of urbanisation than those found on
Exclusively late 18th/early 19th century spa resorts: tolerant of non-participatory onlookers from wide social strata

Ultra-exclusive resorts (no temporal limits)

Non-exclusive mid to late 19th century resorts: generally accessible to wide segment of middle, lower-middle and prosperous working classes

Popular late 19th century, amusement-orientated resorts: frequented by members of the urban working classes

Figure 2.2: The evolution of fashionable maritime resorts since the late eighteenth century (Soane, 1994)

predominantly flat stretches of coastline. For instance, the villas of 'rugged' Bournemouth represented a more aristocratic, picturesque and commodious proposition than the terraces of Hastings. Secondly, the engagement, or failing that, the consent of the landowning elites, was essential to the development of a resort, although this was less of an stimulus/constraint in those resorts comprised of several small (as opposed to one or two large) estate(s), each with a different proprietor. Furthermore, where land was sold to developers on a leasehold basis, strict conditions could be imposed upon the dimensions and use(s) of the intended structure (e.g. the number of stories, the size of rooms, the letting of cellars, and so on), which was not the case with freehold sales. Thirdly, as returns upon invested capital were often slow to materialise, a coastal settlement with aspirations of becoming a watering place of significance had to chance upon a benefactor with sufficient patience, as well as wealth. When they did, it
was common for the investor in question to hail from outside of the area (e.g. much of the funding for the resorts of North Wales came from south-east Lancashire). Finally, for any given resort, the affluence and customs of the area in which the majority of its visitors resided (usually its immediate hinterland, given the highly localised nature of working class demand), were often reflected in the destination itself. By way of illustration, the resorts of the North West (and Blackpool in particular), were among the first to be recast as mass tourism destinations, for two principal reasons: (i) family incomes of employees in the textile factories of Lancashire tended to be higher than those earned in the woollen districts of the West Riding of Yorkshire or the mining areas of North East England and South Wales (this explains why these latter regions generated a greater number of seaside excursionists than tourists), and; (ii) by the late nineteenth century, Lancastrians had more or less abandoned the traditional calendar of wakes and festivals, still celebrated in some areas of Britain (e.g. the Black Country and Potteries), in favour of consecutive days’ holidays (which were more likely to be spent at the seaside, than down the local pub or fairground).

The seaside’s mass appeal continued well into the twentieth century (with an obvious hiatus during the Great War of 1914 to 1918), sustained by two landmark developments. Firstly, the elevation of the suntan, once a stigma associated with manual labour, to the status of fashion icon (thanks largely to the efforts of the designer, Coco Chanel), alongside the widespread acceptance of the alleged benefits to health resulting from exposure to the sun’s rays, saw resorts adjust both their product and promotional messages to suit. Hence, many seaside authorities added large outdoor swimming pools, designed for communal bathing, to their existing range of attractions, and the sun began to feature more strongly in resort advertising, in the form of appropriate visual icons such as blue skies, shadows and tanned skin (Ward, 1998). Secondly, the Holidays with Pay Act (1939), enshrined in legislation something that
employers had long since recognised as beneficial to the workrate and morale of their staff. The full effect of this was not to be realised until after the Second World War when, between 1951 and 1955, the proportion of manual workers entitled to a fortnight’s paid leave jumped from 61 per cent to 96 per cent (Demetriadi, 1997: p.58). This was concurrent with a boom in tourist trips and takings at the seaside, as the British public resumed the annual ritual of spending a week or fortnight at the coast, interrupted by the obvious dangers presented by six years of conflict. It is perhaps symbolic of the times that many of these people chose to stay in another great British invention – the holiday camp (see Ward and Hardy, 1986). Two hundred of these camps were in existence by 1939, catering for an estimated 30,000 holidaymakers a week (Brunner, 1945). Pioneered by Billy Butlin in the 1930s, the camps enticed the working classes by offering “a week’s holiday for a week’s wage” (quoted in Hern, 1967: p.195), without the grim formality of the hotel or guesthouse. In the best traditions of ‘hegemony’, where dominant interests control a subordinate group by consent rather than coercion (Gramsci, 1971), they carefully regulated the behaviour of their ‘guests’ (or ‘campers’, to use the correct nomenclature) in an eminently more subtle and endearing manner than that adopted by the seaside landlady (so vividly described by Walton, 1978).

Seaside resorts were, arguably, the most dynamic of urban areas during the first half of the twentieth century. Walton (1997) uses population counts to discern the premier, and emerging, resorts of the day, a selection of which may be found in Table 2.1. Here, a clear distinction can be drawn between established resorts such as Brighton, Southport and Torquay, and the rapidly developing resorts of Blackpool, Bournemouth and Southend-on-Sea. A broadly similar order of magnitude may be detected in mid-1930s estimates of visitor numbers to selected resorts (cited in Walton, 2000: pp.41-42), which suggest that Blackpool received 7 million visitors per annum, followed by Southend (5.5 million), Hastings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rank at 1951 (1911) census</th>
<th>per cent growth (1911-1951)</th>
<th>Population at 1951 census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brighton</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>158,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southend-on-Sea</td>
<td>2 (4)</td>
<td>142.1</td>
<td>151,806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackpool</td>
<td>3 (6)</td>
<td>143.4</td>
<td>147,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bournemouth</td>
<td>4 (2)</td>
<td>84.1</td>
<td>144,845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southport</td>
<td>5 (3)</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>84,039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hove</td>
<td>6 (10)</td>
<td>64.9</td>
<td>69,535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worthing</td>
<td>7 (15)</td>
<td>129.1</td>
<td>69,431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hastings</td>
<td>8 (5)</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>65,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastbourne</td>
<td>9 (8)</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>57,821</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torquay</td>
<td>10 (11)</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>53,281</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1: Population change in ten English seaside resorts, 1911-51
(adapted from Walton, 1997)

(3 million), Rhyl (2.5 million), Bournemouth, Southport and Redcar (2 million), and Eastbourne and Morecambe (1 million). However, one must beware of the statistical fallacy present in both these measures. Census data is normally collected outside of the main tourist season, although Walton (1997) does acknowledge this, and other, limitations (e.g. Worthing’s impressive growth rate of 129.1 per cent had more to do with its status as a retirement centre than as a tourist destination). Meanwhile, visitor estimates (which make no distinction between ‘tourists’ and ‘trippers’) must be treated with caution, given the tendency of place promoters to exaggerate the popularity of their resort, safe in the knowledge that few sources of data existed which might corroborate, or more to the point refute, their claims.

During the inter-war years, many seaside resorts benefited from huge investments in tourist facilities and infrastructure, much of which remains to this day. This ‘second wave’ of
investment, comprising cinemas, amusement arcades, outdoor swimming pools, bowling and roller-skating rinks, tennis courts, but not grand hotels, flew in the face of the wider economic and political concerns of that time, namely the severe depression of the late 1920s and 1930s (although seaside improvements were often justified as unemployment relief schemes) and the political unrest that accompanied the build-up to hostilities in 1939 (Walton, 1983; Morgan, 1997; Morgan and Pritchard, 1999). Naturally, the Second World War posed problems for resorts. Visitation was unquestionably affected by the prospect of air raids (although few resorts were serious targets), and some piers were dismantled in case of a coastal invasion.

After the war, progress was slow in removing barbed wire and mines from beaches, and de-requisitioning hotels used to house evacuees and military personnel during the hostilities, as it was in repairing six years of neglect and disinvestment. Yet, by the middle of the century, most resorts could still claim to be popular, if highly seasonal, locations for the ‘average’ pleasure-seeker, particularly as they represented one of the few places of recuperation, for a ‘war-weary’ population (Soane, 1992). In a period of rapid and intense change, it was refreshing to consider that “the traditional boarding house seaside holiday, based on a railway journey to an individual resort, still held sway in 1950 as it had in 1900” (Walton, 1997: p.46).

The period 1950-1974 remains curiously under-researched in the academic literature, a fact acknowledged, and addressed, by Demetriadi (1997) in his study of the ‘Golden Years’. A number of pertinent themes emerge from Demetriadi’s work. Firstly, the growing popularity of international package holidays (the first of which was sold in 1950) did not, as it is widely believed, have a significant impact upon the number of UK residents visiting the British seaside for four nights or more, at least not until the economic downturn caused by the oil crisis of 1973/74. In fact, between 1950 and 1974, the number of holidays taken by the British
in their own country rose from 25 million to 40 million, compared with a modest increase in UK-outbound trade from 1.5 million to 8 million (British Travel Association, 1969; British Tourist Authority, 1995). Furthermore, as late as 1967, three-quarters of all main domestic holidays were spent at the seaside (British Travel Association, 1968). Secondly, a rapid increase in private car ownership (rising from 2 million in 1950 to over 11 million in 1970 – Davidson and Maitland, 1997) and the construction of many new roads and motorways, alongside the closure of a substantial proportion of the railway network prescribed by the Beeching Report, meant that resorts could no longer rely upon a captive market of rail-borne visitors. This presented an opportunity for a resort to promote itself as a touring centre for its rural hinterland, but it was also the catalyst for the reduced provision and eventual cessation of seaside excursions, and the end of joint advertising initiatives between resort authorities and the railways. Thirdly, unwelcome developments within the hotel and guest house sector not only reduced serviced accommodation capacity within resorts, but also proved harmful to visitor perceptions. These included the rapid decline in the number of large seaside hotels (i.e. those possessing 100 rooms or more), the growth of (static and mobile) caravan, camping and self-catering holidays, and the conversion of hotels and guesthouses into student residences, hostels for state benefit claimants and old people’s homes. Fourthly, with the honourable exception of the Development of Tourism Act (1969), which set up the national tourist boards and provided incentives for the construction and refurbishment of hotel accommodation, government legislation in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s was generally unhelpful (albeit necessary). For example, the Fire Precautions Act (1971) made the installation of fire doors, fire escapes, sprinklers and smoke detectors within business premises a legal requirement, which many proprietors of the older seaside hotels found to be prohibitively expensive. Fittingly, this period ended with local authority reorganisation, which saw many resorts amalgamated with inland areas to form larger districts, where seaside interests were diluted by
wider, and more disparate, political concerns, thus threatening “the autonomy, identity and tourism investment policies of established resorts, some of which (like Whitby, which was subsumed into Scarborough and an extensive rural area), were quite substantial” (Walton, 2000: p.188). Finally, the number of Britons who took no holiday at all remained around 40 per cent throughout this period (as it does today), suggesting that resorts did little in the way of encouraging new visitors with appropriate pricing and targeting strategies. Indeed, Demetriadi (1997: p.51) characterises this era as one of missed opportunities that the resorts would later come to regret (see also Waterman, 1984).

It is little wonder, therefore, that between 1979 and 1988, the number of visitor nights spent at British seaside resorts declined by 39 million, or 27 per cent, a trend illustrated in Figure 2.3 (Wales Tourist Board, 1992). The blame for this cannot be attributed to a succession of poor summers, in the early 1980s, alone, nor the concurrent economic recession. The core long holiday market (i.e. four or more nights) had grown tired of a product which had changed relatively little since its inception as a destination for the Victorian and Edwardian holidaymaker, and was now looking to more exotic, exciting and fashionable (but cheaper) destinations overseas, spurred on by the vigorous promotional strategies of the package tour industry, with promises of ‘sun, sand, sea and sex’ (although Demetriadi, 1997, warns against exaggerating its influence, at the expense of other relevant factors). With their fears of flying, foreign food and foreigners assuaged by the reassuring advertising campaigns of tour operators, the recommendations of friends and relatives who had already been abroad, and greater (positive) exposure of overseas destinations in the media, a significant number of holidaymakers switched allegiance to the continental resorts (notably those along the Mediterranean Coast) and, much more recently, long-haul destinations such as Florida, the Caribbean and Australia/New Zealand. This not only reduced the volume of arrivals at most
domestic resorts, but also led to a realignment of the market, with a higher proportion of low spending and elderly visitors from the ‘C2’, ‘D’ and ‘E’ socio-economic categories. Furthermore, many resorts failed to attract sufficient numbers of short break (i.e. one to three nights) and, to a lesser extent, day excursionists, not to mention foreign tourists, to consolidate the damage sustained to visiting trade by this development, many of whom preferred the holiday villages, theme parks and historic towns of inland Britain. In turn, this led to the almost inevitable problems that face a high capacity tourist environment when it is under-used by those for whom it was designed (Association of District Councils, 1993), notably the closure and removal of once-valued but economically frail attractions, fewer serviced accommodation providers, a reduction in the quality and attractiveness of the marine and built environments (due to a lack of public and private capital for maintenance and improvement), unemployment, a weaker multiplier effect, inappropriate changes to land use, an unwillingness on the part of major corporations to invest in the destination, and a negative place image in the minds of potential visitors.
Theorists have identified three characteristics of resorts as places that leave them susceptible to the pressures outlined above, namely: (i) ‘seasonality’ (Cooper et al, 1993); (ii) ‘spatial fixity’ (Urry, 1990), and; (iii) ‘peripherality’ or ‘peninsularity’ (Whitehead, 1999). In the first instance, all but the smallest and most foolhardy of potential seaside investors have been put off by the likelihood of slim returns on their capital during the off season, although these can be enhanced through differential pricing (Seaton and Bennett, 1996) and the recruitment of labour on temporary contracts (Ball, 1989). At least in the past, a few boom summer months would have sustained a resort through a lean winter. Now people are free to spend their summer vacation, and their money, elsewhere, suggesting a second problem. Whereas the supply of tourist experiences tends to be fixed to particular places, and slow to respond to changing economic and socio-cultural conditions, the demand for them is most certainly not (Hall and Page, 1999: p.92). The growing taste for more exotic and remote destinations (initially patronised by wealthier tourists who are later emulated, and thus displaced, by lower-order market segments), together with the means of reaching them, has fuelled the expansion of what Turner and Ash (1975) term the ‘pleasure periphery’ (“the tourist belt which surrounds the great industrialized zones of the world”; pp.11-12), far beyond our national boundaries (Goodall, 1992). Ironically, resorts are the epitome of peripheral places, their distance from the main, or core, areas of economic production and consumption making the distribution of goods and services costly, thus deterring entrepreneurial interest and closing-off welcome opportunities for diversification (see Botterill et al, 2000: pp.27-32).

Since the late 1980s, local government, private enterprise and others with a vested interest in resort (re)development have attempted, with a modicum of success, to address these problems via product development and marketing. Relevant product development initiatives include the construction of wet weather facilities, conference venues and interpretation centres (the last
seeking to capitalise upon the seaside’s undoubted heritage potential), the provision of en-suite accommodation, shopping centre enhancement, and the preservation of Victorian, Edwardian and Art Deco architecture (ranging from the ‘spectacular’ to the ‘vernacular’ – see Lindley, 1973). The intangible aspect of the resort product has also been addressed, with events programming, customer care training and new beach award schemes. In terms of marketing, several resorts are repositioning themselves (with mixed success) to appeal to the more lucrative short break, business, international and special interest (e.g. gay, summer school) visitor markets. This not only entails a change of imagery and emphasis within brochures and other promotional literature, but also more precise lifestyle targeting by advertising in appropriate newspapers and magazines, the maintenance of computer databases for direct mail purposes, and the exposure of the repackaged product at travel trade exhibitions and with innovative use of public relations. That said, many resorts are unwilling to give up on the family market, and the promotion of traditional ‘bucket and spade’ activities.

This is an appropriate point to acknowledge the role of the national tourist boards in the attempted regeneration of seaside resorts. A number of significant initiatives have been undertaken, such as the English Tourist Board’s (ETB) ‘Resorts 2000’ competition of 1985. The prize was the Board’s assistance in the setting up and administration of a ‘Tourist Development Action Programme’ (TDAP), a strategy designed to “revitalise the [seaside] tourism industry through a series of privately and publicly funded marketing, research and development initiatives” (Agarwal, 1997a: p.153). The winners – Torbay and Bridlington – were the first beneficiaries of a scheme that was subsequently applied to many resorts in the late 1980s and early 1990s (see Bramwell and Broom, 1989). However, the abolition of ‘Section Four’ grants in 1989 (in England only), the regional tourist boards’ mechanism for ‘pump-priming’ tourism projects that might otherwise not go ahead, and the government’s
reduction in financial support for the ETB (from £15.4m in 1992/93 to £10.8m in 1994/95 – English Tourist Board, 1994), have seriously curtailed tourist board involvement in seaside resort regeneration (Agarwal, 1997a).

As for the near future, beach boredom and fears of skin cancer are challenging the British appetite for short-haul summer package holidays (Curtis, 1997), but these alone cannot help domestic resorts recapture a significant amount of lost trade. Specifically, the outlook for British coastal destinations is largely a question of scale (M. Smith, 1991; Shaw and Williams, 1997a). The smallest resorts have grounds for optimism in that they are ideally placed to appeal to niche markets, although they have little capital for growth and are dependent upon the small business culture. The largest resorts (with annual capacity in excess of 500,000 bed nights) have the critical mass of resources required to sustain visiting custom, and the space to accommodate several different target markets, but remain reliant upon the long holiday market segment whose preferences are known to lie abroad. Lastly, the medium-sized resorts are the most vulnerable, since they lack the distinctiveness of the smaller, and the variety of the larger, resorts (and should consider diversification as their means of survival).

It is possible that the future for the majority of seaside resorts in Britain lies not within a weather-proof dome (Wright, 1989; Arnot, 1998), as an Edwardian theme park (Urry, 1997) or with an injection of ‘continental café culture’ (Owen, 1990), but with light industry, commerce, retailing, information services, the welfare state and commuting. Therefore, should local authorities (and constituents) continue to resist developments which contradict the tourist appeal of their resort, but nevertheless represent a viable and year-round use of otherwise vacant or unproductive land, and are they right to pump finite public monies into
schemes designed to rejuvenate visitor interest? As will be seen later in this thesis, without the benefit of hindsight, these decisions are anything but straightforward.

2.3 Cultural change, postmodernism and the British seaside resort

If we are to understand the process of cultural change and its relevance to the actual and perceived status of the seaside resort, it is first necessary to explain, insofar as it is possible, what is meant by ‘culture’. Adding substance to his claim that culture is one of the “two or three most complicated words in the English language”, Williams (1983: p.87, p.90) suggests that there is not one, but three, suitable applications of the term: (i) as ‘high culture’, where only those objects or events deemed to be of sufficient taste or distinction are recognised; (ii) as a given society’s ‘way of life’, which encompasses the traditions, practices and values of its constituent members, regardless of their status, and; (iii) as that part of society concerned with the production, circulation and exchange of ‘meaning’ (as expressed through signs, texts, discourse, and the like). By way of simplification, Barker (2000) provides a useful definition of culture that excludes the first (thus reflecting contemporary cultural studies’ preoccupation with ordinary, rather than elite, concerns), and amalgamates the second and the third:

The production and exchange of meanings, or signifying practices, which form that which is distinctive about a way of life.

(p.383)

For the purposes of this thesis, all future references to culture – unless prefixed by the word ‘high’ – should be understood accordingly.

The relationship between culture and the economy is problematic but worth explaining, since it is central to this thesis. One approach (‘economic reductionism’) is to view culture as the
symbolic expression of material economic processes (e.g. the profit motive and class relations). In this respect, it is the economy, not culture, which determines social arrangements. Similarly, social analysts have used culture to account for, or excuse, the ‘few’ incongruous variations that exist after ‘rational’ economic explanations have run their course (Duncan and Ley, 1993). The counter-approach considers the economy to be determined by culture. Consequently, the Western taste for coffee and tea has certainly influenced the economic development of the nations of South America and the Indian Subcontinent, respectively. Either way, to treat culture and economy as separate entities – one dominant, one subordinate – is unhelpful. Instead, we should be concerned with how they interact (Crang, 1998). It is this very interaction and coexistence that rescues the thesis from the criticism that, by focussing ‘exclusively’ upon cultural change, the author is overlooking the role of economics (and, for that matter, of politics) in the restructuring of British seaside resorts in the late twentieth century.

Urry (1997) questions the use of economic perspectives (at least in isolation) to explain resort decline, since these fail to consider “changes in fashion, style and taste which have transformed British social life in the past few decades” (p.103). Whilst acknowledging the ‘shabbiness’ of many resorts, and the competitive threat of overseas coastal destinations made accessible by the introduction of jet aircraft and computerised reservation systems, he points to a third instrument of decline that is primarily cultural – the emergence of a dominant service class, which regards the seaside as ‘tasteless’ and ‘common’. Consisting of “occupants of managerial and professional posts working in both the private and public sectors” (p.106), this “new petty bourgeoisie” (Bourdieu, 1984) values very different places, objects and pursuits, such as the countryside, health food, real ale, classical music, novelty purchases, minimalism, recycling, foreign holidays, and so on. Furthermore, it happily berates anything
that falls short of the qualities demonstrated by such forms of consumption, for being too close to ‘nature’ (in an uncivilised, rather than romantic, sense). It should be noted that such distinctions are remarkably fluid. For instance, ‘fish and chips’ is dismissed by the service class, not for its fat content but because it is associated with the seaside (Voase, 1995). However, cream teas, though sold in abundance at the seaside, find favour because they can “be successfully annexed to the ‘countryside tradition’ and thereby discussed with enthusiasm rather than embarrassment” (p.70).

It is not only the service class (or classes, for Savage et al, 1992, distinguish between three sub-types – the ‘ascetic’, the ‘postmodern’ and the ‘indistinct’) that has lost respect for the British seaside resort. In the 1960s, a relatively affluent youth culture appeared (the first cohort of the post-war ‘baby boom’ to experience near full-employment), which resented the austerity of preceding decades and found expression in new styles of music, clothes and behaviour that challenged established norms (Voase, 1995). Unlike their parents, these young people did not wait for the annual seaside holiday in order to ‘let their hair down’. Instead, they found “new arenas for self-expression” (Shaw and Williams, 1997a: p.5) in the conveniently located discotheques and nightclubs of their home town. Attitudes towards the seaside varied amongst youth subcultures, and ranged from indifference to downright contempt, as in the ‘beach battles’ between rival gangs of ‘ Mods’ and ‘Rockers’, which took the concept of ‘liminality’ (i.e. the suspension of normal modes of behaviour within certain spaces) to a new extreme (see Shields, 1991). Such conflicts did nothing to project a positive image of the seaside to the core family market, in the same manner that ‘lager louts’, in the 1980s, tainted the reputation of several Spanish resorts amongst the British outbound holiday market.
To summarise, in a climate of cultural rejection, good business practice alone (e.g. hotel refurbishment, customer care, cheaper prices) is unlikely to satisfactorily address the declining fortunes of many British seaside resorts. Solutions to resort decline, if they indeed exist, must address the cultural as well as the economic, as with the regeneration of the promenade at Morecambe. The TERN project, as it is known, is an intelligent attempt to reposition this most ailing of resorts (the value of tourism in Morecambe declined from £46.6 million in 1973 to £6.5 million in 1990; Association of District Councils, 1993), around the rich variety of bird life that frequents Morecambe Bay, perhaps in the hope that such associations with ‘higher’ forms of nature might elevate Morecambe’s standing amongst the service class.

Although far from uncontested, there is a growing consensus both inside and outside the academy that, since the 1960’s, Western society has witnessed a profound and far-reaching cultural transformation, which has lead to the restructuring of many of its texts and practices. As regards the nomenclature, ‘modernity’ and ‘postmodernity’ are terms that are commonly used to refer to the historical periods either side of this transformation (although there are problems in conceptualising such a ‘clean break’ – see Section 9.6.1), whereas ‘modernism’ and ‘postmodernism’ are taken to be the cultural formations, artistic and architectural styles, and philosophical and epistemological positions, which prevailed during these periods (Barker, 2000). Suffice to say, definitions of postmodernism regularly play on its contrast with modernism (although not everything about the former runs counter to the latter) which, as a cultural formation or experience, is said to have been shaped by the four institutions of modernity, namely: (i) ‘industrialism’ (the transformation of the natural into the man-made); (ii) ‘surveillance’ (the control of information flows and social supervision); (iii) ‘capitalism’ (a form of production predicated on private ownership and the pursuit of profit by extracting
surplus value from workers), and; (iv) ‘military power’ (the emergence of the nation-state) (Giddens, 1990). The resultant ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams, 1981) is not an easy one to conceptualise, for there are two aspects to modernism – one displaying “an optimistic faith in the power of science, rationality and industry to transform our world for the better” and the other beset by “change, ambiguity, doubt, risk, uncertainty and fragmentation” (Barker, 2000: p.134, p.387) – prompting Berman (1982) to offer this highly pertinent insight:

To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and our world – and at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are.”

(p.15)

Returning to the original argument, it is the very contrast between modernism and postmodernism that might advance a cultural explanation for resort decline, in that, if we think of seaside resorts as the epitome of modernist pleasure consumption, it is possible to see why the problems described earlier have arisen, given that postmodern society embraces a markedly different set of practices and values. But what, exactly, is ‘postmodernism’ and what are its implications for those travel patterns pertinent to the British seaside resort? A concise answer to the former question is a near impossible task since the expression connotes a plurality of meanings depending upon which set of circumstances it is applied to. Indeed, Featherstone (1988) cites a dictionary entry on postmodernism, which states: “This word has no meaning. Use it as often as possible” (p.195)! Of those who have attempted an explanation, five scholars in particular warrant mentioning. Lyotard (1984) sees postmodernism as the rejection of universal laws and theories (metanarratives) which validate science (legitimising certain discourses and marginalising others), in favour of a recognition of heterogeneity and nonconformity within knowledge. Baudrillard (1983) speaks of a culture of the ‘simulacrum’ (a copy without an original), where technological advances aid the
mechanical reproduction of previously unique and extraordinary cultural phenomena, so marking the demise of creativity, originality and innovation, which were for so long characteristic features of the modernist period (postmodernism as ‘cultural exhaustion’). Jameson (1984) links postmodernism with the development of capitalism, which has reached the point at which the distinction between the economy and culture is lost, so that the latter is exposed to commodification. In this new era, signs are not merely ‘symbolic expressions’, but ‘expressive symbols’ used in the marketing and exchange of commodities (Gottdiener, 1995: p.27; see also Lash and Urry, 1994). Continuing with the theme of capitalism, Harvey (1989) refers to ‘flexible accumulation’, a response to the crisis of global competition, as typical of postmodernism. Associated with this is the accelerated development (and demise) of new industries, products and markets, in the constant (and arguably fruitless) search for sustainable competitive advantage. Finally, Lash (1990) suggests that the fundamental trait of postmodernism is the de-differentiation of previously separate and discrete institutional spheres (e.g. work, religion, science, commerce, the state, leisure, and so on). Value systems within each sphere have also dissolved, as with the often quoted, and much celebrated/despised (depending upon one’s perspective) blurring of the boundary between high and popular culture.

There are strong parallels between postmodernism and what has been termed ‘post-Fordism’. Defined as a shift “from mass production of standardized goods for an aggregated market... to small-scale customized production for niche markets marked by flexibility of labour and the individualization of consumption patterns” (Barker, 2000: p.389), post-Fordism is to the economy what postmodernism is to culture, although Hall (1989) argues that it is “as much a description of cultural as of economic change”. Like postmodernism, the origins of post-Fordism as a recognisable ‘condition’ may be traced back to the early 1970s, when the
previous Fordist regime (which sustained high levels of production and consumption by investing heavily, and for the long term, in wages and advertising) floundered as oil prices rose (in the wake of turbulence in the Middle East) and Western economies were blighted by 'stagflation' (i.e. nil growth but high inflation) – see Boyd (1998). The subsequent crisis of overproduction exposed the rigidities of Fordism and encouraged corporations to introduce more flexible forms of production (e.g. multi-skilling, temporary contracts) and distribution (e.g. ‘Just-in-Time’ or JIT), which have since been labelled ‘post-Fordist’ (Harvey, 1989).

In his analysis of postmodern culture and the repositioning of tourist practices, Urry (1994) identifies five key processes (based upon the earlier work of Harvey, 1989), which may be paraphrased as follows (see also Rojek, 1995: ch.8). Firstly, there has been the substitution of a culture of ‘writing and substance’ with one of ‘image and surface meaning’, mainly due to the growing influence of the media and the ease at which it can replicate the objects of (visual) consumption by harnessing the latest technologies. Secondly, there has been a transformation of time, from the orderly and regulatory mechanism of clock-time (the ‘working week’, ‘time as money’, etc.) to the compression of spatially and temporally diverse events into the ‘here and now’ (as in the case of news programmes or ‘surfing’ the Internet). Otherwise known as ‘instantaneous time’, this is responsible for a number of latter day products, such as fast food, late availability holidays and cable television. Thirdly, consumption and play are increasingly relevant to the formation of social identity, instead of the once-dominant influences of occupation and the home, leading to increasingly flexible, complex and transient identities with less established and routine patterns of (travel) behaviour. Fourthly, production and consumption within developed economies has become post-Fordist in character, as a shift in employment from manufacturing to service and information industries, has seen the dissipation of associated work and leisure practices, the
partial rejection of products developed for mass publics, an improved standard of living in the
former manufacturing towns and cities, and the nostalgic veneration of traditional working
life. Finally, there is a resistance to the globalising and homogenising effects of modernity
through 'localisation', which has seen a growing interest in 'place' (Urry, 1990, mentions the
preservation of indigenous urban heritage and the popularity of certain aspects of the
countryside as a place to visit, in support of this claim). Indeed, in an era of footloose capital,
localities are forced to differentiate themselves from one another, usually by making symbolic
associations with events, institutions and figures from popular history and culture (e.g.
Hastings as '1066 Country' or 'Thomas Hardy's Wessex' – see Shaw and Williams, 1994;
Williams, 1998).

Although these are rather abstract developments, they have some very real consequences for
the British seaside resort. For instance, the shift from 'blue-collar' to 'white-collar'
employment, and the associated weakening of 'group' (i.e. that which identifies one social
class from another) and 'grid' (the system of classification, particular to each social class, that
associates certain times and spaces with certain activities and experiences – some 'good',
some 'bad'), has profound implications for a place that was designed to appeal to the
proletariat, as a panacea from the oppressive conditions of the urban industrial environment
(Urry, 1990). In addition, the once exceptional character of the seaside resort (a product of
geographic location and the novel manner in which pleasure was experienced) has been
compromised, not only because of overt environmental degradation (which itself is
problematic since consumption is becoming more influenced by aesthetics than reason), but
also due to the use of new technology to reconstruct its most popular features in other places
that are repositioning themselves as visitor destinations. This can be seen with the Center
Parks Holiday Villages found throughout the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Belgium and
France, essentially a collection of holiday villas dispersed around a large subtropical water feature encased in a plastic dome, which regulates the air temperature at a constant 84°F. Paradoxically, these developments are located in otherwise temperate, evergreen areas, usually some distance from the coast (Lavery, 1990; Faché, 1995). Anyway, there is little left of postmodern life that is extraordinary, since we have been desensitised by exposure to a deluge of previously unfamiliar information, sights and experiences, made available through the widespread presence of the media. Finally, the collective forces that marshalled popular culture (including mass tourism) have become less influential. Through commodification (which has also increased the number of alternative sights for the tourist), culture has lost much of its ideological purpose, as it now celebrates capitalism instead of attempting to disguise it (Storey, 1993). Resorts are very much the product of an earlier capitalist era, their development as working class tourist destinations owing much to the desire on the part of industrialists, government and the church to improve the efficiency of labour and civilise the unruly rank and file, through the provision of (paid) leave and excursions. Related to this is the breakdown of the strict spatial and temporal regime that governed the seaside holiday (as demonstrated by the holiday camps with their wake-up calls, set meal times, and entertainment programmes, not to mention the insistence upon Saturdays as the arrival or departure day for campers), such a system being incompatible with the postmodern tourist’s desire for freedom, choice and playfulness (see Ward and Hardy, 1986, on the mechanics and eventual decline of the holiday camp, and Feifer, 1985, for a discussion of the post tourist).

However, one should include the caveat that, in spite of its unquestionable influence, it would be wrong to ascribe too much emphasis to postmodernism as the driving force behind cultural production and consumption in the latter half of the twentieth century. Instead, it is helpful to consider William’s (1980) argument that all social formations are made up of three cultural
movements – 'dominant', 'residual' and 'emergent'. If postmodernism is the dominant, then modernism is the residual (which might explain why some significant developments in tourism's recent past are characteristically modernist), whilst it remains to be seen as to what constitutes the emergent.

2.4 Resort development – the role of the local state

The origins of (formal) local government lay with the Victorian urban system of the late nineteenth century, and the need to address the correspondent problems of (poor) public health, sanitation, housing and order. Municipal intervention in British coastal tourism also began in earnest around this time (with the provision of sea defences and amenities such as piers, gardens, deckchairs and bands – Walton, 1983: ch.6), and seaside authorities were amongst the first to operate gas, water and electricity works. Subsequently, the local state has assumed responsibility for a diverse range of functions, critical to the success of the resort product, for which the private sector lacks the necessary organisation or motivation (Table 2.2).

In spite of two significant pieces of legislation – the Local Government Acts of 1948 (requiring local authorities to set-up tourist information and publicity services) and 1972 (enabling local authorities to encourage visitors to their areas and provide facilities for them) – tourism remains a non-statutory function of district councils and, more recently, unitary authorities, a situation that has prompted some debate (see Bacon and Le Pelley, 1994; Lunn and Whitehead, 1996). Bearing this in mind, the continued willingness to be involved in tourism, exhibited not only by those councils responsible for traditional resorts and tourist 'honeypots' like Torquay and Cambridge, but also by their sister authorities in the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>Roads, car and coach parking, public transport, pedestrianisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Development plans, granting or withholding planning permission, conservation, town centre management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Development</td>
<td>Grant aid for new and existing businesses, encouraging the private sector to invest in the locality, providing shopping and conference facilities, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ownership and Operation of Visitor Attractions</td>
<td>Theatres, museums, leisure centres, parks and other open spaces, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist Information</td>
<td>Tourist Information Centres (distribution of brochures and leaflets for nearby attractions, booking service for local accommodation, ticket agent for coach and rail operators), signposting, noticeboards, plaques marking historic sites, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>Publication of the annual municipal brochure, television and radio advertising, attendance at trade fairs and exhibitions, the collection and dissemination of market research data, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Programming</td>
<td>One-off, annual, monthly, weekly and daily events and festivals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulation</td>
<td>Bye laws, health and safety, licenses for caravan sites, fire precautions, trading standards, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>Refuse collection and disposal, coastal protection, water quality, footpath maintenance, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: Local authority functions in a typical seaside resort (see also Association of District Councils, 1988, and Swarbrooke, 1993)

reconstructed manufacturing towns of Bradford and Wigan (to name but two), is an expression of the importance attached to the industry’s ability to create new (cost-effective) job opportunities, improve the quality of life for visitors and residents alike, act as a catalyst for commercial investment, and ultimately lead to increased revenues from property taxes. Indeed, in a survey of local councillors’ attitudes towards tourism conducted by Wanhil (1987), of the six positive and six negative attributes tested, respondents generally agreed with five favourable statements (“provides local jobs”, “brings money to the area”, “buildings, parks, attractions better preserved”, “more shops and local facilities” and “adds atmosphere”),

37
and only two unfavourable statements ("damages the environment" and "crowding on streets and in shops").

It should also be noted that the tourism industry within most British seaside destinations is dominated by the small business culture with few, if any, major enterprises (Shaw and Williams, 1997b). This is especially true of the accommodation sector, which contains a multiplicity of modest, family-run concerns, often initiated for emotional, rather than sound business, reasons (see Stallibrass, 1980, on Scarborough, and Shaw et al, 1987, on Cornwall). Therefore, the local authority has an important role as co-ordinator of these disparate, and sometimes competing, private sector interests, in those situations where the development and promotion of the destination calls for a unified and comprehensive input from the private sector.

Although the reasons why local authorities exercise the power to develop and manage tourism in their localities may now seem obvious, their engagement with the industry is contentious. This is because their primary concern is the economic and social well-being of their resident population, not visitors, a fact that has caused much antagonism in those places where the local authority is seen to spend significant sums of money (raised from local taxes) on tourist amenities and marketing. That said, past experience would appear to suggest the effectiveness of what Cooke (1989) refers to as ‘municipal capitalism’ in promoting resort economies and, in any case, the majority of services provided for tourists are also consumed by residents. Linked to this is the ‘devalorisation of capital’ (Damette, 1980), whereby the cost of production for any given project is partly met by state subsidy. By providing basic infrastructure and/or a flagship development(s), the public sector attempts to create an environment attractive to investors and tourists, thus ‘levering-in’ private monies. Apart from
generating employment opportunities for local people (and reducing the amount paid out in social security), this should lead to inflated land values and a larger rate base, the fulfilment of political objectives (with enhanced prospects of re-election), and a chance to reach a momentum of development that can be sustained without further recourse to the public purse. In practice, it is a strategy that has worked well in some localities (notably areas once associated with manufacturing), but not in others (Rhyl, the case study selected for this thesis, being a prime example).

Unfortunately, the introduction of the Community Charge in 1990, later replaced by the Council Tax, and the strict capping of local authority expenditure by central government, has meant that district councils and unitary authorities have been forced into making savings, with discretionary functions such as leisure and tourism particularly vulnerable to spending cuts (Agarwal, 1997a). Their direct involvement in the provision of tourism facilities and services was also challenged by the introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), under the Local Government Act (1988). This required councils to contract-out manual, construction-related and corporate services, usually to the lowest bidder, although the authority in question was allowed to set up its own Direct Services Organisation (DSO) to bid for contracts. The resultant erosion of power and responsibility has seen the local state assume an ‘enabling’ role, with more functions undertaken in partnership with the private sector.

A “veritable orgy of institutional change” (Cullingworth and Nadin, 1997: p.302), over the course of the late twentieth century, has made the task of describing the post-war geography of local government in England and Wales a complicated one. The structure in place today is markedly different from that which existed in the 1950s, due to two major reorganisations imposed by the Local Government Acts of 1972 and 1992, and the Local Government
(Wales) Act of 1994. The first, implemented in April 1974, saw a patchwork of county, county borough, urban district and rural district councils replaced with a two-tier system of county and district councils (the implications of this for the British seaside resort were discussed in Section 2.2). This arrangement remained largely unchanged until the latest phase of reorganisation in 1996 (initiated by the above-mentioned acts of 1992 and 1994), resulting in the piecemeal introduction of single-tier unitary authorities in England, with the shire counties retaining the existing two-tier system (albeit without any involvement in those former districts that once fell within their jurisdiction but were now to be administered by a unitary authority), and the replacement of all county and district councils in Wales with (rural) counties and (urban) county boroughs.

From the discussion so far, it should be obvious that local authorities interface with the tourism industry in many different ways, some directly (e.g. the provision of tourist information), some indirectly (e.g. refuse disposal). However, two functions warrant detailed discussion – 'development planning and control' (see below) and 'place promotion' (see Section 2.5). In respect of the former, to understand the process, one must first understand the phenomenon. The term 'development' has been statutorily defined by the Town and Country Planning Act (1990) as “the carrying out of building, engineering, mining or other operations in, on, over, or under land, or the making of any material change in the use of any buildings or other land” (cited in Allinson and Claydon, 1996: p.43), the first part of which refers to those activities which significantly transform the physical environment (e.g. the construction of a new tourist attraction or hotel), and the second to any alteration to the function or purpose of the land or building in question (e.g. the conversion of a cafeteria or restaurant into an amusement arcade).
There is a tradition in this country whereby development proposals of either category mentioned above are assessed, by district councils (and now unitary authorities), against (occasionally conflicting) political and technical considerations, in other words, the likely contribution of the scheme to the local economy and community vis-à-vis issues of location, scale and aesthetics. This was established in the years immediately following the conclusion of the Second World War when Britain, like many other Western European nations, “instituted a system of planning legislation, regulations and working procedures, operated by a rapidly increasing professionalised bureaucracy” (Ashworth and Voogd, 1994: p.40). The Town and Country Planning Act (1947) gave county and county borough councils the power to grant or refuse planning permission for proposed developments within their administrative boundaries (hereafter referred to as ‘development control’), although this responsibility was, more often than not, delegated to the county districts. Development control was guided by the ‘development plan’, a written statement of a county or county borough’s planning intentions for the next twenty years, with an Ordnance Survey base map of the area indicating where specific policies were to be enforced. This plan-led development regime worked well in the immediate post-war years of austerity and reconstruction, but floundered in the face of very different circumstances in the 1960s, notably rising incomes, a dramatic increase in car ownership, and the so-called ‘baby boom’. An obsession with detail and procedure had made it slow to respond to the market and the needs of local people, and so reformers set about devising a more flexible and expedient system, which gave due consideration to strategic, as well as tactical, issues. This was enacted by the Town and Country Planning Act (1968), which envisaged a single-tier unitary authority carrying out both strategic (subsequently referred to as ‘structure’) and tactical (‘local’) planning. However, the aforementioned Local Government Act (1972) divided these functions between county and district councils, so that the former became responsible for ‘structure planning’ (the formulation of broad planning
policies and strategies, which influenced the general direction of development across the county), and the latter for ‘local planning’ (the drawing up of detailed, site-specific guidance on the granting of development rights). Naturally, such bureaucracy amounted to little without some method of enforcement, hence district councils were given the power to reverse any development for which permission was not sought or granted, even to the point of enforcing developers to demolish a recently constructed building.

Although the significance of development planning and control (a far more thorough account of which may be found in Cullingworth and Nadin, 1997, and Rydin, 1998) to the character and economy of a tourist destination is without question (see also Davidson and Maitland, 1997: ch.6; Grant et al, 1997), one must remember that it is impotent in the absence of sufficient development pressure from the private sector. Furthermore, the development planning process, so crucial to the success of any destination, does not favour the short-term, flexible responses to market conditions necessary to maintain competitiveness, given the length of time required to prepare local and structure plans, and the insistence upon ten and fifteen year horizons, respectively (albeit with provision for periodic review and amendment). Finally, the tendency of land use planning is to regulate, and react to, development proposals, as opposed to promoting them, which may constrain a local authority’s ability to be proactive when dealing with changing market circumstances (Lunn and Whitehead, 1996). These shortcomings might explain the emergence of ‘Urban Development Corporations’, ‘Enterprise Zones’ and ‘Tourism Development Action Programmes’, in the 1980s and 1990s, which brought a new brand of ‘entrepreneurial planning’ to otherwise stagnant areas (Davidson and Maitland, 1997), notwithstanding the claims that this was an orchestrated attempt to replace a planning system based on democratic principles with one that privileged market forces above all other concerns. Running alongside this was a shift in emphasis from ‘blueprint planning’
to ‘place promotion’ (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990), a theme that is taken up in the next section of this literature review.

2.5 Selling the seaside – an exercise in place promotion

The phenomenon of ‘place’ may be conceptualised in a number of ways: (i) as a specific location, with ‘x’ and ‘y’ co-ordinates; (ii) as an assemblage of indigenous characteristics, such as climate, topography, flora and fauna, housing, commercial and industrial development and tourist attractions; (iii) as an abstract idea or mental image, and; (iv) as a commodity that can be packaged and sold for (tourist) consumption (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Barke and Harrop, 1994). Place promotion, defined as “the conscious use of publicity and marketing to communicate selective images of specific geographic localities or areas to a target audience” (Ward and Gold, 1994: p.2), operates across all of these categories. In one respect, it serves to remind us of the place’s existence and where it might be found. However, items which fall outside of the above definition also perform this function (e.g. maps, news stories) and, in any case, place promotion is much more than mere ‘signposting’. It identifies those attributes that are distinctive or unique to the place in question, forcing the observer to make comparisons with the more familiar, and immediate, surroundings of ‘work, rest and play’ (although some might say postmodernism renders this dichotomy obsolete). Those places that can be translated into strong, extraordinary images, evoking powerful emotional reactions, are most likely to be perceived as significant and memorable. However, some places are associated with ‘good’ things (e.g. beauty, restfulness, excitement or spirituality), others with ‘bad’ (e.g. pollution, violence, deprivation or boredom). Specifically, place promoters are interested in fostering a ‘sense of place’ which will encourage, rather than deter, visitation and investment, to the point of selectively filtering-out, under- emphasising, or reinterpreting negative place
images, in their advertising and publicity endeavours. Therefore, to say that place promotion conveys ‘information’ or ‘knowledge’ implies an objectivity that, patently, does not exist. Instead, promoters impart myths, or partial truths, of a place, designed to appeal to the tastes of the desired target market(s). Although this has been going on for some time (see below), its evolution from an informal practice to a systematic feature of public policy has given rise to the belief that it is a thoroughly modern activity. Since the 1980s, place promotion has been practised by virtually all settlements of any significance, even those of traditionally modest appeal. This is because, in our contemporary post-Fordist economy, economic specialisation by region (e.g. coal mining in the South Wales valleys) has given way to a “geography of corporate function” (Allen and Massey, 1988). Secondary and tertiary industries are now attracted to areas offering cheap, efficient, non-unionised labour and financial incentives. So, those places adversely affected by de-industrialisation (i.e. virtually everywhere), compete for this footloose capital by trading themselves as commodities to all sorts of new consumers (e.g. some towns and cities are promoted as centres of technological innovation, others as short-break destinations for tourists interested in industrial heritage). Correspondingly, place promotion is no longer preoccupied with advertising and publicity but now includes “subsidies, tax breaks of various kinds, ‘flagship’ development projects, flamboyant architectural and urban design statements, trade fairs, cultural and sporting spectacles, heritage, public art and much else besides” (Ward, 1998: p.1).

Barke and Harrop (1994) make an important distinction between a place’s ‘identity’ (what it is actually like), and its ‘image’ (how it is perceived by people external to that place). Images of a tourism destination strongly influence the behaviour of potential visitors and investors, whether they are accurate or not. That said, one would expect images derived from first-hand experience to bear a greater resemblance to the place in question than those formed in absence
of contact. Gunn (1972) subdivides the latter into ‘organic’ and ‘induced’ images, the former resulting from lifelong socialisation processes (the information passed on by friends and relatives, teachers, the mass media, the church, textbooks, etc.), and the latter invoked by the promotional efforts of the tourism industry. Organic imagery is usually considered to be more credible, induced imagery more utopian, although both are examples of discourse – a set of ideologically motivated ‘textual’ arrangements which seek to influence people to think and act in certain ways. This is how institutions, “a relatively stable set of social arrangements and relationships” (Thwaites et al, 1994: p.132), reproduce themselves in society.

Ward (1998) identifies, and attempts to synthesise, three explanatory approaches to place promotion. The ‘marketing approach’ is concerned with the business of place promotion, and varies by degree of pragmatism between different authors. For instance, Heath and Wall (1992) and Kotler et al (1993) reduce the art of promoting places to exemplars of best practice, as if these could be applied to any place at any time and be guaranteed of success. Alternatively, Ashworth and Voogd (1990), although still prescriptive in their treatment of the topic, do at least consider some of the conceptual difficulties that underlie the practice of place promotion. For instance, places consist of many products that are consumed by a variety of different people, a complex situation that does not sit well with the marketing ethos of developing, pricing, distributing and promoting a clearly defined and uniform product to a readily identifiable and measurable target market. The ‘public policy approach’ is concerned with the use of place promotion by municipal authorities to stimulate economic development within their localities. It is paradoxical that a method that embraces capitalist principles of maximising sales volume through attaining competitive advantage is being practised by an institution noted for its belief in the public good and the inadequacy of market forces in achieving a fair and equal distribution of income. However, the two are reconciled, both in the
concept of 'social marketing' (Kotler and Zaltman, 1971), and a wider political agenda operating throughout the 1980s and early 1990s (i.e. Thatcherism and Reganism), whereby local government was encouraged to adapt to market forces rather than meddle with them. Hence, place promotion by municipal authorities on both sides of the Atlantic, has become an accepted means of rising to the challenges of a post-Fordist economy. This has attracted considerable coverage in the academic literature (see Ashworth and Goodall, 1990; Ashworth and Voogd, 1990; Paddison, 1993), particularly in respect of urban tourism (Law, 1993; Page, 1995) and the (re)imaging of cities in conjunction with mega-events (Hall, 1994: ch.6). Finally, a ‘critical approach’ has emerged, which instead of viewing the advertising and publicity messages of place promoters in isolation, considers them in their wider sociocultural context. This is evident in studies of the discourse of advertising (Cook, 1992; O’Barr, 1994), which are less interested in the advert itself, than in what it tells us of the selling process (the ‘primary discourse’) and the ideological and cultural tenets that are represented by it (the ‘secondary discourse’). A number of contemporary works have focussed upon the last of these concerns, such as Morgan and Pritchard’s (1998) study of the power relations that lie behind the apparently innocent façade of tourism imagery, and Dann’s (1996a) perspective on the linguistic properties of tourism discourse.

Until recently, a chronicle of place promotion’s long history was conspicuous by its absence, at least until the publication of Ward’s (1993) ‘Selling Places’, which deals with the promotion of frontier lands in nineteenth century North America, health resorts and watering places, suburban housing, industrial towns and post-industrial cities. By and large, this has been used to inform the following account of seaside resort promotion since the late nineteenth century, with one or two other references included where appropriate.
In the early years of their existence as tourist destinations, seaside resorts were promoted by a number of different vehicles, including the works of artists and writers, guidebooks, medical treaties and word of mouth. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the railway companies were promoting day excursions for the working classes, using posters, newspaper advertisements and handbills, although these lacked sophistication and information on the destination’s qualities. Local authorities first became involved in place promotion when, in 1879, Blackpool succeeded in attaining powers to advertise from the rates, levying a local tax of two (old) pence for the production of illustrated brochures and posters, to be sold/displayed at railway stations. Permission was refused for other resorts to do the same, sparking a conflict between local and central government which was not resolved until the Health and Pleasure Resorts Act (1921). Meanwhile, in 1886, the Compagnie de l’Ouest, which provided railway services connecting Paris with Brittany and Normandy, became the first railway company to commission a lithograph colour poster, a device which was to see extensive use in Britain throughout the early years of the twentieth century.

The restrictions placed upon local authorities, in respect of advertising, meant that the railway companies took the lead role in promoting coastal regions, and subsequently individual resorts, from the 1890s to the outbreak of war in 1914, using a combination of guidebooks and posters. The first railway posters lacked the imagination and potency of later efforts, an obsession with detail reducing them to “a confused jumble of small vistas of resorts with uninspired scenes of piers, promenades, bandstands and hotels” (Towner, 1996: p.215). In contrast, John Hassall’s famous depiction of a jolly fisherman, in a 1908 poster promoting the ‘bracing’ qualities of Skegness, raised this medium to the status of an art form, and signified the beginning of a more subtle approach to place promotion that sought to evoke an emotional, rather than rational, response. From that point onwards, images of simple seaside
pleasures and practices, such as people strolling along the promenade, children playing on the beach or fishermen tending to their nets, progressively took the place of 'bricks and mortar' (see also Shackleton, 1976). Over time, the concepts used in these posters changed in accordance with fashion. For instance, the word 'bracing', which alluded to the notion of holidaymaking as a means of physical and mental renewal, was progressively replaced with 'sunny' in the slogans and copy of resort promoters, from the 1920s onwards, conveniently ignoring the capricious nature of the British climate.

As a consequence of the freedoms permitted by the Health and Pleasure Resorts Act (1921), whereby resorts could finance advertising with revenues derived from the hire of deckchairs, beach tents and bathing machines, and admission charges to municipal attractions (Yates, 1989), local authorities became more involved in place promotion, initially in conjunction with the railway companies but later by themselves. This gradual drift apart was largely the product of creative differences between the two parties (particularly in the case of the 'lesser' resorts, which resented the railway's lack of interest in promoting them as individual destinations), a reduction in the railway companies' contributions to advertising budgets, and the growing number of visitors arriving by motor coach. Ultimately, co-operation ended in the early 1960s, when British Railways pulled out of joint advertising initiatives with the resorts who, from then on, had to pay the 'going rate' to display their posters at railway stations (Morgan, 1997, p.95). The flagship of a resort's promotional efforts became the annual holiday guide (later referred to as the 'municipal brochure'), which accounted for the lion's share of marketing expenditure and remains a popular tool to this day. This, too, has evolved from an authoritative and lengthy (written) treaty on almost every feature of the resort experience (e.g. tourist attractions, sunshine hours, schools, local rates, market days), to a more obscure and subtle (visual) impression of the resort's charms (Ward and Gold, 1994).
As has been demonstrated, the promotion of seaside resorts was, and still is, a local concern. However, recognising that the marketing efforts of district councils were being impeded by restrictions placed upon local government expenditure, since the mid 1980s, the national tourist boards have launched a number of initiatives, in the 1990s, designed to raise the profile of the seaside. The best known of these was the ETB’s ‘Discover the English Seaside’ campaign, to which it committed in excess of 25 per cent of its marketing budget for 1991/92. In conjunction with the regional tourist boards, thirty-five individual resorts, and the private sector, it not only promoted the seaside product to potential consumers, through the media of television and direct response advertising, but also sought to encourage confidence in the seaside amongst would-be investors (Travis, 1992). It was significant for bringing together resorts that were used to competing against each other for the tourist pound, such rivalry being the norm since increased motor transport heralded the arrival of multi-centre holidays and greater ‘wandering’ beyond resort boundaries (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999).

What is interesting, with regards to the recent history of many British seaside resorts, is the seemingly widening gap between identity and (induced) image, as the demand and supply-side issues, outlined earlier, challenge the ability of promoters to be truthful and informative when selling their resort to potential tourists. Specifically, they face three dilemmas (Ashworth and Voogd, 1990: pp.111-115). Firstly, do they communicate as much factual information about their place as is possible, so as to address any number of potential enquiries, or do they limit the content of their promotional literature to imprecise, but colourful, eye-catching illustrations and clever slogans, which might carry a greater impact? Secondly, should their promotional endeavours be accurate and transparent, or would they be better off exaggerating the value of their place product with a selection of carefully chosen metaphors? Finally, do they play to the recognised strengths of their place, or attempt to
nullify its perceived weaknesses at the risk of reminding would-be consumers of what they are? The answers, of course, lie with the places being promoted, those who promote them and, from a historical perspective, the circumstances in which these decisions were made. On this note, one would imagine that those responsible for selling the seaside in the 1950s would choose the first option in response to each of the above questions, whereas their successors in the 1990s might consistently opt for the second. However, the danger facing contemporary place promoters is that incomplete, biased and defensive images of a destination could lead to dissatisfaction for those tourists who choose to visit on the strength of them, only to find that what exists is markedly different or inferior to what was promised.

2.6 Theories of resort transformation

Much has been written, and several models devised, in an attempt to understand the dynamic nature of resort development. Foremost among these is Butler’s (1980) ‘Tourist Area Life Cycle’ (Figure 2.4.1), which assumes that visitor numbers at a destination follow an ‘S-shaped’ pattern similar to that of the ‘Product Life Cycle’ in classical marketing theory (i.e. after a product is launched onto the marketplace, sales increase, reach a peak, and then decline, to the point where, unless something can be done to resurrect consumer interest, the product is likely to be withdrawn from sale). In applying this ‘birth to death’ cycle to tourist destinations, Butler identifies a number of distinct stages:

- Exploration. The unspoilt qualities of the physical and cultural environments attract the first (independent) visitors to the would-be destination, although numbers are low due to a lack of accommodation, poor amenities and limited infrastructure.
> Involvement. Recognising the benefits likely to accrue from heightened visitor interest, local entrepreneurs address the lack of tourist facilities and begin promoting the area to outsiders. Access is improved and seasonal fluctuations in visitation are established.

> Development. Visitor levels rise rapidly, putting strain upon the destination’s resources. The negative impacts of accelerated tourism development begin to compromise the natural appeal of the area. Economic influence shifts from local traders to external interests.

> Consolidation. Growth rates slow down, but the total number of visitors is still increasing. Contrived, rather than natural, attractions largely account for the destination’s product position. Geographically speaking, the destination is fully developed.

> Stagnation. The destination is perceived to be unfashionable and tourist arrivals peak. Environmental degradation becomes painfully obvious and a deterrent to potential visitors.

> Decline. Visitor trips, nights and expenditure levels fall, attractions are closed to the public, and accommodation stock is reduced by demolition and conversion to non-tourism uses. The destination loses its appeal as a holiday resort.
The ‘Tourist Area Life Cycle’ is said to end in one of three ways: (i) ‘retrenchment’; (ii) ‘survival’, or; (iii) ‘role change’ (Goodall, 1992: p.9). In the case of (ii) or (iii), an attempt is made to develop new products, markets and channels of distribution, for the (one-time) destination. Option (i) is more common in those places where tourism is not the dominant industry.

Butler’s life cycle theory has been the basis of a number of studies with the British seaside as their focus (Cooper and Jackson, 1989; Cooper, 1997a; Agarwal, 1997b; Thornton, 1997), where it has been shown to be empirically relevant, and of assistance to an understanding of strategic decision making by resort authorities. However, it has also incurred a great deal of criticism, aimed at the shape of the curve (which may vary according to a plethora of demand and supply-side factors, including visitor type, development velocity, ease of access, the level of state involvement and competition for the tourist pound), the apparent abruptness of the transition from one stage to another, and the fact that some of a destination’s constituent products may exhibit a direction and rate of development at odds with the overall picture. Most contentious, is the claim that the life cycle may be used as a ‘prescriptive’ tool, given its assumptions about the homogeneity of demand and the exceeding of carrying capacity, not to mention the inability to isolate causal factors (many of which are unpredictable anyway), the lack of accurate long-term statistical information on visitor arrivals at most traditional tourist destinations (which could be used to calibrate the model with individual cases), and the likelihood that a resort’s position along the cycle may only be ascertained in retrospect. In fairness, this was not originally intended by Butler. The theory is better suited to historical narrative and analysis, and it is in this respect that it provides an appropriate context in which to study the rise and fall of British coastal resorts.
An alternative life cycle is proposed by Wolfe (1983), who suggests that, in the formative years of a destination's development, the environmental and economic impacts of tourism are both, on balance, positive. However, the net effect of the former, and then the latter, eventually becomes negative, as excessive visitor numbers give rise to environmental degradation, revenues are leaked to organisations outside of the local economy, and operating costs spiral within the destination. This rather pessimistic trajectory, when plotted, is known as the ‘Ellis Curve’ (Figure 2.4.2).

In contrast to the life cycles of Butler (1980) and Wolfe (1983), Gormsen’s (1981) model of the ‘spatio-temporal development of international seaside tourism’ (Figure 2.5) is specific to coastal resorts. Taking a European perspective, it illustrates the evolving supply of tourist accommodation across four particular destination areas or ‘peripheries’ (there are clear links here with the work of Turner and Ash, 1975), namely the resorts on both sides of the English Channel, as well as those of the Baltic (‘Periphery I’), the coasts of southern Europe (‘Periphery II’), the North African coastline and the Balearic and Canary Islands (‘Periphery III’), and destinations in West Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific and Indian Oceans, South East Asia and South America (‘Periphery IV’). Furthermore, key dates are provided to mark the various stages of development identified by the model, starting with 1800 (and the discovery of seawater bathing in Northern Europe) and concluding with 1980 (at a time when increasing numbers of tourists were switching from domestic to overseas destinations), and columns depicting the extent of regional involvement in tourism development (‘A’) and the participation of the different social classes in seaside holidays (‘B’) are included to the left of the bars representing the quantity and range of tourist accommodation. Of the various developments described by the model, the notion of the guest house as a uniquely European phenomenon, the gradual passage from serviced to self-catering accommodation and the
Changes in the provision of seaside accommodation also feature in the eight-stage model proposed by R.A. Smith (1991), which charts the morphological, environmental, economic, social and cultural development of a hypothetical coastal destination from ‘first settlement’ to ‘city resort’ (Figure 2.6). Based upon case studies drawn from the Asia-Pacific region, the premise of the model is that early resort growth occurs in a linear fashion along the shoreline (initially comprised of second homes but later tourist accommodation and commerce), before expanding inland with the formation of a separate central business district. This is broadly similar to the work of Barrett (1958), whose blueprint of the typical English and Welsh
Stage 1
PRE-TOURISM DATUM
No tourism
Settlement in some cases

Stage 2
SECOND HOMES
First tourism development
Low budget tourism
Second homes along beach
Roads defined
Strip development

Stage 3
FIRST HOTEL
Visitor access improved
First hotel opens
Ad hoc development
High-budget visitors
Jobs in tourism

Stage 4
RESORT ESTABLISHED
More hotels
Strip development intensified
Some houses displaced
Residential expansion
Hotel jobs dominate

Stage 5
BUSINESS AREA ESTABLISHED
More accommodation
Visitor type broadens
Non-hotels business growth
Tourism dominates
Large immigrant workforce
Cultural disruption
Beach congestion and pollution
Ambience deteriorates

Stage 6
INLAND HOTELS
Hotel away from beach
Rapid residential growth
Business district consolidated
Flood and erosion damage potential
Tourism culture dominates
Traditional patterns obliterated
Entrepreneurs drive development
Government master plan

Stage 7
TRANSFORMATION
Urbanized resort
Rehabilitation of natural ambience
Accommodation structural change
Visitors and expenditures change
Resort government fails

Stage 8
CITY RESORT
Fully urbanized
Alternative circulation
Distinct recreational/commercial business districts
Lateral resort spread
Serious pollution
Political power to higher government

Figure 2.6: The Beach Resort Model – summary of stages one to eight (redrawn from R.A. Smith, 1991)
seaside resort portrayed an urban area in which most recreational activity was concentrated along the promenade (a prime location for more exclusive hotels, theatres, gift shops and members of the catering and licensed trades), behind which lay a nucleus of non tourism-specific businesses and, further afield, small guest houses and the homes of the residential population (see Figure 2.7). Clear changes to architectural and social arrangements were noted as one moved inland, sustained by differential land values (the highest being found nearest the sea and along the main access route(s) connecting the resort with its hinterland), and the perceived utility of the sea view and beach environment.

Few would deny that these patterns are replicated in a significant number of resorts, both within the United Kingdom and overseas. Indeed, they largely correlate with those observed in Rhyl, the case study for this thesis (see Section 4.1). However, neither model described above sufficiently attends to the morphology, and other circumstances, of decline within tourism-dependent destinations. The resorts that R.A. Smith (1991) describes are either still prosperous or possess suitably diverse economies. Meanwhile, Barrett (1958) was writing at a time when the British seaside was enjoying a post-war ‘Indian Summer’, having profited from the establishment of holidays with pay. Moreover, the influence of the motor car was still relatively benign, television had yet to assimilate the majority of households and competition from other mass tourism destinations was insignificant. In any case, the pattern of evolution suggested by Smith is based upon relatively young resorts, developed on the back of the recent boom in international mass tourism, whereas Barrett didn’t actually deal with the subject of change at all – his was a static model!

Essentially, what problematises the use of all these theories as a framework for the analysis of cultural change and resort decline, is the notion that destinations evolve in a logical and
consistent manner, particularly Butler (1980) who implies that stagnation and decline is an inevitable outcome of earlier growth and prosperity. Postmodernity, as the collection of political, economic, environmental, demographic, technological and cultural changes that have so affected tourism flows, sights and practices over the last two decades, is not ‘evolutionary’ but ‘revolutionary’ (Butler, 1994), and thus may be thought of as a new and unpredictable epoch, rather than the mere continuation of established trends and processes.

Our final model not only accommodates the above argument, but also pinpoints those institutions responsible for recent alterations to the seaside resort product. Known as the ‘Tourism Transformations Model’ (Figure 2.8), it was developed by the Centre for Recreation and Tourism Studies of Wageningen Agricultural University, and published by Dietvorst and Ashworth (1995). It illustrates how producers and consumers, either intentionally or unconsciously, alter the material and symbolic properties of the original tourism resource (e.g.
a townscape, country park, individual attraction or the host population’s ‘genre de vie’),
incorporating the concepts of acceleration, (re)localisation versus globalisation and
visualisation of culture, introduced earlier in this chapter. Specifically, four separate – but
interrelated – transformations are identified:

- **Material Transformations by Producers.** The construction of tourist facilities, provision of
  transport systems, land use planning, environmental enhancement and the preservation of
  historic monuments, are but a few examples of producer intervention in the physical
  composition of the tourist resource. Relevant agents of production are the local state,
  businesses, private organisations and the community.

- **Symbolic Transformations by Producers.** As mentioned earlier, producers attempt to turn
  the ‘reality’ of place identity into the ‘illusion’ of place image, by depicting elements of
  the tourist resource that are known to appeal to visitors, in such a way as to create a
desired product position (e.g. the destination as attractive, entertaining, exciting, historic, romantic, unique, or any combination thereof). Resorts, as presented in holiday brochures and other promotional media, thus become symbolically purged of everything that might deter the would-be visitor, and are reduced to a collection of favoured sights and visual clichés (with accompanying captions and eloquent narrative), which become markers for the destination (MacCannell, 1989a; orig. 1976). The use of the Eiffel Tower or a picture of a couple strolling arm-in-arm along the River Seine as representative of Paris, and the choice of Big Ben rather than Tower Hamlets to signify London, are obvious examples of this practice. Intermediaries (i.e. tour operators and travel agencies) are worth mentioning at this juncture, as they do much to develop and sustain an image of a particular place, through the promotion and sale of package tours and ancillary services (although they have little influence over its material characteristics).

- **Symbolic Transformations by Consumers.** Upon arriving at a destination, a visitor may interpret that place in a number of different ways (not always in the manner intended by producers), depending upon their personality, the presence (or absence) of other people, and their motivation(s) for being there. However, in all likelihood, some kind of consensus will already exist between different visitors since, with few exceptions, they will have been previously exposed to markers and opinions of the destination through brochures, travel features within the newspapers, television holiday programmes and the recommendations of others. Consumers may also symbolically transform the destination by sending postcards to friends and relatives, and verbally recounting their holiday experiences after returning home.

- **Material Transformations by Consumers.** Tourist places are not only centres of consumption, they are also consumed, both 'visually' (as in sightseeing) and 'literally' (Urry, 1995). In this latter respect, the tourist resource is depleted with intensive use, as
with the erosion of public footpaths, the damage sustained by popular heritage attractions (e.g. Stonehenge), and the reduction in air quality that accompanies the customary bank-holiday traffic jam. One may therefore conclude that with the success of a destination lie the roots of its destruction, a point made in the earlier discussion of the Tourist Area Life Cycle.

It is the author’s belief that this model is a more satisfactory way of seeing the changes taking place within a particular seaside resort over the latter half of the twentieth century, and complements the objectives set for the research project, as it: (i) brings attention to bear upon recent socio-cultural change as an agency in the transformation of the tourist resource (in this case, Rhyl); (ii) locates the involvement of the local authority, as a key player in determining the substance and expression of the resort product, and; (iii) makes a distinction between the tourist resource as it is in reality, and as selectively encoded and transmitted for the purposes of promotion. Hence, Dietvorst and Ashworth’s prophecy is fulfilled, that “each reader...is in a position to substitute quite different illustrative cases, thus extending our model into fields unimagined by us” (1995: p.12). However, there is scope to modify the model so that it might better fit the findings reported in this thesis (this, indeed, is the study’s fourth, and final, objective – see Section 1.2.2).
3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter attempts to explain and defend the manner in which the study’s objectives were substantiated, beginning with a positioning statement justifying the application of textual analysis (in its various guises) to a case study of Rhyl (and the period 1951 to 1996). It then discusses the competing philosophies of positivism, constructivism and critical realism (and the reasons why this study is at odds with the first two, but consistent with the third), before explaining the theory behind the chosen analytical techniques (i.e. ‘iconography’, ‘semiotics’ and ‘tracking’) and their respective operational procedures.

3.2 Positioning statement

The subject of ‘tourism studies’ can be said to have reached a turning point in its short, but fertile, history. The theoretical premises outlined earlier have led to a critique of dominant, positivist methodologies, which use general laws, theories and classificatory systems to explain the dynamics of tourism production and consumption, thereby reducing the real world to a series of assumptions and ‘two-dimensional’ concepts. Furthermore, if (as implied in the previous chapter) tourism and cultural practices have become indistinguishable from one another (cf. de-differentiation), then it follows that methods used in the study of culture should be equally applicable to certain types of tourism research. Thus, in challenging the ability and credibility of those approaches to representing reality, traditionally adopted by the social sciences, the stage is set for a new research agenda, as proposed by Urry (1994):
this implies rather different methods of social research from those customary within the tourism field. Tourism research should involve the examination of texts, not only written texts but also maps, landscapes, paintings, films, townscapes, TV programmes, brochures, and so on. Such texts should, moreover, not be viewed as simple representations of the ‘real world’ — given that what tourists consume are signs so what is mainly involved in tourism research are processes of cultural interpretation...Thus, social research significantly consists of interpreting texts, through various mainly qualitative techniques, to identify the discursive structures which give rise to and sustain, albeit temporarily, a given tourist site.

(pp.237-238)

‘Textual analysis’, first proposed by Ricoeur (1971), is an ‘umbrella’ term for a variety of analytical techniques that treat cultural phenomena as analogous to written texts. Conventionally, to speak of a ‘text’ is to make reference to writing in its various forms (e.g. a book, a newspaper), but textual analysts also consider “anything that generates meaning through signifying practices” (Barker, 2000: p.393) to be a text (e.g. clothes, dance, and sport). As a philosophy, it heavily influenced the methodological choices made by the author, which are described in detail later in this chapter. Before explaining why this was so, it is worth specifying the three prominent approaches to textual analysis, namely:

- **Texts as signs.** This approach is chiefly concerned with how the meanings produced by texts derive from the manner in which their constituent signs are arranged, and the cultural codes (or rules) that govern such arrangements. Inquiries of this nature are most readily accomplished through the use of semiotics, “an analytic technique, not a data-gathering technique...that seeks to understand how signs perform or convey meaning in context” (Manning, 1987).

- **Texts as narratives.** Texts, when read over time, function as stories or narratives. Two features of a narrative, defined as “an ordered sequential account which makes claims to be a record of events” (Barker, 2000: p.31), invite analysis, specifically: (i) ‘turning points’, where an existing equilibrium is disrupted and the ensuing ‘turbulence’ leads to
the establishment of a new equilibrium, and; (ii) 'genre', a set of stylistic conventions (or formula) that regulates the narrative process (e.g. a 'soap opera', a 'tabloid newspaper').

Texts as myths. This approach (which goes by the name of 'deconstructionism') involves taking apart a text, with a view to exposing its underlying, but unacknowledged, assumptions. It seeks to unravel the hierarchical dichotomies that prevail Western philosophy (e.g. male/female, white/black, nature/culture) and is used to debunk a text's truth claims, which are based upon the inclusion/elevation of one half of a given dichotomy, and the exclusion/devaluation of the other.

According to Urry (1994), tourist practices are related to culture in four possible ways, an argument that underpins the use of textual analysis (in its broadest sense) to achieve the overall aim of this study:

first, tourist practices and culture develop in opposite directions; second...tourist practices are separate from culture but reflect how it changes in a fairly direct fashion; third...tourist practices lead cultural changes and provide a good index of its future transformations; and finally...tourist practices simply are cultural, that is, they comprise signs, images, texts and discourse.

(p.233, emphasis his)

He suggests a sequence for these relationships, relevant to Britain and parts of northern Europe. During the nineteenth century, tourism and culture were considered to be the antithesis of one another, a class-based distinction reinforced by the spatial separation of bourgeois and popular culture into the concert hall, museum and art gallery, on the one hand, and the seaside resort, on the other. Subsequently, this relationship gave way to one of increasing synchrony, then convergence. Hence, in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, tourist practices began to emulate changes to culture as a whole (as with the development of mass tourism, which paralleled that of mass culture), and some even preceded cultural change (e.g. the 'postmodern' spaces of Disneyland and Bondi Beach). Finally, in the
late twentieth century, the distinction between tourism and culture was lost, on account of de-
differentiation (a characteristic feature of postmodernism – see Section 2.3).

Hence, if tourist practices reflect cultural change, and texts such as those advocated for
analysis by Urry (see above) reflect tourist practices, it follows that by analysing the third
over a sufficient period of time, it is possible to determine the nature of any cause and effect
relationships that exist between the second and the first. Specifically, the author was
interested in the influence of those late twentieth century cultural transformations described
by Urry (1990, 1994) and Rojek (1995), upon Rhyl and the tourist practices associated with it
(in this study, these ‘practices’ are taken to include the actions of those that ‘produced’ the
‘Rhyl experience’, as well as those that ‘consumed’ it), as manifest in particular texts.
Accordingly, three distinct methods of textual analysis were applied to three texts (each of
which was analysed longitudinally, that is, over the period 1951 to 1996), to produce the
following methodological components:

1. An iconographic analysis of pertinent elements of Rhyl’s townscape;
2. A semiotic analysis of the front covers and editorial content of municipal brochures,
   published for the purposes of promoting Rhyl as a holiday destination;
3. The use of tracking, a method of evaluating records with precedents in investigative
   journalism, to analyse the minutes of those committee and sub-committee meetings of
   Rhyl’s local authority in which decisions critical to the post-war development and
   promotion of the resort were made.

The information salient to these ‘components’ is summarised in Table 3.1, the contents of
which are explained in detail throughout the rest of this chapter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method:</th>
<th>Iconography</th>
<th>Semiotics</th>
<th>Tracking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text:</td>
<td>Townscape</td>
<td>Municipal brochure</td>
<td>Council minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant textual approach:</td>
<td>Text as sign</td>
<td>Text as sign</td>
<td>Text as narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedure(s):</td>
<td>A reading of those features of Rhyd's townscap, as text, that were: 1. deemed to be symbolic of the town's identity as a tourist destination 2. introduced, significantly altered or removed during the period 1951-1996; 3. located within established core visitor areas</td>
<td>The application of semiotic principles and techniques to the front covers and editorial content of brochures published for the purpose of promoting Rhyl as a holiday destination, by the resort's local authority. Two distinct but complementary approaches: Written copy analysed according to the seven functions of a speech act and their associated elements (after Jacobson &amp; Thwaites et al): 1. Functions of significance (referential...content; meta linguistic...code; formal...form) 2. Functions of address (expressive...addresser; phatic...contact; consensive...addressee) 3. Context (contextual...situation) Pictorial content analysed according to the procedure below (after Barthes &amp; Thwaites et al): 1. principal signifiers identified; 2. selection of connotative signifieds proposed for each signifier; 3. social codes used to encode/decode text established; 4. denotations distinguished; 5. cultural and ideological context ascertained.</td>
<td>The use of 'tracking' to analyse the minutes of those council committee meetings in which decisions of significance to the post-war evolution of Rhyl were made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective(s) substantiated:</td>
<td>1 &amp; 3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Also relevant to objective(s):</td>
<td>2 &amp; 4</td>
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</table>

Table 3.1: Methods, texts, dominant textual approaches, influences, procedures, data sources and relevance to research objectives
Both iconography and semiotics are derivations of linguistics, although one is applied to landscapes and the other to written, verbal and visual messages. What they have in common is an interest in the ideological and cultural tenets represented in texts such as those mentioned above. Indeed, given the earlier arguments regarding the relationship between tourist practices and culture, it is not unreasonable to suggest that these methods together represented a satisfactory means of studying the association between postmodernism and the production and representation of tourist space within Rhyl (this being the first of the study’s objectives). Since ‘the proof of the pudding is in the eating’, we shall let the thesis’s findings corroborate this claim rather than labour the point here. In tandem, they were also useful for comparing the various images contained within the municipal brochure with the tourism resources that they purported to represent (the study’s third objective). Here, the townscape and brochure texts were read at equivalent points during the period of analysis, to determine those elements of the resort product that the place promoters: (i) literally presented (notwithstanding the obvious loss of shape, texture and presence, in the translation of referent into sign); (ii) selectively re-presented, and; (iii) omitted altogether. This exercise allowed the author to gauge the level of distortion involved in popularising the resort for tourist consumption, and whether this was amplified or reduced by changes to tourist practices and culture per se. In contrast, the study’s second objective – an exploration of the role of the local state in the development and promotion of Rhyl as a tourist destination – required a more ‘impartial’ and ‘detached’ modus operandi (despite being part-fulfilled by a reading of the resort’s townscape and municipal brochure as text). Hence, ‘tracking’, a form of records analysis identified by Guba and Lincoln (1981), was applied to the minutes of those committees and sub-committees of Rhyl Urban District Council (between 1951/52 and 1973/74) and Rhuddlan Borough Council (between 1973/74 and 1995/96) that were responsible for tourism in Rhyl (in this case, the text in question was a literal, as opposed to metaphorical, one). This
apparently protracted task was made a little easier by concentrating upon those meetings in which certain ‘turning point’ decisions were made, as identified from contemporary press coverage and the index that accompanied each volume of minutes.

Incidentally, the study’s fourth objective, with its brief to modify Dietvorst and Ashworth’s (1995) ‘Model of Tourism Transformations’ so that it reflected the association between late twentieth century cultural change and the transformation of Rhyl’s tourism resource(s) and place image(s) by its producers and consumers, was a theoretical, rather than empirical, exercise that was not dependent upon any one of the above-mentioned methodological components. Also, it is worth bearing in mind that all three methods shared several advantages over more conventional forms of social-scientific research (e.g. large-sample surveys), in that they were *inexpensive* (no specialised equipment was needed), *unobtrusive* (they dealt with information sources that were non-reactive) and *presented few problems of access* (much of the necessary material was archived in municipal libraries and records offices). These must be added to their specific virtues, which are discussed in Sections 3.4, 3.5 and 3.6.

3.3 Critical Realism

It is possible to identify a number of phases, or paradigms, throughout the history of the social sciences, in which certain perspectives on the nature of reality (ontology) and the way of knowing (epistemology) are accepted as ‘right and proper’, and therefore unquestioned (after Kuhn, 1970; orig. 1962). These relatively tranquil periods in the development of any social scientific discipline are punctuated by ‘crisis points’, where existing norms are challenged, rejected and superseded, as with the ‘assimilation’ of human geography (and social science in
general) by positivism, during the 1960s. Whilst not going as far as to claim disciplinary status for tourism studies (at least not yet), the failure of its methods texts to question the “implicit [positivist] norms in research” (Ryan, 1995: p.4) would suggest that we are some way off the next ‘crisis point’. Elsewhere, however, there are signs that positivism’s grip on the social sciences is loosening, in favour of alternative epistemologies such as constructivism and critical realism (see below).

Critical realism, as the ontological and epistemological reference point for this study, holds that social reality is not constructed by individuals or science, but by ‘generative mechanisms’ (which, contrary to positivism, are ‘circumstantial’ rather than ‘deterministic’). It originates from the work of Bhaskar (1978, 1989; orig. 1979) on ‘transcendental realism’ (his general philosophy of science) and ‘critical naturalism’ (his specific philosophy of the human sciences), in which he provides a critique of scientific experiments – whereby one mechanism of nature is isolated from other mechanisms, so as to observe its detailed workings, record its effects and/or test some hypothesis (thus ignoring the fact that nature is an open, not closed, system; Bhaskar, 1986). Collier (1994: pp.6-7) suggests that a theory is ‘realist’ when it makes the following claims for knowledge, namely: (i) ‘objectivity’ (i.e. something may be real without being known to us); (ii) ‘fallibility’ (claims are not made about supposedly ‘infallible’ appearances, but about the ‘hidden’ mechanisms that give rise to them, hence are always open to refutation in light of further information); (iii) ‘transphenomenality’ (knowledge may be not only of what appears, but of underlying structures that last longer than those appearances), and; (iv) ‘counter-phenomenality’ (knowledge of deep structures may not just go beyond, and not just explain, but also contradict appearances). He uses this argument to contrast critical realism (as ‘depth realism’) with ‘actualism’ (or ‘empiricism’), on the one hand, and ‘non-realism’ (or ‘idealism’), on the other. The former, whilst not denying the
‘reality’ of events and experiences, refutes the existence of underlying mechanisms, whilst the latter asserts that there is nothing knowable that is independent of mind – two conflicting perspectives that may be elaborated with reference to ‘positivism’ and ‘constructivism’, respectively.

According to Delanty (1997), positivism is comprised of five tenets, namely: (i) ‘scientism’ (the use of ‘suitable’ and ‘mathematically logical’ methods of sampling, data collection and analysis, as in the natural sciences); (ii) ‘naturalism’ or ‘phenomenalism’ (the reduction of the subject, which exists outside of science and may be observed objectively, to conceptual models or theories that have a corresponding truth value in reality); (iii) ‘empiricism’ (a concern with ‘verifiable’ facts, not ‘normative’ values or intentions); (iv) ‘value freedom’ (the omission of any reference to the researcher’s personal experience of the subject, thereby constructing a position of neutrality), and; (v) ‘instrumental knowledge’ (the idea that the findings of (social) scientific research may be used to address, and solve, real-life problems). Its influence over the development of the social sciences remains considerable, yet its links with the so-called ‘Enlightenment Project’ – a philosophy marked by its faith in reason (over and against religion, myth and superstition) as the means of demystifying and illuminating the world, and its search for universal truths (or ‘metanarratives’) that make no provision for temporal, spatial or cultural differences (Barker, 2000: p.140) – have rendered it particularly vulnerable to criticism from scholars seeking a ‘break’ with enlightenment thinking and its logic of domination and oppression (e.g. Horkheimer and Adorno, 1979). The positivist ideal of “a unified science based on the certain knowledge of mathematical logic” (Delanty, 1997: p.29) is challenged by the philosophical and epistemological positions of ‘postmodernism’, which proposes a “radical relativism where knowing is culturally and socially contained” (Duncan and Ley, 1993: p.7), and ‘hermeneutics’, a more ‘conservative’ tradition in which
truth is discovered through a process of interpretation, as opposed to ‘mere’ observation. Both seek to ‘decentre’ the power of representation from the Western male intellectual – the traditional ‘caretaker’ of knowledge – although the former does this by experimenting with deliberately inconclusive and open-ended styles of writing (or ‘language games’), whilst the latter posits that the study of any social practice must begin with the agent’s, and not the scientist’s, conceptions of it, an anti-positivist stance that is the bedrock of contemporary constructivist epistemology (a ‘broad church’, ranging from the ‘radical’ and ‘emancipatory’ constructivism of ‘feminism’, to the ‘autopoietic’ and ‘value-free’ constructivism of ‘systems theory’ – see Delanty, 1997: ch.6). Constructivism considers the social sciences to be ‘self-referential’ or ‘reflexive’, that is, ‘bound up’ in their respective discourses and, therefore, unable to deliver objective knowledge of the outside world – a notion that is disputed by critical realism, which defends the power of social science to explain, as well as interpret.

Actualism or empiricism, in its various forms, is preoccupied with experiences (i.e. ‘impressions’, ‘sense-data’). Most empiricists also assume, whether tacitly or categorically, another level of reality that is comprised of events, which may be inferred from their effects (i.e. experiences). However, in contrast to critical realists, they make no allowance for the powers, or mechanisms, that give rise to events. If, therefore, we adopt a critical realist position and presume these powers to be ‘real’, then it follows that there must exist a third, and even deeper, level of reality. These three ontological ‘domains’ are referred to by Bhaskar (1978) as the ‘real’, the ‘actual’ and the ‘empirical’ (Table 3.2), and are best explained in reverse order (see also Collier, 1994: pp.42-45). Firstly, not all events (and their antecedent mechanisms) are experienced, hence the ‘domain of empirical’ consists only of experiences. Secondly, just because we were not present to witness an event, it does not follow that it did not actually take place, and so the ‘domain of actual’ is comprised of both events and

70
experiences. However, outside of the laboratory (i.e. in open systems), no one mechanism is ever perfectly demonstrated by the events that it (co)determines, and so mechanisms – insofar as they are not apprehended – do not belong in this domain. Thirdly (and this is the very essence of critical realism), mechanisms are real regardless of whether our scientific imagination is able to extrapolate them from the pattern of events for which they are responsible, hence they comprise (along with events and experiences) the ‘domain of real’. Furthermore, they are no less real than events or experiences, and “theories which relegate mechanisms to a lower ontological league, as ‘theoretical entities’, logical constructs’, etc., are refusing to allow causal criteria for reality” (Collier, 1994: p.44). Indeed, in transcendental realism, “the domain of the real is greater than or equal to the domain of the actual, which is greater than or equal to the domain of the empirical” (p.45; emphasis added) or, as Bhaskar (1978: p.229) puts it, “D_r ≥ D_a ≥ D_e”. The special case “D_r = D_a = D_e” applies within highly circumscribed situations (i.e. the laboratory) – in which a given mechanism may be successfully separated from its usual codeterminants and manifested as an event consistent with the law to which it corresponds – and is assumed to be ‘spontaneously’ satisfied by empirical realism (although, in truth, it needs to be ‘worked at’).

Critical realism also goes by the name of ‘depth realism’, which provides a clue as to how, in open systems, the multiplicity of mechanisms that conjointly provoke a given course of events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Domain of Real</th>
<th>Domain of Actual</th>
<th>Domain of Empirical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mechanisms</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.2: The three levels of reality (Bhaskar, 1978: p.13)
are arranged. In addressing this issue, Bhaskar (1978) argues for the ‘stratification of nature’, that is, “an ordered [or layered] series of mechanisms in which the lower explain without replacing the higher” (Collier, 1994: p.48). In other words, “when one mechanism has been identified and described, and shown to explain various phenomena, it becomes itself something to be explained” (ibid), a process outlined by Bhaskar (1978) in the following, oft-quoted, passage:

Thus the observable reactions of chemistry, which are represented in the textbooks by formula[e] such as $2\text{Na} + 2\text{HCl} = 2\text{NaCl} + \text{H}_2$, are explained by reference to the atomic hypothesis and the theory of valency and chemical bonding. The patterns which constitute the explananda of the theory of valency are needless to say by no means superficially obvious or readily available. Both the concepts and the substances and conditions had and have to be worked for, produced in the social activity of science. The theory itself sets out to describe the causal mechanisms responsible for the overt behaviour of the substances. Once its reality has been established (which justifies our assuming that chemical bonding occurs and the laws of chemistry hold outside the laboratory) and the consequences of the theory have been fully explored, the next task consists in the discovery of the mechanisms responsible for chemical bonding and valency. This has been explained in terms of the electronic theory of atomic structure. Once the reality of this explanation has been established, science moves on to the discovery of the mechanisms responsible for what happens in the sub-atomic microcosm of electrons, protons, and neutrons; and we now have various theories of sub-atomic structure. The historical development of chemistry may thus be represented by the following schema:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stratum I</th>
<th>$2\text{Na} + 2\text{HCl} = 2\text{NaCl} + \text{H}_2$</th>
<th>Mechanism 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stratum II</td>
<td>theory of atomic number and valency</td>
<td>Mechanism 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stratum III</td>
<td>theory of electrons and atomic structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stratum IV</td>
<td>[competing theories of sub-atomic structure]</td>
<td>[Mechanism 3]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It should be noted that the historical order of the development of our knowledge of strata is opposite to the causal order of their dependence in being. No end to this process of the successive discovery and description of ever new and deeper, and explanatorily more basic, strata can be envisaged.

(pp.168-169)

In the example provided by Bhaskar, above, it is possible to distinguish between ‘horizontal explanations’, which account for cause and effect relationships that occupy the first and
second tiers of any such schema (e.g. the explanation of the chemical reaction, represented by the formula “2Na + 2HCl = 2NaCl + H₂”, in terms of the theory of atomic number and valency), and ‘vertical explanations’, where one mechanism is explained by another, more basic one (e.g. the use of the theory of electrons and atomic structure to explain the theory of atomic number and valency). With regards to the horizontal explanation of events and experiences by their immediate mechanisms, Bhaskar (1998: pp.63-65) distinguishes between: (i) ‘necessary’ and ‘accidental’ cases; (ii) ‘closed system’ and ‘open system’ cases, and; (iii) ‘protolaw’ and ‘hypothesis-formation’ cases (Figure 3.1). In the illustration accompanying the first pair of cases, the sequence ‘Eₐ . Eₐ’ is linked by the mechanism ‘M₁’, and is therefore necessary, whereas the sequence ‘Eₐ . Eₐ’ is not connected by the mechanism ‘M₂’ (even though it might appear that whenever Eₐ occurs, Eₐ is produced), and is therefore accidental. In the second illustration, the closed system case – where the sequence ‘Eₐ . Eₐ’ is produced by a single mechanism ‘M₃’ – is contrasted with the open system case – where ‘Eₐ’ is the product (or ‘conjuncture’) of at least two distinct events (‘Eₐ’ and ‘Eₐ’), which are generated by the mechanisms ‘M₄’, ‘M₅’, ‘M₆’, and so on. Finally, in the third illustration, the sequence ‘Eₖ . Eₖ’ constitutes a prima facie empirical regularity or protolaw that presupposes the existence of a mechanism (‘M₉’). Having identified the sequence ‘Eₙ . Eₙ’ as a protolaw, it is then the job of the scientist to determine which one of the various plausible hypothetical mechanisms that might explain it (i.e. ‘Mₗ’, ‘Mₘ’ or ‘Mₙ’) is actually responsible for producing ‘Eₙ’ whenever ‘Eₙ’ occurs. In each pair of cases, the second of the two serves to illustrate the challenges faced by the scientist, when seeking to access the mechanisms that give rise to a particular sequence of events and experiences within open systems (these will be revisited in Section 9.7, which reflects upon the suitability of critical realism as the ontological and epistemological reference point for this study). As for vertical explanation, this fits in well with the metaphors of ‘depth’ and ‘digging deeper’ that predominate accounts
(1) The necessa4t/ case
E_a . E_b in virtue of M

(b) The accidental case
E_c & E_d are not connected by a mechanism (though E_d is caused)

(2) The closed system case
A single M is at work

(b) The open system case
E_i in virtue of M_4 , M_5 , M_6 etc.; i.e. a ‘conjunction’

(3) The protolaw case
There are grounds for supposing that there is a M such that when E_k, E_i tends to be produced

(b) The hypothesis-formation case
E_m . E_n in virtue of M_7 v M_8 v M_9

Figure 3.1: ‘Horizontal explanation’ – the six cases identified by Bhaskar (1998: pp.63-65)
of nature and society under critical realism, and sets it apart from 'shallow' empiricism and relativistic theories of the object of science. Moreover, it is this very capacity for vertical, as well as horizontal, explanation that has seen critical realism become a powerful contender to the dominant epistemologies of positivism and constructivism during the last decade.

3.4 Reading the iconography of Rhyl’s townscape

The treatment of landscape as text is a fundamental characteristic of the ‘new’ school of cultural geography, that was initiated, institutionalised and critiqued in just over a decade (from the early 1980s to the early 1990s). It was, itself, a critique of traditional cultural geography, as embodied in the personalities of the Berkeley School and its onetime leader, Carl Sauer. In a paper entitled ‘The Morphology of Landscape’, Sauer considered landscape to be “the impress of the works of man upon an area” (1963: p.30; orig. 1925), and advocated a science that would determine how individual landscapes came to assume a particular morphology. However, such a science would not be preoccupied with establishing general laws (a ‘nomothetic’ approach), reflecting Sauer’s distrust of environmental determinism, which reduced the diversity of cultures found throughout the world, to a single explanation – an outcome of human adaptation to natural (essentially climatic) factors. Instead, it would adopt an ‘idiographic’ approach, by studying how different processes interact within a particular area to produce a unique landscape. In addition, rather than capturing a particular, or celebrated, view of such a landscape (as would a landscape painter), the cultural geographer was advised to seek out the typical or generic vantage point. One could read into this a concern for the objects of ‘low’ rather than ‘high’ culture, the former having traditionally been neglected by cultural studies.
To Sauer, culture (the ‘agent’) interacts with a natural area (the ‘medium’) to produce a cultural landscape (the ‘result’). Consequently, a (cultural) landscape embodies the beliefs, practices and technologies of the culture that shaped it. In turn, it also fashions the future development of that culture (i.e. it is a ‘yardstick’ by which constituent members live their lives). There is a temporal dimension to landscapes, too, in that they record change over time and contain traces of erstwhile ideologies. In this respect, a landscape may be viewed as a ‘palimpsest’, a medieval writing block on which inscriptions could be erased and replaced, but without fully removing the original marks (Crang, 1998). Behind the relative clarity of the latest inscription could be found elements of earlier writings, as it is with landscapes, in which signifiers of previous economic and political episodes may be glimpsed ‘beneath’ their contemporary ‘surfaces’. The problem faced by anyone who treats a landscape as an historical record is how one extracts information from the ‘palimpsest’ that has been deleted and overwritten (i.e. it cannot be observed in the contemporary landscape), as was the case with this study. Here, the solution was found with a variety of local history information sources, namely photographs, maps, retrospectives authored by local people, academic treatises, directories, brochures, travelogues, guidebooks, postcards, leaflets, the Internet, interpretative provision, local and national newspaper articles, television and video documentaries, local/unitary development plans, planning registers and applications, consultants’ reports and guidelines for building design.

Having briefly explained the position of Sauer and the Berkeley School on culture and landscape, it is now possible to review the counter-developments in cultural geography, mentioned at the beginning of this section. The first signs of resistance may be found in Duncan (1980), who attacks Sauer’s ‘super-organic’ definition of culture as a single entity without internal differentiation. His mistake, repeated by many others, was to associate an
area with one, homogenous culture and, in doing so, fail to acknowledge a plurality of sub(ordinate)-cultures, whose ideologies and practices are different from, and in opposition to, those of the dominant social group. Sauer, then, is guilty of an “ecological fallacy” (Zelinsky, 1973), whereby what is applicable to a group in its entirety, is also assumed to be relevant to each individual that belongs to that group. Ley (1985) points to a second weakness of the Berkeley School – its obsession with describing the material landscape and the spatial arrangement of cultural artefacts (e.g. log cabins, field boundaries and petrol stations). In contrast, ‘new’ cultural geographers view such distributions, not as the natural product of a given social group, but as symbolic of the cultural context in which the artefact in question is conventionally and historically embedded. By way of illustration, Ley proposes an interpretation of postmodern forms of architecture as text, so that human-scale structures, diverse and socially eclectic designs, the use of regional building materials and styles, and synergy with the existing built environment, may all be read as a sensitive reaction to the stoical geometry of modernist ‘place-making’.

This position is further refined by Cosgrove and Jackson (1987) who, apart from providing the (by now) obligatory attack on the traditions of the Berkeley School, consider the methodologies that might be suited to the study of the symbolic, rather than material, properties of landscape. They trace the origins of the interpretative ‘turn’ in cultural geography back to post-war linguistics and semiotics (see Section 3.5), and propose iconography as the method for interpreting visual images present in the landscape or material artefacts. This article forms the basis of an arguably seminal collection of essays edited by Cosgrove and Daniels, entitled ‘The Iconography of Landscape’ (1988). Their editorial reveals the diverse range of substances and media through which landscapes can be represented, including “paint on canvas...writing on paper...earth, stone, water and
vegetation on the ground” (p.1). The issue here is that, when a reader observes a landscape through a medium other than physical contact, (s)he must be aware of the ‘spin’ (to use a term popular in contemporary British politics) put on that landscape by the person or persons who are representing it. Crang (1998: pp.40-41) illustrates this ‘double encoding’ of landscapes with reference to the paintings of Constable, which contain features designed to appeal to urban tastes (e.g. “dead trees, broken gates or a neglected flock of sheep”) that would not have been tolerated by rural inhabitants of that era. In as much as it was possible, the author tried to take account of this, when attempting to reconstruct the past townscape(s) of Rhyl from the information sources listed above.

Cosgrove and Jackson (1987) establish iconography as an offshoot of structuralist linguistics and semiotics, which views acts of writing and speech as determined by, and indicative of, “deep structural regularities...narrative structures and routinized patterns of behavior” (p.118), rather than the product of a unique individual. In contrast, Duncan and Duncan (1988) reinterpret the ‘landscape as text’ metaphor, using a post-structuralist perspective (based on Derrida’s, 1976, critique of structuralism, which will be revisited later in this chapter). Apart from negating a linear reading of text, this proposes that there is no rudimentary and stable meaning inherent in signs (the ‘transcendental signified’), hence there is no point in interpreting texts with a view of exposing deep structures (e.g. the cultural beliefs and practices that shaped a particular landscape). Accordingly, meaning is unstable and something to be ‘played with’ (a characteristically postmodernist sentiment). Thankfully, they define the limitations of this theory, which might otherwise negate the very premise on which this study is founded. Signs may connote a plurality of meanings, but within finite boundaries that “are related to actual empirical differences in interpretations” (Duncan and Duncan, 1988: p.120). In other words, the extent of possible interpretations is not infinite, but
restricted to those with some relation to what is being interpreted. A consensus as to those interpretations that are acceptable is reached amongst a given ‘textual community’, “a group of people who have a common understanding of a text, spoken or read, and who organize aspects of their lives as the playing out of a script” (Stock, 1986: p.294; cited in Duncan and Duncan, 1988: p.120).

Finally, in his manifesto for a new cultural geography, Jackson (1989) focuses upon aspects of culture other than landscape, and calls for a reconciliation between the ‘material’ concerns of social geography (e.g. the built environment) and the ‘immaterial’ concerns of cultural geography (e.g. language, conduct and music). Drawing inspiration from the contributions of cultural theorists such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall (of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham), he proposes a new agenda for cultural geography that embraces a ‘materialist approach’. Significantly, this holds that culture is grounded in material life, as “a set of signs and symbols that are embedded in a whole range of activities, relations and institutions, only some of which are manifestly ‘cultural’, others being overtly economic, political, or generational” (Williams, 1981: pp.207-209). By implication, studies such as this that seek a cultural, rather than an economic or political, explanation for changes to a given landscape, can embrace material, as well as symbolic, concerns.

As enticing and hypnotic as the calls for a new brand of cultural geography appear to be, they have not escaped criticism from scholars still loyal, or at least sympathetic, to the Berkeley School (notably Price and Lewis, 1993). It is not this criticism that is holding iconography back from greater things, however, but the esoteric nature of many of those works in which it is featured (see, for example, the volumes edited by Barnes and Duncan, 1992, and Duncan
and Ley, 1993). Hence, it is particularly appropriate to conclude this review of the ‘cultural turn’ in human geography with the following relatively simple definitions of iconography as:

closely related to semiotics but tending to look at signs embedded in the landscape or material artefacts. Thus it might attempt to read to symbolism of the urban fabric, or what the landscape can say about the values and society of the people who shaped it.

(Crang, 1998: p.191)

the interpretation of the material landscape as a carrier and repository of symbolic meaning...Iconographic essays in geography seek to bring the critical instruments and traditions of both the art historian and the semiologist to bear on questions of landscape evolution and the production of symbolic value through the fashioning and design, intentional or otherwise, of the humanized landscape.

(Billinge, 1986: p.212)

On the practical side, readings were confined to those features of Rhyl’s townscape (within the core visitor areas of the promenade, central business district and principal routes of access and egress) that were symbolic of the resort’s identity as a tourist destination, and had been introduced or removed from the landscape, or profoundly altered (whether in appearance or use), between the years of 1951 and 1996. Such ‘moments’ were felt to reveal the changing tourist practices and broader cultural tenets that shaped the fortunes of both the resort and its competitor destinations, in the late twentieth century.

A reading of Rhyl’s Victoria Pier, just prior to its demolition in 1973, serves as an appropriate example. First, it is necessary to establish the relevant ‘facts’, inasmuch as these can be gleaned from historical records. What we know is that it was constructed to a design that was typical of the majority of mid to late nineteenth century seaside piers (i.e. a series of cast iron piles, which were driven into the sand at various intervals, connected by a lattice of supporting rods and covered with wooden decking), opened in 1867 as a landing stage for steamships running between Rhyl and the nearby towns of Liverpool, Bangor and Llandudno, commuted to roughly half its original length (a reported 2,355 feet) in 1930, and closed in
1966 on the grounds that it was unsafe for visitors, too expensive to maintain and, according to one local historian, “like an old coat full of patches...an eyesore” (Thomas, 1991: p.63). Furthermore, photographic evidence captured around the time the decision was made to dispose of the pier (e.g. Plate 3.1), gives the impression of a structure that had become ‘neglected’ and ‘dangerous’ and, in tandem with the above information, offers some explanation as to why it is no longer with us. However, the role of the interpreter, in this case, is not to stop with the condition of the pier, circa 1972, as a sign of its owner’s and public’s indifference towards it, but to consider the underlying mechanisms that codetermined such attitudes, one of which – ‘cultural change’ – falls within the remit of this study (this approach was described in Section 3.3, under the banner of ‘critical realism’). Accordingly, the abandonment of the pier is symptomatic of the prevailing ‘anti-Victorian’ sentiments of the day, which saw much “Victorian tourism plant [removed on account that it] was no longer to the taste of late twentieth century holidaymakers” (Cooper, 1997b: p.79). It was also consistent with the ‘privatisation’ of (domestic) tourist practices, as suppliers and consumers of tourism ‘moved indoors’ to escape the unpredictable British climate, and the public spaces of the exterior lost their appeal with the masses (as demonstrated by the growing number of amusement arcades, discotheques, night clubs, and the like). A more detailed discussion of these particular cultural changes, and their implications for Rhyl, may be found in Sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.3, respectively.

3.5 Semiotics and the Rhyl municipal brochure

For tour operators, tourist boards and (local authority) destination marketing agencies alike, the design, production and distribution of the annual tourist brochure is usually the most important and expensive item in their marketing budgets (Pritchard and Morgan, 1995). The
unique characteristics of the tourism ‘product’ may have something to do with this. Unlike conventional consumer goods, holidays (and even aspects of the destination in which they take place) are essentially intangible. Hence, there are no physical stocks at the point of sale that can be inspected or tested prior to purchase. Furthermore, production and consumption is simultaneous, and takes place at the destination, often several weeks or months after the purchase has been made. In this scenario, brochures fulfil an important ‘product substitution’ role, as an indicator to the potential tourist of quality and value for money, and as a tangible device for anticipating the holiday and destination that lie ahead, once (s)he is committed to travelling (Middleton, 1994). Their part in helping the uncommitted would-be tourist to decide between two or more destinations is, however, overrated. Indeed, research by the Wales Tourist Board (reported in Pritchard and Morgan, 1995) suggests that only 17 per cent of UK holidaymakers, interviewed in 1993, ordered a brochure for this purpose. This compares to 39 per cent who had already made a decision but wanted background information
on the destination, 26 per cent who had also decided where to go but not where to stay (hence they required the brochure's list of approved accommodation), and 18 per cent for whom the brochure was of general interest only.

The difficulties of objectively promoting a destination were discussed in the previous chapter, which implied the existence of a credibility gap between reality and the (induced) image(s) of the ubiquitous tourist brochure. On this note, Barthes (1972) was rather critical of travel guides in general, and the classic 'Guide Bleu' in particular, accusing them of being "agents of blindness", which promote particular aspects of the places featured with them, over others that are equally real, but 'off-message'. Moreover, the discursive content of brochures is imitated in the behaviour of the tourist, particularly in respect of what is chosen as an 'authentic' sight to be captured on film (see Dann, 1996a, on the tautological properties of the language of tourism). In this respect, Weightman (1987: p.230) believes the brochure to be a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', as "it directs expectations, influences perceptions and thereby provides a preconceived landscape for the tourist to 'discover'". Or, as Boorstin (1987: p.116) puts it, "The foreign country, like the celebrity, is the confirmation of a pseudo event...we go not to test the image by reality but to test reality by the image".

Whether one believes in the utility or fallaciousness of tourist brochures, what is important is that they may be read (as text) with a view to understanding the meanings (and corresponding ideological and cultural tenets) implicit within them. To this end, the author applied analytical procedures drawn from semiotics, to the front cover and editorial content of selected examples of the Rhyl annual municipal brochure, published between 1951 and 1996 (inclusively), the relevant details of which will be presented after the following review of the method.
With its origins in linguistics, semiotics is an analytical technique that seeks to uncover how phenomena are represented and understood in society, with particular reference to the ‘sign’ as conveyor of ‘meaning’ (“in its direct, indirect, intentional and unintentional forms” – Echtner, 1999: p.47). It challenges the user to go beyond the unconscious, which serves us so well in everyday life, so that instead of taking for granted what is seen and heard, we scrutinise the discursive content of a particular ‘text’, or combination of signs (i.e. “what concepts does it invoke?”, “which of these is the intended meaning?”, “what interests are served by a preferred reading?”, and other such questions). Hence, for example, the layout of a lecture theatre, the order of service for an Anglican wedding, the road signs illustrated in the Highway Code, and the events depicted in the many James Bond movies, are not mere accidents of circumstance, but texts that are comprised of highly significant and conventional signs, which can be isolated and interpreted using semiotic principles and procedures. Not attributed to any one discipline (MacCannell, 1989b), nor a discipline in its own right, (formal) semiotics is closely allied with ‘structuralism’, which attempts to understand society in terms of its internal components and the relations between them. Its most notable adherents include Claude Lévi-Strauss in anthropology and Jacques Lacan in psychoanalysis. More recently, (post-structuralist) semiotics has been used by Marxist scholars to pursue and expose the ideologies that, for any given sign, seek to attach and naturalise certain meanings at the expense of others, with a view to fulfilling a particular (and usually hidden) agenda.

The ‘science of signs’ was founded by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, in his posthumous ‘Course in General Linguistics’ of 1916. ‘Semiology’, as he called it, sought to explain any act of communication by analysing the basic unit of the ‘sign’ (originally defined as a spoken or written word). All signs are comprised of two inseparable elements – the ‘signifier’, or expression that carries the message in question, and the ‘signified’, or concept it
represents (note, the latter is a mental image, not the real object or ‘referent’). He posited that the relationship between them is arbitrary, in that there is no preordained or transcendental connection between the two. Instead, the allocation of signifieds to signifiers is understood through social interaction between members of a given speech community, or culture. Therefore, for example, the spoken or written signifier “tree” should simultaneously engender the signified concept of “treeness” in the mind of the listener or reader, which is not the referent (a real, material tree), but its mental equivalent.

Saussure discovered language to be organised along two axes – the ‘paradigmatic’ (selection) and ‘syntagmatic’ (combination) – a structure that gives meaning to even the simplest of sentences (Figure 3.2). A ‘paradigm’ is a set of words that, although distinct, share some common property (in the example overleaf, the paradigms are ‘size’, ‘terms of address’ and ‘activity’). A ‘syntagm’ is the juxtaposition of a number of words, chosen from different paradigms, to form a sentence. The meaning of each of the words selected to make up a syntagm, is not a product of the arbitrary link between signifier and signified (i.e. it is not self-contained), neither does it in any way originate from the seemingly natural relationship between sign and referent (as this is an “historical accident”, Thwaites et al, 1994: p.32). Instead, it is derived from the contrast or difference between that word and other words along the paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes. To explain, because paradigms are made up of words that are “conceivably interchangeable within a given context” (p.39), any word present in a sentence is understood in relation to those words that are associated with it, but are absent (e.g. “happy” only means something when compared with “sad”, “dog” is recognised as not being “cat” or “bird” or “horse”, or any other variety of animal, and so on). That word is also understood in the context of those other words with which it is combined to form the sentence, or syntagm (e.g. the mental image of a small boy running is invoked by juxtaposing
the words “boy”, “ran” and “small”). For this, and any other, message to make sense, paradigmatic selection and syntagmatic combination are governed by the rules of ‘semantics’ and ‘syntax’, respectively (i.e. words familiar to both sender and receiver are expressed in an order appropriate to the grammatical rules of their language). Saussure used the terms ‘langue’ and ‘parole’, to respectively indicate this system of differences between signs, and the individual acts of speech and writing that are enabled by it.

In Saussure’s scheme of things, paradigmatic choice and syntagmatic combination are deliberately undertaken with the express intention of communicating a particular idea or series of ideas (critics of Saussure have since described this as a ‘linguistic fallacy’). For the sender of a message to be confident that the receiver will interpret it in the manner in which it was intended, (s)he adheres to particular conventions (or codes) that restrict the choices of, and possible responses to, the signs that make up that message or text. As Cobley and Jansz (1999) note, these codes are abstract – like a game of chess, there is no need to consult the
rules before each move in order to see if it is lawful. Rather the player is already (subconsciously) aware of them, as we are of the linguistic codes that give meaning to our utterances and writings. Familiarity with certain codes varies between people of different social and cultural backgrounds, and is influenced by factors such as age, class, education, ethnicity, gender, language, nationality, occupation, politics and sexuality (Thwaites et al, 1994). Furthermore, codes are not static but dynamic entities – with the passage of time, new codes are introduced to a culture and become familiar, others are reinterpreted or renegotiated, and others still are forgotten and become obsolete.

Saussure’s other major ‘discovery’ was that the above principles work equally well with non-linguistic aspects of culture. For example, an outfit of clothing is a syntagmatic combination of a number of items (e.g. shirt, trousers, shoes, etc.), previously selected from a paradigmatic range of similar choices (i.e. a wardrobe may contain a variety of shirts, trousers and shoes, from which one example of each is decided upon as fit to wear for that occasion). For a person’s attire to be socially accepted, certain codes of dress applicable to the occasion in question should be adhered to (e.g. organisers of a ‘black-tie’ dinner party are not likely to accommodate guests who turn up wearing jeans and a T-shirt). As Thwaites et al (1994: p.40) remark, “it is surprising how many activities can be described in this way” (see Table 3.3 for some examples).

Accordingly, just as a sentence becomes nonsensical when the rules of grammar are ignored (e.g. “cat the on sat mat the”), or an inappropriate combination of letters gives rise to an illegitimate word (e.g. “mta”), ‘errors of syntax’ may be observed in non-linguistic texts. For example, to ice a fruit cake before baking it and adding the fruit, is to contravene the very conventions on which cookery is established, and is unlikely to lead to the end product being
Table 3.3: Examples of paradigms and syntags (Thwaites et al, 1994: p.41)

accepted by those for whom it was produced (Thwaites et al, 1994: p.41). By implication, preparing food for consumption is not just a matter of satisfying a physiological need, it is an act of signification imbued with meaning, suggesting that semiotics is suited to analysing a variety of phenomena, even those that seem logical and insignificant.

In correspondence with the axiological structure of language described above, two generic forms of semiotic analysis may be applied to a text. ‘Syntagmatic analysis’ studies a text’s structure and the relationships that exist between its components, and is concerned with three types of relationship: (i) ‘sequential and causal’ (e.g. the narrative of books and film); (ii) ‘spatial’ (e.g. the juxtaposition of images to form a collage), and; (iii) ‘conceptual’ (e.g. arguments, such as ‘smoking causes lung cancer’). It is common for advertisers to employ one or more of these syntagmatic devices to promote a particular product or brand name. For instance, many advertisements ‘tell stories’ in which the purchase and/or consumption of the product leads to a desirable outcome. Equally popular is a technique whereby an object or person embodying the required attributes (e.g. good taste, sexual attractiveness) is associated with the product (see Morgan and Pritchard, 1998: ch.2; for some examples specific to
tourism). Finally, with few exceptions, advertisements seek to persuade as well as inform. In this respect, their syntagmatic structure will usually consist of a proposition (e.g. “we will beat our competitors on price”), supported by ‘evidence’ (which can range from fact to mere assertion), with a view to justifying a particular action or stance (Tolson, 1996).

‘Paradigmatic analysis’, on the other hand, is concerned with why the signs that comprise a particular text were chosen over other equally applicable, but symbolically different, alternatives. A popular approach is to employ what is known as a ‘commutation test’ (after Fiske, 1982), where the person practising the analysis imagines the effect of substituting one of the text’s key elements for another (from the same paradigm). Normally, signs are replaced with their polar (and absent) opposites (e.g. ‘fat’ instead of ‘thin’, ‘black’ instead of ‘white’, ‘female’ instead of ‘male’), thus subverting the meaning of the text and, in doing so, reminding the analyst of the possibilities that its producer (deliberately or otherwise) overlooked. Critics have, however, argued that it is too simplistic to reduce signs to simple dichotomies, when they would be better described using continua. It seems that “the world is divided into those who divide people into two types, and those who don’t” (Chandler, 1994).

Some years before Saussure’s ideas were published, the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce developed his own approach to the study of signs, which he termed ‘semiotics’ (as distinct from Saussure’s ‘semiology’). Like Saussure, he did not get to write a book on the subject. Instead, his papers were published in six volumes, by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, from 1931 to 1935, well after the publication of Saussure’s ‘Cours de Linguistique Generale’. The parallels between the two men are all the more remarkable when one considers that they never met. This might, at least, account for their radically different theories of the sign (Figure 3.3). Unlike Saussure’s self-contained dyad (the sign as comprised of ‘signifier’
and ‘signified’), Peirce envisaged a triadic relationship between three constituent parts: (i) the ‘representamen’ (the sign itself); (ii) the ‘object’ (to which the sign refers), and; (iii) the ‘interpretant’ (not the interpreter, but the psychological response to the sign). Peirce’s model is preferred by many (post)modern semioticians, as it does not set aside the referent (the object) and, more importantly, acknowledges the critical process of interpretation, which had no place in Saussure’s idealistic notion of the sign (Gottdiener, 1995).

A key feature of this arrangement is the ability of signs to call up other signs, in the mind of the interpreter. Since the interpretant is itself a mental event, it may function as a further representamen, which is related to a different object and, in turn, brings about another interpretant, and so on. This process of one sign setting off a sequence of associations (e.g. Christmas → Jesus Christ → Crucifixion → Monty Python’s Life of Brian → Paramount Pictures → Hollywood → the United States of America → George Washington → etc.), is theoretically infinite and, for this reason, is known as ‘unlimited semiosis’. In practice, however, the demands of everyday life (e.g. to work, to sleep) seriously curtail its potential.
This process of association is encountered in the concept of ‘intertextuality’, where an assemblage of signs, or ‘text’, makes reference (whether implicitly or explicitly) to another.

Another of Peirce’s significant contributions was the classification of sign types. Of the ten proposed, a ‘mere’ three have found their way into the glossaries that accompany various semiotic treaties: (i) a ‘symbol’ (an arbitrary or conventional sign bearing no resemblance to its object, as in a green traffic light meaning ‘go’); (ii) an ‘icon’ (a sign which simulates its object, as with a portrait or diagram), and; (iii) an ‘index’ (where an elemental and causal link exists between a sign and its object, as in smoke signifying fire). These three types have been arranged in decreasing order of arbitrariness or conventionality (the extent to which the appearance of the sign is not determined by the object), contradicting Saussure’s claim that all signs are arbitrary. We must remember, however, that they are not mutually exclusive. For instance, a map is a symbol (it uses emblems and abbreviations to depict features of the landscape), an icon (it is a representation of place), and an index (its co-ordinates reflect actual spatial location).

The writings of Saussure and Peirce inspired many subsequent embellishments to, uses of, and rebuttals aimed at, the philosophy and analytical techniques of semiology/semiotics, by a number of academics and social commentators. The major personalities among them may be (roughly) divided into three camps: (i) those who were either influenced by Saussure (e.g. Roland Barthes, Jean Baudrillard and Claude Lévi-Strauss) or opposed him (e.g. Jacques Derrida); (ii) those who took their inspiration from Peirce (e.g. Charles Morris and Thomas Sebeok), and; (iii) those who belonged to neither tradition (e.g. Umberto Eco and Roman Jakobson). Space does not permit a review of each person’s work (see Cobley and Jansz,
1999, for a visual introduction to their theories), save for three that demand particular attention, on account of their relevance to this study – Jakobson, Barthes and Derrida.

The Russian-born linguist, Roman Jakobson, was a founder member and vice-president of the ‘Prague Linguistic Circle’ (or the ‘Prague School’, as it is more commonly known). When the Nazis invaded Czechoslovakia in 1939, he left Prague for Scandinavia, before moving on to the United States. This enforced migration exposed Jakobson, who was already familiar with Saussure and structuralism, to the ideas of Peirce and information theory, most notably Claude Shannon’s and Warren Weaver’s classic model of communication, devised in 1949 (Figure 3.4). As a result, there is a rare eclecticism present in his work, which is absent from the writings of others (with the exception of Eco’s, 1976, breathtaking synthesis of the various contributions to semiotic theory and analysis, made during the twentieth century).

We are already aware of how a sign makes reference to something in the world, but it is easy to forget that this is only one of several sign-functions necessary for communication to take place. Jakobson (1988) reminds us of these functions in a model that combines his understanding of signification with information theory (Figure 3.5.1). By replacing Saussure’s terms ‘langue’ and ‘parole’ with ‘code’ and ‘message’, he identifies six features of any communicative act, each with its own function. In short, an ‘addresser’ transmits a message to an ‘addressee’, which refers to a specific ‘context’. In order for the message to be correctly encoded and decoded, both addresser and addressee must be aware of the ‘code(s)’ relevant to that message, and must be in ‘contact’ with one another (if not physically, then via some channel of communication). By implication, meaningful communication depends upon the presence of all six corresponding functions (i.e. ‘emotive’, ‘poetic’, ‘conative’, ‘referential’, ‘metalingual’ and ‘phatic’) although, in particular instances, some may be dominant over
others (e.g. the phrases "I'll be damned!" and "Hey you!" are dominated by the emotive and phatic functions, respectively).

Taking his lead from the Danish linguist, Louis Hjelmslev, Roland Barthes (a French literary critic) set about Saussure's unfinished task of developing "a science that studies the life of signs within society" (Hawkes, 1977: p.123). This led to the publication of 'Elements of Semiology' (1967), in which Barthes explored the 'denotative' and 'connotative' aspects of the sign (two terms that were originally coined by Hjelmslev). Denotation refers to the literal or natural meaning of the sign (e.g. a "tree" is a living organism, with bark, branches and leaves), while connotation covers the less rigid, conventional interpretations that can be made of that very same sign (e.g. the tree as symbolic of growth or nature). Linked to these concepts are two orders of signification, or levels of meaning (Figure 3.6). At the first order (denotative), we find a sign with an apparently obvious meaning (e.g. the signifier "woman" denotes an 'adult, human female'). At the second order (connotative), that sign functions as a signifier for any number of potential signifieds, which are conventional and open to interpretation (e.g. 'adult, human female' may connote beauty, motherhood or irrationality). This avoids the 'linguistic fallacy' committed by Saussure – the idea that all signs (intentionally) communicate as well as (unintentionally) signify. In practice, some signs (e.g. wearing a coat because it is cold), are not deliberate acts of communication, while others (e.g.
Figure 3.5: Functions and features of communication – (1) Jakobson's original model (1988) and (2) as amended by Thwaites et al (1994)
wearing a fur coat in order to convey status, wealth and fashionable consciousness) evidently are. Now, it is possible to recognise the former as a denotative sign, and the latter as a connotative sign. However, some have argued that all signs, no matter how obvious they appear, are connotative. For example, a photograph is a mechanical reproduction of an object on film, and could thus be said to be denotative. Nevertheless, the photographer has obviously exercised his/her judgement as to what should appear in the frame, and has made other choices relevant to how it is photographed (e.g. focus, aperture, angle, quality of film, etc.), these being connotative aspects of sign production. Barthes later listed six such ‘connotation procedures’ in ‘Image-Music-Text’ (1982; orig. 1977), namely: trick-effects, pose, objects, photogenia, aestheticism and syntax (see also Uzzell, 1984, and Dann, 1996a).

In ‘Mythologies’ (1972), a collection of essays that first appeared between 1954 and 1956 in the magazine ‘Lettres Nouvelles’, Barthes uses this two-tier model of signification to expose the myths that permeate our daily lives, yet appear normal and inconspicuous. In each essay, he skilfully deconstructs an aspect of popular culture, including striptease, the face of Greta Garbo, professional wrestling and the depiction of Romans in the film ‘Julius Caesar’, with a view to demonstrating how the interpretation of signs is surreptitiously influenced by vested interests (e.g. advertisers, political parties) according to their ideologies, so that certain myths

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<th>1 Signifier</th>
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<td><strong>3 Denotative Sign</strong></td>
<td><strong>II Signified</strong></td>
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<td>I Signifier</td>
<td><strong>III Connotative Sign</strong></td>
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*Figure 3.6: First and second orders of signification (Barthes, 1967)*
(e.g. "communism is evil") are accepted as fact, instead of what they really are – one of several possible connotations.

Literary critics such as Barthes often make reference to two devices that are used to generate connotative meaning – ‘metaphor’ and ‘metonym’. Thwaites *et al* (1994: p.44) define a metaphor as “an implicit or explicit comparison between signs”, as in the phrases “you eat like a horse” or “that’s as much use as a chocolate teapot” In this respect, metaphors seek to engender a likeness between signs that, in their denotative sense, are quite different, and thus require the listener or viewer (for they can be visual as well as verbal) to make an ‘imaginative leap’ in order to understand the comparison. For example, the tourist resorts of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham on the South Devon coast have, since 1982, been promoted as the ‘English Riviera’, a name that, in conjunction with various visual representations of a palm tree (see Plate 3.2), likens these traditional destinations to their milder and more prestigious counterparts in the south of France (a classic case of product repositioning, from a marketing perspective). A metonym, on the other hand, is a sign that invokes a related sign through reference to associated detail, as in ‘motor’ or ‘wheels’ meaning ‘car’ (Thwaites *et al*, 1994: p.48). The cigarette companies Benson and Hedges and Silk Cut, have traditionally used metonyms in their advertising campaigns, thus differentiating between almost identical products and avoiding redress from governments that have outlawed clear-cut [sic] references to cigarettes and their consumption.

Barthes was later to abandon semiology for deconstructionism, on account of Jacques Derrida’s (1976) damning critique of Saussure and the “anti-humanism of structuralist teachings” (Cobley and Jansz, 1999: p.69). Derrida argued that Saussure, like many Western philosophers before him, was guilty of ‘logocentrism’ – a naive faith in “the supposed rational
power of the word to explain the world” (p.88). He took issue with Saussure’s conception of a
one-to-one relationship between signifier and signified, as mediated by ‘la langue’, which
failed to allow for ‘polysemy’ (a signifier’s ability to call up multiple signifieds). It also
ignored the fact that the link between a signifier and a signified is determined by the context
in which the sign in question exists, and the individuals who use it. For example, the word
‘weed’ might signify an unwanted plant to a gardener but, when mentioned to a cannabis user,
could be construed as referring to his/her next ‘joint’ or ‘fix’. Like other deconstructionists,
Derrida also believed in the notion of ‘infinite regress’, whereby signifiers do not automatically call up signifieds, but further signifiers, in a perpetual chain of signification (this is key to Baudrillard’s, 1983, definition of ‘hyperreality’, where image takes precedent over function). Thus meaning is constantly deferred from signifier to signifier, and so on, and one can never gain access to the ‘transcendental signified’, the idea that a signifier will ultimately refer to a stable signified concept, implicit within Saussure’s semiology.

History tells us that semiotics, as it is now universally known, not only survived Derrida’s punishing critique, but positively flourished (albeit by turning its back on structuralism). Its cause was aided by the fact that some of Derrida’s criticisms had already been addressed in Peirce’s theories of the sign (a fact acknowledged by Derrida himself), and deconstructionism, as with most forms of postmodern writing, did not present a pragmatic alternative. Indeed, as Gottdiener (1995) suggests, it only dealt with the ‘conception’ of culture, or its mental image, and had little interest in the material world as the social context in which signs operate (an indifference that seems to be at odds with its recognition of polysemy). Also, by denying that the flow of meaning could ultimately be halted by a stable and unquestionable concept (the transcendental signified), it neglected the role of social interaction and communication in generating and reasserting fundamental signifieds, on which a majority of folk were agreed (a similar point was made in the earlier discussion of landscape as ‘text’ – see Section 3.4).

Derrida, perhaps unwittingly, laid the foundation for what could be termed ‘modern’ or ‘post-structuralist’ semiotics – a more enlightened approach to the study of signs that is chiefly concerned with the social contexts in which they are used (this represents a shift in focus from ‘langue’ to ‘parole’). One variation on this theme is ‘socio-semiotics’ (see Gottdiener, 1995: 98)
which focuses upon the connection between material culture ('the substance of expression') and specific ideologies ('the form of content'). Hjelmslev first used the terms 'expression' and 'content' when referring to signifier and signified, but Gottdiener is not interested in the traditional Saussurean model of the sign. Neither is he keen to emulate the abstract theorising of the postmodernists. Instead he finds a 'third way' that recognises the freedom of both senders and receivers of signs to interpret them in the manner they choose, whilst focusing upon the material forms and practices of everyday life, as constrained by the codified ideologies or value systems of social groups.

Having summarised the history of semiotics and its key principles, we are in a better position to judge the strengths and weaknesses of the approach. On the positive side, it encourages us not to take for granted what we see and hear in the real word, but to penetrate, dissect and understand the ideologies and associated discourses that operate at a deeper level of meaning. To put it another way, semiotics is equivalent to 'reading between the lines', instead of accepting the 'natural' or 'apparent' meaning of a text. It also avoids the elitism of much literary criticism (an alternative method of textual analysis), by refusing to make distinctions between high and popular culture – the signs of both are of equal importance to the semiotician. Finally, it represents an improvement upon content analysis (another alternative), defined as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (Berelson, 1952: p.18). Typically, this involves counting the number of times a particular item (whether written or visual) is featured, and then grouping these values according to categories defined by the researcher. However, such an analysis privileges frequency over other valid criteria, such as placement (Burgelin, 1972), and does not sufficiently interrogate the connotative meanings of the signs that make up that text, or the ideologies that dictate and naturalise those meanings. Content analysis was
originally popularised in social-scientific approaches to the study of mass communication (Weber, 1990), but has now been relegated to the status of “a first step” or “a basic building block” (Gold, 1994: p.20), in other words, a pilot for more ‘sophisticated’ analytical methods. In this respect, it is a useful accompaniment to semiotic (and, for that matter, discourse) analysis, as demonstrated by Dann (1996b) and Hopkins (1998).

On the negative side, apart from the above criticisms of structuralist semiotics by Derrida, there is a tendency for some analysts to present their accounts as though they were objective, scientific treaties, not subjective, negotiable interpretations (Chandler, 1994). Furthermore, as this chapter testifies, semiotics is accompanied by a large and occasionally abstruse vocabulary, the danger being that this might be misused in order to demonstrate the intellectual mastery of an author, at the expense of accessibility to a wide readership. This does little to improve the standing of semiotics amongst those who lie outside of the small academic community familiar with these terms, and exposes the method to the criticism that it “tells us things we already know in a language we will never understand” (Seiter, 1992: p.1). On a different point, Morgan and Pritchard (1998) suggest that semiotics, with its concern for the ‘poetics’ of meaning, does not sufficiently address “issues of knowledge, power and historical specificity” (p.34), for which they advocate a discursive approach. Finally, semiotic analysis can result in a somewhat ‘cold’ reading of a cultural artefact or practice, which does not do justice to the human beings implicated in its production and consumption. In this respect, a more suitable alternative would be ‘ethnography’ (“a form of field research in which the researcher attempts to understand a culture by becoming part of it”; Thwaites et al, 1994: p.205) or ‘ethnomethodology’ (where explanations are provided by those participating in, as opposed to those administering, the study). Both approaches are especially popular in audience studies (such as Morley’s, 1986, analysis of how families watch television), where
the views of the addressee must be considered as well as the message itself. With regard to this study, however, it was not felt necessary to pursue either of these alternatives, since it is concerned with the material and symbolic construction and transformation of Rhyl as a tourist destination, and not the perceptions or behaviour of its ‘consumers’ (which, in this context, may be loosely described as both visitors to the resort and readers of its municipal brochure).

The precedent for the use of semiotics in the analysis of tourism phenomena was set by MacCannell (1989a; orig. 1976). Borrowing from Peirce’s model of the sign, MacCannell proposes a ‘semiotic of attraction’ whereby information on a particular ‘sight’ (the object), is conveyed by a (series of) ‘marker(s)’ (the representamen), to the ‘tourist’ (the interpretant). This suggests, to use an example, that visitors to the Capital City of Wales will not actually see Cardiff, as such, but a series of ‘symbolic markers’ that represent it (the castle, the Millennium Stadium, the civic centre, the Edwardian shopping arcades, and the like). Furthermore, it has been posited that tourists express greater involvement with markers, than with the sight itself. Hence, an unprepossessing field approximately six miles north-west of Nuneaton, is perceived to be a tourist attraction, not by virtue of once hosting the Battle of Bosworth (1485), but because it is accompanied by vivid descriptions in guidebooks of the area, and official white on brown Department of Transport tourist direction signs allowing visitors to locate it. Semiotic analyses of specific tourist attractions have since been undertaken by Bennett (1983) on Blackpool Pleasure Beach, and Gottdiener (1995) on Disneyland.

In an interesting piece of alliteration, Dann (1996a: p.6) suggests that “nowhere...is a semiotic perspective considered more appropriate than in the analysis of tourism advertising with its culture coded covert connotations”. Indeed, this claim is substantiated by a number of
studies that have utilised tourist brochures, including Thurot and Thurot's (1983) neo-Marxist interpretation of Club Méditerranée, Uzzell's (1984) (alternative) structuralist analysis of the '18-30' tourist market, Selwyn's (1993) attempt to deconstruct the myths perpetuated in relation to Thailand and various other destinations of the 'Far East', and Dann's (1996b) 'dilettante' application of semiotics and content analysis to representations of hosts and guests. However, not all works of significance focus upon brochures, as with Albers and James' (1988) paradigmatic analysis of Mexican postcards, which sets up oppositions between the postcard as text and Mexican culture as a whole (e.g. festive, as opposed to everyday, dress), and Hopkin's (1998) socio-semiotic interpretation of representations of the Canadian countryside in pamphlets, flyers and other promotional literature.

Together with a special issue of 'Annals of Tourism Research' (Volume 16, Number 1), introduced by MacCannell (1989b), and a review article by Echtner (1999), the above works reflect a growing recognition amongst tourism researchers of the suitability of semiotics for studies that focus, in whole or part, upon the cultural. Indeed, the tourism industry is replete with signs, as implied by the seminal works of Krippendorf (1987) and Urry (1990), which make reference to the imagery that underpins the 'promises of the paradise seller' and the 'tourist gaze', respectively. In these circumstances, one can only imagine that the "privileged relationship between tourism and semiotics" (MacCannell, 1989b: p.2) will continue for some time yet.

Slater (1998: p.238) claims that "semiotics is all theory and very little method, providing a powerful framework for analysis and very few practical guidelines for rigorously employing it". How, then, did the author analyse the front covers and editorial content of those municipal brochures that were published for the purpose of promoting Rhyl as a holiday destination,
between the years of 1951 and 1996? The solution was found with a hybrid methodology, comprised of two 'procedures' – one for the written copy contained within each brochure, and the other for their pictorial content (a similar approach is taken by Arnold et al, 1997, in their analysis of retail flyers). The former was derived from the Jakobson model of communication, as amended by Thwaites et al (1994: p.19) (see Figure 3.5.2), and involved the identification and analysis of the following seven 'sign-functions', and the associated 'elements' that make up any spoken or written communicative act:

- the 'referential function' – the sign's ability to invoke a 'content';
- the 'metalingual function' – the sign's ability to suggest the 'code(s)' by which it may be interpreted;
- the 'formal function' – the structure of the sign, or its 'form';
- the 'expressive function' – the sign's construction of an 'addressee' (or the authorial persona it proposes as its source);
- the 'conative function' – the sign's construction of an 'addressee' (or ideal reader);
- the 'phatic function' – the nature of the 'contact' between addressee and addressee, as constructed by the sign;
- the 'contextual function' – the sign's ability to indicate the 'situation' in which it operates.

The latter procedure was a derivative of Barthes' 'spectral analysis', as applied to predominantly visual texts. Starting with the brochure's 'linguistic' (the words, or anchorage, that often accompany graphical images) and 'iconic' messages (both connotative and denotative), the author attempted to extract and interrogate the myths of contemporary life that were exhibited and perpetuated by it. The exact procedure for this was drawn from Thwaites et al (1994: p.72), with minor amendments by the author:
1. The principal signifiers, within the text, were identified;

2. A selection of possible (connotative) signifieds were proposed for each signifier;

3. The social codes, to which the connotations in the text belong, were established;

4. Those connotations that appeared to be the most literal or acceptable (i.e. the denotations) were distinguished;

5. These connotations and denotations were used as a 'way of seeing' the cultural milieu in which the text was situated, and the specific ideological tenets that influenced the choice and arrangement of signifiers.

Two things must be stressed with respect to these procedures. Firstly, although each may appear to be a highly systematic way of analysing the municipal brochure as text, neither was an exact science (in the event, readings proved to be more 'intuitive' than 'methodical'). Indeed, as Echtner (1999: p.50) points out, "the semiotic/structuralist approach allows considerable analytic freedom and creativity in terms of research procedures". Secondly, the meanings that the author attributed to each of the extracts/images that were scrutinised do not constitute universal truths, nor do they preclude other readers of the same texts from reaching quite different conclusions. It is, however, maintained that they share a satisfactory degree of correspondence with a reality that exists outside of our conceptions of it (otherwise there would be little point in conducting such an analysis).

Readings of an editorial extract from the 1966, and the front cover of the 1995, municipal brochures for Rhyl, show how these procedures worked in practice. Let us start with the former:

There's a welcome awaiting EVERYBODY at SUNNY Rhyl. Plenty of accommodation (first class); entertainment (A.1) and amusement (the tops) plus miles of golden sand, regularly sea-washed, low rainfall, high sunshine records.
You want the BEST, you want all the facilities of a modern, happy and invigorating holiday centre with parks and huge carpets spread with floral displays to thrill you. You want the perfect Family Holiday Resort with marvellous attractions for the children. You want a little history, scenery to admire, tradition to hear about, the luxury of nature’s gifts to enjoy – and lots of the other things like good shopping, country walks and efficient municipal administration. Seek no further – here’s SUNNY RHYL.

A number of features emerge from a critical reading of this passage, which capture the mood of the holiday experience offered by Rhyl, and the way in which it was promoted, as at the time of the brochure’s publication. Firstly, the conative and phatic functions dominate (i.e. “you want…”), in what is a classic example of the ‘hard sell’ approach to marketing, so typical of this era (see Proctor, 1996; Kotler et al, 1998). Indeed, the tone is relentless and repetitive, almost as though the addresser is trying to ‘break down’ the perceived resistance of the addressee to the notion of taking a holiday in Rhyl (a literal version of the old ‘foot in the door’ tactics of the salesman, perhaps). Also, it is interesting to note the contrast between the complex and extensive holiday requirements attributed to the addressee, and the simplicity of the solution – “SUNNY RHYL” – as though the resort is some kind of ‘miracle cure’ that needs no explanation. Secondly, despite extending a welcome to everyone, the ideal reader appears to be the head of the family (i.e. the person who makes all the ‘important’ decisions). Elsewhere in the brochure, the gender of that role is implied to be ‘male’, and the family ‘nuclear’, with allusions to ownership over other family members (e.g. “you and yours”). Thirdly, claims of being the “BEST” resort are backed up by appealing, but vague and unsubstantiated, expressions of quantity (e.g. “plenty”, “miles”, “regularly”, “low”, “high”) and quality (“first class”, “A.1”, “the tops”). Fourthly, as for the terminology, Rhyl is always prefixed by the word “SUNNY” (emphasised in capitals), forming a cliché which, at the time, was repeated so often that it was perceived to be a fact (incidentally, it is less likely that such repetition would ensure legitimacy amongst a more sophisticated modern-day audience). Also, conventional slang such as “A.1” and “the tops” is used to position the resort as a
'switched-on' and 'trendy' place, in a brazen attempt to appeal to the youth of the day by borrowing from their vocabulary. Fifthly, aspects of high culture (e.g. "history", "scenery", "tradition", "nature") are relegated to the end of the passage, and presented as inferior to the more popular (or plebeian) charms of Rhyl, through the use of the word "little" (as if too much of these qualities would, in some way, 'spoil' the holiday experience). Finally, it is curious, by today's standards, that "efficient municipal administration" should feature as a requirement of the holidaymaker, as if to suggest that his [sic] experience of Rhyl would be all the poorer without it. This could, on one hand, be interpreted as yet another manifestation of the 'municipal ego' (the tendency of the local state to 'talk up' its involvement in the provision and promotion of services to tourists). Alternatively, the era in which this text was published was one of extensive state involvement in the production process (as demonstrated by the large number of industries that were under national ownership at that time). Therefore, perhaps we should not be so surprised to see such expressions of 'civic self-esteem' in texts of this vintage.

Likewise, much is to be gained from subjecting the front cover of the 1995 Rhyl and Prestatyn municipal brochure, published by the former Rhuddlan Borough Council (Plate 3.3), to a critical, as opposed to a passive, reading – this time with a different procedure. Upon examination, the key signifiers appear to be the landscape, the pattern created by the ignited firework, the "Rhyl and Prestatyn" logo, the caption "Welcome to the beautiful Vale of Clwyd", and the European Union and Welsh flags. What then, are the signified concepts, indicated by these elements? Firstly, the landscape is of the west end of Rhyl promenade (looking onto the Ocean Beach Funfair), although this is not obvious without some knowledge of the resort. Secondly, the fireworks suggests a festival of some kind, in this instance, one best appreciated after dusk. Thirdly, the logo is a stylistic representation of the
two place-names in question. Fourthly, the caption is hailing or greeting the reader (or would-be visitor) to what is claimed to be a beautiful place – the Vale of Clwyd. Finally, the EU and Welsh flags are the chosen iconic representations for those two particular territories.

Just as each of these signifiers connote certain signifieds, further connotations (and denotations) can be drawn from considering the text as a (syntagmatic) whole. For instance, whilst most people are retiring for the night, visitors to Rhyl (and Prestatyn) are experiencing
the carnivalesque pleasures of amusement and transgression (or ‘letting one’s hair down’), as metonymically represented by the fairground rides. In addition, the logo presents a dominant/subordinate relationship between the two resorts by using larger characters for one and smaller characters for the other (Rhyl is, after all, the bigger and older resort, and contains a greater number of attractions). As for the caption, the area is positioned as a rural idyll of remarkable aesthetic quality (although there is little evidence to suggest this in the view itself). Furthermore, by extending a welcome, normally reserved for the visitor, to the reader of the brochure, the caption chooses not to discriminate between the two, as if to say that the reader is already there (this might be a meaningful device for converting a request for the brochure into the act of travel itself). Finally, the flags raise an interesting question of identity, denoting an affiliation not just with Wales, but with Europe as a whole. A possible explanation lies with the fact that much of the redevelopment of Rhyl promenade was financed by the European Regional Development Fund although, once again, this interpretation relies upon a knowledge of the ‘exo-semiotic’ rather than being derived from reading the text in isolation.

The remaining task is to understand the overall meaning of the text which, as we already know, is derived from the syntagmatic combination of its constituent signs. This is best achieved through the use of a commutation test (see earlier). By way of demonstration, picture the different meanings that would result, if we were to substitute night for day (complete with a grey sky), a close up of the promenade instead of a distant shot (the local authority acknowledges the western esplanade to be one of the most unattractive features of the resort), or the Union Jack as opposed to the EU flag. This helps us comprehend why those particular signs were chosen, and how they come together to represent a resort which is fun to visit, transgresses the repressive regime of clock-time, and offers panoramic views in a truly
attractive part of the country. Naturally, there are no guarantees (only possibilities) that the reader of the brochure will agree with these sentiments – (s)he may even be unaware of them.

On a final point, it is worth pre-empting any criticism of over-interpretation that might be levelled at the above readings (i.e. “how can a mere paragraph of text, and the cover of a holiday brochure, generate so many observations?”), by reminding the reader that a healthy measure of expediency was used when applying and presenting the findings of these semiotic procedures (the depth of analysis, above, is merely for illustrative purposes). This does not imply, however, that meanings of significance were overlooked or not reported. Rather, they were generalised into key themes, which were used both to structure the discussion contained within Chapters 5 to 8, and to substantiate objectives one and three of this study.

3.6 ‘Tracking’ the committee minutes of Rhyl’s local authority

The highly subjective manner in which cultural landscapes and tourist brochures are encoded and decoded, meant that it was inadvisable for the author to claim to understand the role of the local state in the development and promotion of Rhyl as a tourist destination, solely from reading these phenomena as ‘text’ (objective two). Clearly, it would have been unrealistic, and indefensible, to impute motives to elected councillors and their officers, based upon observations of the landscape and brochure ‘texts’ alone (in spite of their importance in shaping them). Instead, direct access to the decision making structures of the local state was sought, via the recorded minutes of those committees and sub-committees of Rhyl Urban District Council (from 1951/52 to 1973/74) and Rhuddlan Borough Council (from 1973/74 to 1995/96), whose decisions had a significant bearing upon the post-war development and promotion of Rhyl as a seaside resort.
Council minutes fall into the category of ‘records’ which, by definition, “attest to an event or transaction and form an official chronicle that is part of a larger work, usually on the processes and proceedings of public affairs” (Guba and Lincoln, 1981: p.230). Of all the methods recommended by Guba and Lincoln as suitable for records analysis, the author chose ‘tracking’, which assumes that a person’s (or institution’s) actions leave traces within certain records, that may be recovered and analysed as evidence of those actions. It is, in fact, similar to the work of the investigative journalist who, in seeking to verify that a particular incident took place, looks for clues within records that are accepted to be ‘authoritative’ and ‘genuine’.

The rationale for analysing these council minutes was simple. As it was, and is, in the rest of the country, most of the decisions taken by Rhyl’s local authority were delegated to committees made up of elected councillors, the meetings of which were recorded and deposited in the public domain (in this case, Denbighshire County Council’s Records Office), as true and accurate accounts of what was said and agreed (in practice, of course, certain items of information would have been ‘struck from the minutes’ and, therefore, lost to the researcher). They represented the only credible means of evaluating the involvement of the local state in attracting tourists to Rhyl and catering for their needs (during the period 1951/52 to 1995/96), as so few individuals from the early years of the analysis – with the authority to speak on this matter – were available to recount their experiences.

As with the previous two sections, it is appropriate to conclude with a demonstration of this methodological procedure in action, in this case with the help of a page of minutes taken at the meeting of Rhyl Urban District Council’s ‘Entertainments and Parks Committee’, on Monday 8th July 1968 (Figure 3.7). Four features contained within this extract invite discussion, namely:
At a meeting of the SEASONAL ENTERTAINMENTS AND PARKS COMMITTEE held in the Council Chamber Town Hall on Monday the 8th day of July 1968 at 5 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor K.F. Christley, Chairman.
Councillor J. Esmor-Thomas (Chairman of the Council).
John T. Conway, R. Mervyn Owen, Emlyn Williams (S.O.).

SEASONAL ENTERTAINMENTS.

18. The Clerk submitted a letter from Mrs. D.H. Harris concerning the lack of entertainments in the town during June 1968.

RESOLVED -

(a) That the Clerk be instructed to advise Mrs. Harris of the present position concerning the provision of seasonal entertainment and of the particular difficulties encountered in this connection during the current year, and

(b) that matters concerning the possible extension of seasonal attractions be considered at the meeting due to be held on 5th September 1968.

PIER.

19. The Clerk reported on a confidential enquiry concerning the future of the Pier.

RESOLVED that consideration of this matter be referred to the Sub-Committee appointed to consider the entertainments complex and indoor swimming pool (p.25), for investigation and report.

PAVILION LOUNGE BAR.

20. (A) Licence. The Clerk reported on negotiations with the present licensee of the Pavilion Lounge Bar for the renewal of the licence for the premises for a period of three years (p.345).

RESOLVED that the Clerk be authorised to complete the renewal of the licence herein subject to such administrative variations as might be considered necessary, by the Clerk and the Treasurer.

(B) Security. The Clerk reported on matters concerning security at the Pavilion Lounge Bar.

RESOLVED that this matter (including determination of apportionment of cost) be left in the hands of the Chairman of the Committee in consultation with the Clerk, with power to act.

PROMENADE FACILITIES.

21. The Clerk submitted an application from the Liverpool Daily Post and Echo for newspaper promotion facilities on the Promenade involving balloon races and the use of a vehicle.

RESOLVED that this application be refused with regret.

Figure 3.7: Extract from Rhyl UDC Council Minutes (Denbighshire C.C. Records Office)
1. *The committee in question.* Given tourism's holistic nature, and its all-pervasive presence in a town such as Rhyl, it was no surprise to find that decisions pertaining to the industry were scattered across several committees (e.g. 'Publicity', 'Parks and Gardens', 'Entertainments' and 'Health'). If this were not complex enough, where a decision(s) was of sufficient magnitude, a (temporary) sub-committee would be instituted, which would then make recommendations to its parent committee for approval. This occasionally resulted in some rather curious designations, such as the 'Sub (Miss Wales) Committee' and the 'Sub (Pavilion Lounge Bar Curtains) Committee'! On a more serious note, the fragmented coverage of tourism in these minutes, not to mention their sheer volume (i.e. forty five ledgers of around seven hundred to eight hundred pages each), made the task of analysing them somewhat protracted.

2. *The format adopted.* The conventions used within these minutes were remarkably consistent throughout the forty five years for which they were available. Each committee's proceedings would begin with a roll call of those councillors that were present, followed by apologies for absence, before moving on to the business at hand. Also, certain protocols were commonplace, such as the exclusion of the public prior to the discussion of confidential matters, and the requirement for members to declare any vested interest in a particular decision, whereupon they were obliged to leave the Council Chamber until the resolution in question had been passed. Suffice to say, since the author was interested in the issues being discussed, and not the day-to-day mechanisms of local government, such entries were excluded from the analysis.

3. *Matters raised during the meeting.* The majority of issues did not engender much coverage within the minutes, either inasmuch as they were self-explanatory or because the relevant information was contained within an (unseen) report, circulated to all members at the meeting. On occasions, however, certain propositions of a controversial nature would
be debated at length (e.g. the demolition of Rhyl's principal theatre, the ‘Pavilion’, in 1974), thus providing a rich seam of material for analysis.

4. Resolutions passed. Typically, resolutions would take one of five forms: (i) a positive statement of intent; (ii) a refusal of terms; (iii) the maintenance of the status quo; (iv) a deferral to a later meeting, or; (v) a referral to a different committee or named officers of the council. Those passages containing resolutions pertaining to matters of a tourism nature were treated as irrefutable evidence of local authority involvement in the provision and promotion of the Rhyl product.

All subsequent claims, with regards to items three and four, above, are corroborated by either citing, or making reference to, the relevant passage(s) contained within the minutes. Since the weight of evidence was such that transcripts could not realistically be provided with this thesis, a referencing system was devised to aid the reader in the task of revisiting the minutes, should (s)he so desire, comprised of: (i) an abbreviation denoting the committee responsible for raising or passing the matter or resolution under discussion; (ii) the volume of minutes (and the page, or pages) containing the necessary proof, and; (iii) the agenda item in question. By way of example, the resolution referring matters concerning the pier to the 'Sub (Entertainments Complex and Indoor Swimming Pool) Committee', in Figure 3.7, would be referred to thus (E&PC-18(101)-19). Information in support of this referencing system may be found in Appendix A.
4 Case Study

4.1 Introduction

Rhyl is a purpose-built resort on the North Wales coast, just east of where the River Clwyd meets the Irish Sea (Figure 4.1). With a resident population of 24,909 (as of 1991), and an estimated 4.2 million visitors per annum, of which 1.7 million are tourists and 2.5 million are day excursionists (as of 1993 – Denbighshire County Council, 1995: p.73), it is comparable to medium-sized seaside resorts in England, such as Weymouth and Bognor Regis, but is the largest of its kind in Wales. One of the few north facing resorts in Britain (with some interesting microclimatic consequences), it was a characteristically linear settlement akin to the models of Barrett (1958) and R.A. Smith (1991), before expanding inland to accommodate a mix of residential, (light) industrial and retail development. That said, given the enduring appeal of the sea, at least to gaze upon if not to bathe in, much of the provision for tourists remains concentrated within the area adjacent to the beach (see Figure 4.2).

The rationale behind the choice of Rhyl as the case study for this thesis was presented in Section 1.2, and need not be revisited here. Instead, this chapter will chronicle the town’s rise and fall as a long-holiday destination, from the late eighteenth century to the present day.

4.2 A brief history of Rhyl (1794 – 2001)

Rhyl is a comparatively young settlement. Indeed, prior to the end of the eighteenth century, the land on which the town is now situated was mostly marshland, with a few scattered
cottages, and was regularly flooded at the mouth of the River Clwyd. The turning point came with the Rhuddlan Marsh Embankment Trust Act (1794), a land drainage and flood defence scheme that provided deeper shipping lanes for the nearby port of Rhuddlan, thus facilitating the export of agricultural produce from the Vale of Clwyd to markets in Lancashire. Neighbouring landowners were appointed as Trustees, with the power to assume ownership of the marshes and undertake the necessary works, the capital for which was raised from the sale of the improved, but agriculturally unproductive, land for the safe anchorage of trade vessels. However, in 1807, a new motivation for acquiring land in the area emerged, with the sale of twenty acres “in an eligible situation for sea bathing” (Chester Chronicle, 2nd September 1807). The fashion for immersing oneself in the sea had finally reached North Wales and, in the ensuing years, was to be responsible for a glut of sales to the east of the River Clwyd, on which hotels and other tourist amenities were constructed.

Contrary to the situation that prevailed in the nearby resort of Llandudno, land in Rhyl was sold in small lots, on a freehold basis, and without the dictatorial influence of a single dominant landowner or estate. This was to prove crucial to the social tone of the resort in that, in the absence of a ‘grand plan’ or restrictive covenants, development in Rhyl (as was the case in Blackpool) occurred in a rather haphazard manner, answerable only to market forces (Fletcher, 1993). Hence, it is of little surprise that, after a brief flirtation with the more affluent classes (including King George III’s third son, the Duke of Sussex), Rhyl drifted towards the popular end of the tourist market, where it has remained ever since. Transport improvements were undoubtedly the catalyst for this, in the form of a thrice-weekly (later daily) steam packet service between Liverpool and Rhyl, which commenced in 1829, and the Chester to Holyhead Railway, which opened as far as Bangor in 1848. The latter brought an influx of visitors from the newly-industrialised regions of Lancashire, Merseyside and the
West Midlands who, upon arrival, found a nucleus of some forty shops, inns and hotels, bounded by Church Street, Wellington Road, Crescent Road and West/East Parade (Figure 4.2: C3-D3/Y3-Y7) – Millward and Robinson (1979). They were also welcomed by a new promenade, running from Water Street (C6/Y2) to High Street (D6/Y2), the £1,000 cost being met from local subscriptions to a fund-raising initiative, led by the Hon. Edward Mostyn Lloyd Mostyn MP (who was later to play a key role in the development of Llandudno).

The railway also generated welcome publicity for Rhyl, with the publication of guidebooks and, much later, poster campaigns at stations across the network. An early example of the former was ‘Parry’s Railway Companion from Chester to Holyhead’, published in 1848, which encapsulated the resort’s popular appeal at that time:

This place is justly ranked as the best bathing place in the Principality. It has grown during the last few years from a small village to a large and respectable town. The salubrity of the air, the beauty of the scenery, the contiguity of the town to the sea, and the extent and firmness of the sands render it a place of considerable attraction, and is accordingly patronised by visitors from all parts of the Kingdom.

In the early years of Rhyl’s development as a resort, tourists were accommodated in the houses of local residents, an arrangement that gradually receded with the construction of several hotels in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. These included the Royal Hotel (built in 1825), which was advertised as offering hot and cold showers, a bowling green and a billiard room (C9/Y4), the Mostyn Arms Hotel (C9/Y7) (1832) and the Belvoir Hotel (D7/Y3) (1840). During this time, the resort’s ever-improving tourist trade, and the obvious potential offered by the railway, “attracted a thrusting, ambitious, resident bourgeoisie” (Fletcher, 1993: p.522), not all of whom were employed in providing hospitality to visitors (e.g. builders, solicitors). It also led to a healthy turnover in speculative land acquisitions, which
offered annual returns in the region of seven to twelve per cent, compared with a typical interest rate on borrowed capital of between three-and-a-half and five per cent.

With the Rhyl Improvement Act (1852), municipal responsibility for the resort (which became a parish eight years earlier) shifted from the vestry at Rhuddlan to a secular, and more proactive, board of ‘Improvement Commissioners’. The act limited the newly-formed board to thirty elected members, all of whom had to be male, over twenty-one years of age and owners or lessees of property with a rateable value of no less than £20 per annum. It also restricted the rate that the Commissioners could levy, to two-shillings-and-sixpence in the pound (with provision for a raise of one shilling, provided two-thirds of all ratepayers were in agreement). Their record speaks for itself – in the ten years that followed, Rhyl (whose population numbered 1,563 in 1851) gained a new waterworks (1853), a lifeboat and Town Hall (1856), a police force (1857), a gas supply (1858), and a fire engine (1860), although the utilities were, at first, privately owned. Furthermore, by the 1860s, the resort’s population had increased to 3,000 (three times that recorded in the 1840s), so justifying the presence of a post office (C9/Y6), a branch of the North and South Wales Bank (C7/Y5), a market hall and assembly rooms, two local newspapers (the ‘Rhyl Record’ and the ‘Rhyl Journal’, founded in 1855 and 1856 respectively), two churches (the Holy Trinity, C7/Y5, and St. Thomas’s, D4/Y7 – the first of which was consecrated in 1835, and the second built in stages between 1861 and 1869), two chapels and a convalescent home (C5/Y3). Plates 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 give an impression of what Rhyl must have looked like, around this period in its history.

Access to the resort was further improved with the opening of the Rhyl to Denbigh branch line in 1858, which conveyed day trippers from the Vale of Clwyd, and the construction of the Foryd Toll Bridge in 1861, thus creating a new gateway to the west. However, despite gaining
a head start on many of its regional rivals (Blackpool included), Rhyl was beginning to feel the effects of competition, principally from its neighbours Colwyn Bay and Llandudno. Hence, it was timely that, in 1867, it should become the first of the North Wales resorts to have its own pleasure pier. Constructed at a cost of £23,000, and situated opposite the junction of East Parade and Church Street (D2/X9), the Victoria Pier was to prove expensive to maintain and rather prone to damage from storm-driven vessels and the corrosive qualities of the sea air, throughout its one hundred and five year life (twenty three years of which were spent closed to the public on safety grounds). Nevertheless, it represented a necessary
investment, and icon, if Rhyl was to entertain any pretensions of being a premier tourist destination of national (that is British, as opposed to Welsh) repute.

Although many investments in nineteenth century Rhyl paid handsome dividends, it was not unknown for some to go awry, the most spectacular example of which was surely the Winter Gardens, opened in 1876 (the same year that saw the construction of the current Town Hall, C\textsubscript{7}/Y\textsubscript{7}, at a cost of £8,000). Despite an impressive array of attractions (including an artificial lake, a theatre, a fountain, a Seal Pond, a Monkey House, a Switchback Railway, an aviary, a bandstand, a skating rink, tennis courts and a cricket pitch), excessive construction and maintenance costs prevented it from making a profit, and the thirty five acre site – bounded by West Parade, Butterton Road, Wellington Road and Sandringham Avenue (B\textsubscript{0}-B\textsubscript{4}/Y\textsubscript{3}-Y\textsubscript{7}) – was sold for housing in 1894 (by which time Rhyl’s population had surged to 6,491). This came at a time when investment in Rhyl was flagging. Plans to run electric trams from the railway station, through High Street and along the promenade, were scrapped in the 1880s, and no new attractions were added during this decade (although two large seafront hotels, the Westminster and the Marina, were built in 1878 and 1889 respectively). The most likely cause of this mini slump was the emerging taste for quieter and more remote resorts, such as Llandudno and Southport, which hitherto had suffered from the ‘tyranny of distance’. This was certainly reflected in the population of the former, which had caught up with, and surpassed, that of Rhyl by the time of the 1891 census (Fletcher, 1993).

Fortunately for Rhyl, this hiatus was relatively short-lived, and development resumed in earnest in the 1890s, commencing with the Russell Buildings in High Street (1890) and the Grand Pavilion (1891). The latter cost £3,500 and was built at the entrance to the pier (D\textsubscript{2}/Y\textsubscript{0}), to a strikingly Gothic design. Reputed to house the world’s largest theatre organ, it hosted
musicals and other forms of light entertainment, plus the occasional public meeting. Sadly, and no doubt because of its wooden construction, the Grand Pavilion was utterly destroyed by fire, only ten years later. Meanwhile, in 1895, the ornamental Marine Lake and Pleasure Gardens were created on mudflats to the west of the promenade (A<sub>0</sub>-A<sub>7</sub>/Y<sub>6</sub>-Z<sub>3</sub>). A few years after opening to the public, this £10,000 feat of late-Victorian engineering was supplemented by several fairground rides, including a figure-of-eight roller-coaster, a water-chute and a miniature railway, and was leased by Rhyl Urban District Council (which had replaced the aforementioned Board of Improvement Commissioners in 1894) to Rhyl Amusements Limited. Along with its later neighbour, the Ocean Beach Pleasure Park (A<sub>2</sub>-A<sub>7</sub>/Y<sub>3</sub>-Y<sub>6</sub>), it was to mark the distinction between the livelier but tawdry West Parade, and the quieter and more refined East Parade.

By 1899 (the year in which the last large Victorian hotel, the Palace, was built on the promenade), visitors to Rhyl were arriving in such numbers as to warrant the extension of the platforms at the railway station (C<sub>0</sub>/Z<sub>2</sub>). Many, especially the day trippers, made a bee-line for the beach, one of the few arenas for self-expression in turn-of-the-century Britain. Even here, social control was strictly imposed. Bathing machines, some two hundred in number, were very much in evidence, and the pier was used as a none-too-subtle means of segregating the ‘gentlemen’ from the ‘ladies’ (the former to the east and the latter to the west). The beach, by now, was also the venue for the customary seaside pleasures of boating, donkey rides and Punch and Judy shows. Incidentally, a short film of children playing on the beach around this time, was shot by Arthur Cheetham (a Mancunian who converted the Lyric Hall in Market Street, C<sub>0</sub>/Y<sub>7</sub>, into Rhyl’s first moving picture house, the Silvograph, in 1906) and, together with footage of a May Day procession along the promenade, survives to this day as a unique reminder of what Rhyl was like at the end of the nineteenth century.
The pace of development hardly let up in the first decade of the new century. In 1901, the year in which Queen Victoria died, Rhyl’s streets were lit by electricity for the first time. The following year saw the opening of the Queen’s Palace (C9/Y3), a four-storey building comprising a theatre, a ballroom (with space for 2,000 couples), an underground ‘Venetian’ lake (with ‘authentic’ gondolas), and a zoo, all topped off with a huge glass dome offering views of the Irish coastline, the Isle of Man and Snowdonia. With uncanny parallels to the Grand Pavilion before it, the Queen’s Palace was burnt down in November 1907, although the façade was retained as part of the Grand (later Queen’s) Theatre (which is now an indoor market). At least, in its short life, this most original of attractions witnessed the introduction of two more landmarks to the Rhyl landscape – the Sussex Street Baths in 1905 (C9/Y4) and the Carnegie Free Library in 1907 (C7/Y6) (‘free’ for all, that is, except Scots-born steel millionaire and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie, who donated £3,000 towards its construction).

Rhyl’s last significant construction project before the Great War of 1914 to 1918 was the Pavilion Theatre (opened in July 1908). Designed by the acclaimed architects Maxwell and Company of Manchester, and built for £13,500 on the promenade – opposite Edward Henry Street (C4/Y1) – in a mere four months, it could accommodate a seated audience of 1,600 and regularly staged circus performances, opera, pantomimes, plays and various cabaret acts. Like many other seaside theatres, it rarely made a profit for its owners, RUDC. However, it was arguably Rhyl’s greatest landmark on account of its wholly unique and exotic design, the centrepiece of which was a huge, illuminated dome (lending comparisons with the Taj Mahal in India), flanked by terraces picked out in red and yellow brick. Indeed, in its sixty-six year life, it was rarely omitted from promotional posters and the front cover of the annual...
municipal brochure. Hence, what it failed to generate in gate receipts, it more than made up for in publicity for the resort.

In 1913, the pier was closed by the local authority, who had purchased it four years earlier, after its middle section collapsed in the wake of a storm. It was to be another seventeen years before it was reopened to the public. Little else happened in the resort during the 1910s (which, by now, was home to just over 9,000 residents), largely because of the First World War (as it is known today). However, this did usher in a period of profound social change in Britain (and throughout Europe), which saw the relaxation of the old formal Victorian attitudes and the advent of some thoroughly modern leisure activities, during the ‘Roaring Twenties’ (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999). Closer to home, this was reflected in the replacement of the horse-drawn bathing machines on Rhyl beach, with scores of large wicker-basket chairs (that could be coupled together for privacy), the advent of mixed bathing, and the first non-religious Sunday concert at the Pavilion Theatre (all of which took place in the mid-1920s). The choice of a female impersonator (the locally-renowned Billie Manders) as Queen of the three-day 1929 Carnival (considered to be the largest event ever held in the town), was further confirmation of the greater tolerance shown by late-Edwardian society towards the behaviour of the public when at play.

One other characteristic of the inter-war years at the seaside, was the ‘counter-cyclical’ nature of tourism investment vis-à-vis the national economy (Walton, 1983; Morgan and Pritchard, 1999), the majority of which came from the public sector. Indeed, apart from the extension of the promenade (to two miles) and the construction of the roofless Coliseum Theatre (C/Y) – both in 1921 – much of the capital that was injected into Rhyl between the wars coincided with the economic depression of the late 1920s and 1930s. In 1930 alone, the local authority
reopened the pier (albeit commuted to half its original length) and constructed an open air, floodlit swimming pool on the promenade (D9/X0), costing £23,000. There followed a host of improvements throughout the decade, including three cinemas – the Plaza (C9/Y4), Odeon (D1/Y0) and Regal (D1/Y7), the eight-acre Botanical Gardens to the south-east of the town centre (E4/Z8), facilities for Bowling, Putting and Tennis on the promenade, chalets just off East Parade (D8-E9/Y0), the New Foryd Bridge (built for £66,000), and a training wall to steer the River Clwyd away from the beach.

Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, Rhyl had evolved from a resort whose primary appeal lay with its advantageous physical environment (e.g. good views, fine sands, bracing sea air, a climate beneficial for the regeneration of body and mind, and so on) to one that had embraced the fashion for more active and carefree holidays, both during the day and at night (as demonstrated by the increased provision of facilities for sports and dancing). This evolution, however, was rudely halted by the Second World War of 1939 to 1945, which saw the beach ‘spiked’ (using wooden poles and concrete pyramids) to prevent an enemy invasion, the imposition of blackouts and rationing, an influx of refugees from the cities, and the relocation of the Ministry of Works and Buildings from London. Thankfully, only two bombs were dropped upon the resort (in March 1941) with no casualties, the only other incident of note being the discovery of a mine in the Foryd Harbour, which was later defused. Clearly, there were more pressing targets elsewhere.

Predictably, the period of austerity that followed the end of hostilities saw few additions to Rhyl’s range of attractions, save for the Garden of Remembrance on East Parade (D8/Y1) and the Clock Tower at the seaward end of High Street (D9/Y2) – two commemorative gestures that were erected in 1948. Accordingly, it took a few years for the number of visitors to reach
and exceed their pre-war levels (by which time the development of the Ocean Beach Fun Fair was underway), although the town’s population was showing no signs of slowing down, with a census return of 18,868 in 1951, compared to 14,760 in 1931, no doubt boosted by the failure of some refugees to return ‘home’. Rhyl’s recovery as a holiday destination, in the 1950s, was measured, not so much in bricks and mortar, but in the more intangible delights of the ‘Miss Sunny Rhyl’ Bathing Beauty Competition (held every Wednesday at the Open Air Swimming Pool), the staging of headline acts such as Laurel and Hardy and Cliff Richard, the introduction of ‘rock and roll’ onto the resort’s dance floors, and the provision of lavish illuminations (though not on the scale of those encountered at Blackpool). In fact, it took until 1959 for RUDC to match the investments of the inter-war years, with the Royal Floral Hall, a huge £21,000 arboretum on the promenade (opposite Bath Street – Ds/Yo), stocked with non-indigenous cacti, flowers, plants and shrubs. Together with the flower beds that bedecked the promenade, and the Botanical Gardens, the Royal Floral Hall lent credibility to Rhyl’s latest attempt to win the hearts and minds of would-be visitors (especially those of a horticultural persuasion), by positioning itself as ‘The Floral Resort’. Two views of Rhyl promenade that featured in the 1961 municipal brochure (Plate 4.2), illustrate the range of visitor attractions into which the Royal Floral Hall was neatly slotted.

The summer of 1962 saw the use of the Vickers VA3-001 ‘Hovercoach’, on a series of trial runs between Wallasey and Rhyl (a journey of some thirty-two minutes). It was to prove a fitting metaphor for the resort by ending up at the bottom of the Solent a mere three years later, having been scuttled by a mine in the name of research. The decade marked a distinct downturn in Rhyl’s fortunes, although this was not reflected in the number of visitors, which apparently remained buoyant from beginning to end. The traditional seaside entertainment
Plate 4.2: Annotated view of Rhyl promenade facing (1) west and (2) east, circa 1960 (Rhyl Urban District Council)
facilities were hardest hit, with the closure of the Queen’s Theatre in 1960, the Regal Cinema in 1962, and the pier in 1966, along with the loss of the Ritz Ballroom (A$_3$/Y$_4$) (formerly the Alhambra Café) to fire in 1968, and the removal of the fairground at the Marine Lake, upon termination of the lease held by Trust House Forte Leisure Limited, in 1969. More subtle changes were apparent, too, echoing developments in the tourism industry at large, most notably the increased volume of traffic on the resort’s roads and the commensurate demand for on-street parking, which did little for a place that once prided itself on its clean air and relaxed atmosphere. The latter hardly benefited from the highly visible and audible presence of several amusement arcades along West Parade, either, after a rash of conversions in the 1950s. In addition, a revolution was taking place in the accommodation sector, with the loss of hotels and, to a lesser extent, ‘Bed-and-Breakfast’ establishments to self-catering (and residential) apartments. The growing preference for freedom-of-choice in one’s holiday arrangements also fuelled the expansion of caravan parks and camp sites on the relatively undeveloped stretches of coastline to the west and east of the resort. Meanwhile, the youthful, anti-establishment streak that characterised the 1960s, revealed itself in the much publicised beach battles involving rival gangs of youths (under the various banners of ‘Mod’, ‘Rocker’, ‘Skinhead’, etc.), and the escalating tensions between ramblers and amorous couples over the use of the sand dunes. Even the entertainment industry seemed to be reorienting itself towards a younger audience when, in 1962, the erstwhile Billie Mander’s local theatre troupe, the ‘Quaintesques’, ended a run of forty-two consecutive summer seasons at the Amphitheatre (D$_2$/Y$_0$) (built in 1923 and subsequently renamed the Gaiety Theatre), and the Beatles performed at the Regency Dansette in High Street (later returning for two nights at the ill-fated Ritz Ballroom). Rhyl, which for some time had promoted itself as a wholesome family resort, seemed to be losing its innocence.
The early 1970s offered some encouragement to the resort, with the conversion of the Odeon Cinema into the first three-screen movie complex in Wales, and the opening of the Grange Road Indoor Swimming Baths (E6lZs) (a replacement for the Sussex Street Baths, which were closed in 1969). However, controversy quickly followed when the local authority demolished not one, but two, of Rhyl’s principal attractions – the pier in 1973, and the Pavilion Theatre in 1974. The reasoning behind the former, although short-sighted by today’s standards, was logical enough – the pier had become an eyesore and an alternative buyer could not be found. The latter decision, however, was altogether more debatable. Certainly, substantial cracks had been discovered in the upper part of the building (the dome), which would have been expensive to put right, and the theatre had been losing money in its later years. Nonetheless, its removal robbed the resort of one of its few remaining unique selling points, and was made all the more galling by the fact that, when the bulldozers moved in, the supposedly defective dome fell to the ground in one piece!

This seemingly hasty act might never have happened, had it not been for RUDC’s desire to ‘tie up the loose ends’ before it was dissolved to make way for Rhuddlan Borough Council, under the Local Government Act (1972). Its successor authority (one of six in the new county of Clwyd) covered an area extending several miles inland, taking in primarily rural communities such as Bodelwyddan, St. Asaph and Bodfari, whose needs were very different from those of Rhyl and Prestatyn (by far the two largest settlements in the Borough). One could argue that this distracted RBC from its attempts to address the issues facing those resorts, at a time when they needed more, not less, attention (having said that, the council was to be an ambitious one during its twenty two years in power). Furthermore, its policy was to promote tourism throughout the Borough, rather than at the seaside alone, which might explain why the cover of the 1976 ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ Holiday Guide, the first to be
produced under the new regime, contained a single photograph of Rhuddlan Castle, a peculiar choice of image for a pair of established ‘sun and fun’ destinations.

The loss of the pier and Pavilion Theatre left Rhyl without a flagship attraction, and so RBC set about finding a replacement. For some years, concerns had been raised about the lack of wet weather facilities in the town, a deficit that was made all the more problematic by the increased demand for, and supply of, comparatively-priced package holidays to overseas destinations that could boast far more impressive sunshine records than Rhyl. The construction of the Sun Centre opposite the junction of East Parade and Conwy Street (E2/Y2), a “beach brought indoors” to use the words of the former Borough Treasurer, therefore made perfect sense. Heated to 81°F and extensively planted with palm trees and other tropical vegetation, the complex was designed by Gillinson, Barnett and Partners of Leeds to accommodate three ‘free-form’ pools (one for bathers, one for surfers and one for children), a wave machine, water slides, sun beds, an overhead monorail, a licensed bar and restaurant, sales kiosks, and changing rooms. It was, to say the least, a difficult birth. A strike and defective workmanship turned a sixteen-month contract valued at £2 million into a four and a half year project costing £6 million, although the council received a ‘shot in the arm’ from the European Economic Community, with a European Regional Development Fund grant of over £500,000 (the first to be awarded to a tourism-based project). Much of the remaining capital was provided by loans, a precept on the rates (amounting to 1½ pence in the pound in the 1975/76 financial year and enforced for a total of nine years), and interest earned on the monies that built up during the aforementioned strike action. The labour pains, however, were evidently worth it. When the Sun Centre eventually opened in June 1980, it proved an instant ‘hit’ (clocking up half a million visitors and a trading profit of £240,000 in its first year of operation). As a measure of its success, the formula has been copied many times since, in a
variety of different places (not least in the guise of the now-ubiquitous modern-day leisure centre). Incidentally, provision was made in the scheme for a new theatre, but spiralling costs dictated that this be put back to a later date, when the profits generated by the Sun Centre could be ploughed into its construction (a logical decision since, if the theatre had been built first, it would not have made enough money to fund the Sun Centre). The New Pavilion Theatre (E₆/Y₂) was eventually opened alongside the Sun Centre in 1991.

Unfortunately, the success of the municipally-owned and operated Sun Centre could not be matched by the private sector. A monorail, suspended some fifteen feet in the air on the central promenade, operated for only six weeks during the summer of 1980, before debts of £650,000 forced its owners into liquidation (it was later dismantled in 1982). Meanwhile, the traditional promenade attractions were reaching the latter stages of their respective product life cycles, and were re-branded in a last-ditch attempt to resurrect diminishing visitor interest. In some cases, the attraction retained its existing function, but disguised under a new name (e.g. the Children's Cycling Track, Cₗ/Y₁, and Roller Skating Rink, Cₛ/Y₁, were renamed 'Cyclorama' and 'Skateworld' respectively). Others, however, underwent a more imaginative transformation, notably the Open Air Swimming Pool and Royal Floral Hall which, with the addition of the necessary creatures, became Rhyl Fishing Village and Butterfly Jungle, respectively (these two attractions were later combined to form Ocean World).

For some traditional attractions and events, however, no amount of re-branding could have saved them. In the same year that the Plaza Cinema closed its doors for the last time (1984), the 'Miss Sunny Rhyl' Bathing Beauty Competition was axed, no doubt to the disappointment of many middle aged male visitors! In its place, the council chose to promote the brand new
White Rose Shopping Centre, built on the site of the former Crosville Bus Station (D1/Y4) and home to several well-known ‘high street’ retailers. Along with the exclusion of motor vehicles from High Street, this formed the main thrust of the council’s strategy to reposition Rhyl as a retail environment to rival the likes of Chester and Llandudno. Redevelopment of the area immediately east of High Street continued in 1986, with the opening of the Rhyl Library, Museum and Arts Centre (D5/Y3), at a cost of £750,000 (part-financed by Clwyd County Council). This was the first attempt to capitalise upon Rhyl’s heritage as a resort, with a mock-up of the old Victoria Pier (as it would have appeared around 1910) and a permanent exhibition of various items of seaside paraphernalia.

The effect of these developments upon the long-holiday trade was negligible, but they did, at least, generate an increased number of day trips and, to a lesser extent, short breaks (of between one and three nights), facilitated by the duelling of the A55 trunk road between Chester and Bangor. Those staying in the resort were quite likely to patronise one or more of its growing stock of night-clubs (e.g. the Dixieland Showbar, Catz and the Savoy Bistro), as Rhyl developed a reputation for the entertainment of single-sex groups (of the ‘Stag Night’ variety) during the evening and late into the night (later consolidated by the drugs scene).

These developments were not universally welcomed, but at least people were still visiting the town, even if they were staying for fewer nights, spending less money, and (in some cases) making a nuisance of themselves. In their absence, and with few other industries to support its residents (several of whom were attracted to the area by a publicity campaign in the 1960s and 1970s), the resort would have experienced far higher rates of unemployment, with all the attendant symptoms of an ‘ill’ society, namely poverty, crime and drug-usage (which were, in any case, conspicuous by this time).
Undeterred, RBC set about the most ambitious programme of investments ever seen in Rhyl, since the heady days of the early and mid nineteenth century. This commenced with the opening of the Skytower in 1988 (C5/Y1), a two hundred and forty foot import from the Glasgow Garden Festival that offered unrivalled views of North Wales, and provided a much needed focal point for the west end of the promenade. Spurred on by its success (it was one of the few municipally-owned amenities in Rhyl to make a profit), the council announced its intentions to comprehensively redevelop the promenade in 1989, with a mix of new attractions, environmental enhancements and improved infrastructure. With copious amounts of funding from the European Union and the Welsh Development Agency, work started in September 1991 with the demolition of the Gaiety Theatre, to make way for an underground car park (C8/Y1). Six months later, permission was granted for the clearance of the Ocean World site, on which the £1.4 million Sea Life Centre (D2/Y0) and £2.7 million Events Arena (D6/Y1) (dubbed the ‘non-events arena’ by critics) were constructed (opening in 1992 and 1994 respectively). Both were bold architectural statements, the former possessing a pitched roof that reached ground level, and the latter a flat, concentric maze (some eighty metres in diameter), surrounded by pre-cast concrete walls shaped to look like those of a sand-castle, with integrated shelters and seats. They were joined in 1995 by the even more outlandish Children’s Village (C7/Y1), a collection of novelty retail units built to a similar ‘fairytale’ design as that found in many theme parks and based around a covered staircase (the ‘Village Square’) leading down to the underground car park. Away from the seafront, improvements were made to the railway/bus station with the intention of providing a better welcome for those few visitors who still travelled to Rhyl by public transport (the days when the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, and later British Rail, ran regular excursions to the resort were, by now, a distant memory).
The council’s efforts were hailed as an upstanding example of ‘Entrepreneurial Planning’, loosely defined as the use of less restrictive development planning policies – in combination with subsidies and grants, the provision of suitable land, and appropriate advertising and publicity campaigns – to ‘lever-in’ private sector investment (see Davidson and Maitland, 1997). Accordingly, the redevelopment programme received several accolades and even penetrated the academic literature as a lesson in how to address resort decline (e.g. Association of District Councils, 1993; Cooper, 1997a). These plaudits were, however, premature and failed to foresee the profound and intractable difficulties that were to beset the scheme. Most seriously, it left Denbighshire County Council (which succeeded RBC in April 1996) with a debt of £7 million, with the result that vital services were put in jeopardy and several projects were either terminated prior to completion (e.g. the Ffrith Beach Leisure Park, near Prestatyn), or abandoned at the ‘drawing board’ stage (e.g. the proposed marina at the Foryd Harbour). Furthermore, investment from the private sector, so crucial to the scheme’s success, was slow to materialise. Nowhere was this more obvious than at the Children’s Village which, with the exception of the Tourist Information Centre and Apollo ‘5’ Cinema, was left largely untenanted (it was also heavily criticised for blocking the view of the beach from the promenade). Given the severity of the situation, those council officers deemed responsible (principally RBC’s Chief Executive) would, under normal circumstances, have faced disciplinary charges. However, few of them now worked for the new unitary authority, hence they could not be made to answer for their actions.

Even without taking account of this issue, the catalogue of problems that afflicted Rhyl during the 1990s makes for grim reading. Firstly, its stock of serviced accommodation plummeted from 2,890 bed-spaces in 1989, to 1,857 in 1995 (see Table 4.1), much of the lost capacity being used to accommodate the homeless and unemployed. This did little to improve the
resort’s already-tarnished image, although landlords could hardly be blamed for shunning the seasonal, and fickle, tourist trade for a year-round source of revenue. Indeed, in 1991, the average income of a guest house in Rhyl was estimated to be in the region of £10,000 to £15,000 per annum, as compared to the £40,000 that one could earn from the Department of Health and Social Security, according to figures supplied by the Rhyl Hotel and Guest House Association. Secondly, a report published in 1996 claimed that the main beach was one of the fourteen worst, in the United Kingdom, for water quality, although improvements carried out by Welsh Water saw it secure a ‘Seaside Award’, a mere two years later. Thirdly, one of Rhyl’s few remaining corporate tenants, First Leisure (who, as Trust House Forte Leisure Limited, took over Rhyl Amusements Limited in 1967), pulled out of the resort in 1997, after

Table 4.1: Number of bedspaces in Rhyl by accommodation type, 1989 and 1995 (Rhuddlan Borough Council)
the Superbowl \((A_6/Y_4)\) and part of the Ocean Beach Funfair (both owned by the company) were destroyed in two separate fires (the latter started deliberately), causing damage estimated at £1¼ million. Finally, Rhyl received several scathing reviews in guidebooks and the media, principally the Rough Guide to Wales (which berated it as a ‘decaying Edwardian resort’) and the Western Mail (which disparagingly nicknamed it ‘Costa Del Dole’), in addition to the negative publicity generated by the RBC debacle, mentioned above.

Casting a critical eye over Rhyl, at the start of the twentieth-first century, it is hard to disagree with these sentiments. Half a century of modernisation has blighted much of the built environment which, given its Victorian pedigree, could conceivably have played a key role in a future bid to win back lost trade (in value if not in volume). In the worst cases of architectural vandalism, bay windows, chimneys and ornamental detailing have been removed, original brickwork hidden behind paint, pebbledash and stone-facing, and ground-floor frontages obliterated by poorly-designed signage, porches and canopies. The resort’s drift down-market is also articulated through its equivalent of Blackpool’s ‘Golden Mile’ – West Parade – where the contemporary visitor will encounter a mix of tourist accommodation (much of it unclassified), amusement arcades, takeaways, souvenir shops, tattoo parlours, night clubs, and an alarming number of vacant, and in some cases derelict, properties. Those few traditional attractions along its length, which have made it into the twenty-first century, face an uncertain future – the Coliseum Theatre is now closed and the Marine Lake, Rhyl’s only remaining Victorian attraction, was recently ‘adulterated’ by the installation of a storm water and sewage drainage tank. Finally, nuisances such as bird mess, fly-tipping and petty crime, increasingly disfigure the landscape, and threaten to reach epidemic proportions, unless something is done by the local authority to check their progress.
However, not everything in Rhyl is indicative of a declining resort. The Ocean Beach Funfair and Sun Centre still attract large numbers of visitors, as does the Knights Caverns (Cz/Y3), an innovative audio-visual simulation of the torture chambers of ancient Wales and the medieval legends of the ‘Mabinogion’. Also, several properties along the promenade have recently been renovated with the help of grant aid from the local authority, the Welsh Development Agency, the Wales Tourist Board and CADW, in recognition of the seafront’s role as the ‘shop window’ for the resort. In any case, it would be inaccurate to suggest that Rhyl per se is in decline, since it still finds favour with day trippers and certain niche markets (e.g. those interested in bowling, horticulture and ‘clubbing’), and supports functions other than leisure (e.g. retailing, light industry, and welfare). That said, since tourism was responsible for the resort’s initial growth and remains the dominant industry in the town (despite the best efforts of the local authority to diversify its income base), one should not be entirely surprised to find that any reduction in Rhyl’s capacity to accommodate and entertain tourists should be equated to its downfall.
5 Results and Discussion of First Epoch:
"An Indian Summer" (1951 – 1960)

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to 'set the scene', against which later material and symbolic transformations within Rhyl, and their economic, political and, above all, cultural antecedents, may be evaluated. Its title (inspired by Parry, 1983: p.189) was chosen to reflect the resurgence in the number of holidays taken at Rhyl, and the British seaside as a whole, during the 1950s, commensurate with Britain's emergence from post-war rationing and austerity into a period of relative affluence, and founded upon near-full employment and holidays with pay. The idea of resorts enjoying a fleeting return to former glories during this decade is, in fact, a recurring one in the academic literature, most recently appearing in Walton (2000: p.7), who speaks of the "sense of full bloom and incipient decay which seemed to typify the Indian Summer of the seaside in the 1950s". Moreover, Soane (1992) offers a compelling reason for this 'stay of execution', namely that Britons of this era were intent upon 'getting back to normal' after the turbulence and pain of the Second World War, and what better way of achieving this than by returning to the 'nation's playground', which had effectively been 'off-limits' during hostilities?

For Rhyl, this was a decade of very little change, as it was for the majority of British seaside resorts. Relatively minor physical damage had been sustained during the war, and government priorities rightly lay with rebuilding industry and the cities, which had borne the brunt of the conflict. Furthermore, the motivations and practices of visitors staying in mass-market resorts
such as Rhyl, throughout the 1950s, were remarkably consistent with those that prevailed in the first four decades of the twentieth century. In other words, the majority of tourists (with their families) *still* arrived by train, *still* sought temporary respite (often for a period of one week) from the responsibilities and monotony of the home and the workplace, and *still* stayed in a boarding house or holiday camp (Walton, 1997).

5.2 Rhyl and (high) modernism

In reading Rhyl’s townscape and municipal brochure as text, for the years 1951 to 1960, the author encountered many signs that were consistent with the fundamental tenets of (high) modernism as a cultural experience (here, the prefix ‘high’ is used to convey the sense in which modernism was still very much the dominant cultural formation of the day). Of these tenets, four were identified as being most pertinent to the production of Rhyl’s tourism resources and place images during this epoch, to wit: (i) ‘volume and homogeneity’; (ii) ‘spatial specialisation’; (iii) ‘habitus and distinction’, and; (iv) ‘rationalism and bureaucracy’. Together, they were the outcome of a search for an explanation as to what ‘made’ Rhyl during this epoch which, in accordance with the epistemology of critical realism (see Section 3.3), went beyond the actions and decisions of the resort’s producers (and consumers), as the ‘apparent’ or ‘obvious’ solution to this research problem, to ‘deep reality’ and the generative mechanism of ‘culture’.

5.2.1 Volume and homogeneity

Central to modernism is the view of the public as an homogeneous mass, that there is a realm of correct values which will serve to unify people.

(Urry, 1990: p.87)
Mass tourism, a regime based upon the creation and management of environments in which large volumes of people could be efficiently fed, watered, entertained and rested was, in essence, the extension of Fordism, the dominant economic practice of the day, from the 'workplace' into the 'playground'. Put simply, Fordism involved the large-scale production of standardised goods (by a labour force that was rigidly divided into units specialising in certain tasks and motivated by high wages), which were not so much targeted, as thrust, at consumers en masse (Barker, 2000). Fordist forms of consumption were distinguished by: (i) a preparedness to purchase mass-produced commodities; (ii) elevated expenditure on consumer products; (iii) high-volume, high-yield markets, in which the choice of producers, brands and products for the consumer was limited; (iv) minimal product differentiation, according to fashion, season or market segment, and; (v) few assurances or guarantees for consumers regarding product quality (adapted from Urry, 1990: p.14); and were reflected in the various impersonal and inflexible arrangements for efficiently 'processing' the comparatively large numbers of holidaymakers that descended upon a given seaside resort during high season (e.g. the set meal-times and wake up calls of the holiday camps, the similarity of one café's fare to another, and so on). One should, however, exercise caution in criticising these strategies as yet another example of the dominance of producer over consumer interests under Fordism, for there were few other 'coping mechanisms' to deal with the exponential rise in the number of Britons taking a holiday in the immediate post-war period (one estimate suggested a twofold increase, from 15 to 30 million – Urry, 1990: p.27), and little expectation on the part of the mass tourist to be singled out for special treatment (that is, over and above the basic level of 'pampering' expected by all holidaymakers).

There is plenty of evidence, from the 1950s, to suggest that Rhyl (and its constituent products) was built, operated and promoted with the mass market in mind. For instance, the
capacities of the resort’s principal man-made attractions were far in excess of those expected in a town of its size (i.e. with a population of 18,868, as of 1951), the most notable examples being: (i) the 1,000-seater Alhambra Café – the epitome of mass catering; (ii) the Open Air Swimming Pool, which measured 110 by 30 yards and was surrounded by terraces that could hold up to 1,000 spectators (with additional room for deckchairs); (iii) the Pavilion Theatre, which could accommodate a seated audience of 1,600, split between the balcony and the stalls, and; (iv) the Queen’s Ballroom, with a dance-floor large enough for 2,000 couples. Rhyl’s mass appeal was also reflected in the municipal brochures of the day, with highly-populated scenes of anonymous pleasure seekers on the beach and promenade (in preference to shots of individuals and small groups), and images emphasising the vastness of the featured attractions (see Plates 5.1.1 and 5.1.2).

However, the resort’s strategy of encouraging ‘volume over value’, and its apathy towards niche market provision and promotion, worked against it in later years, as its visitors became increasingly mobile and resistant to being treated as a mass, to the point where they sought out alternative destinations and experiences (thus leading to a substantial and, to date, irreversible fall in visitation). In addition, having made provision for large numbers of tourists, the above-named attractions were very much dependent upon their presence in order to project the desired atmosphere. Being reliant upon the collective tourist gaze (Urry, 1990), they presented a particularly odd and uncomfortable sight outside of the peak season, and were often closed during times of low demand as a result. Subsequently, with the internationalisation of mass tourism and the relocation of the gaze away from the British seaside, their viability was brought into question, invariably leading to permanent closure and a change of use or demolition (starting with the Queen’s Ballroom in 1958).
Plate 5.1: View of (1) Rhyl beach facing west and (2) interior of the Queen’s Ballroom, circa 1930 (Rhyl Urban District Council)

5.2.2 Spatial specialisation

Modernity was the age of the classical specialised local economy, whereby certain industries agglomerated around particular municipalities or regions (e.g. textiles in Lancashire, shipbuilding in Tyneside and coal mining in the Rhondda Valley), as influenced by the availability of natural (and human) resources and the friction of distance (i.e. the need for producers to be close to suppliers, distributors and markets). Tourism, too, was an industry
with strong spatial preferences, favouring (in the main) coastal areas located within relatively easy reach of (but not too close to) the industrialised conurbations of inland Britain. Underpinning this was a highly structured, or ordered, society in which work, rest and play were spatially (and temporally) differentiated from one another. This, in turn, was responsible for the formation of clear dichotomies or ‘inversions’ (Williams, 1998: p.9) between the seaside resort and the remainder of urban Britain, the most notable being that of ‘pleasure’ versus ‘pain’. Pleasure, according to Urry (1990: p.102), was equated with “being away from the place in which one worked and from the boring and monotonous pain of work, especially of industrial production”. It was also closely linked to the phenomena of ‘spectacle’ (with an emphasis upon surface appearance, particularly those physiognomic attributes that could be described as ‘extraordinary’, ‘monumental’ or ‘extravagant’) and ‘carnival’ (which involved an unusually high degree of social mixing, a lurid fascination with the human body and the short-term interruption and reversal of the protocols that governed human behaviour and relations in everyday life – see also Bakhtin, 1984, and Rojek, 1995).

It was this very spatial concentration of pleasure and pain into the seaside resort and the workplace, respectively, that saw the former function, and prosper, as a place of (temporary) escape for the working and lower middle classes, during the modern era. What, therefore, prompted such an abundance of pleasure (or of spectacle and carnival) within the average seaside resort, whilst ensuring an absence of pain? Three overlapping explanations may be offered in response to this question. Firstly, resorts (being, quite literally, at the periphery of civilisation) were too remote to play any meaningful part in the manufacture and distribution of goods (which required the raw materials, skilled labour and accessibility of the inland conurbations), and so were untainted, on the whole, by the machinery, architecture and practices of production. Consequently, they possessed what might be termed a ‘leisure
landscape’ in which very few, if any, references to work could be found, unless by way of censure, parody or commodification (naturally, this does not reflect the experience of their host populations, many of whom were engaged in servicing the tourist). Secondly, Urry (1990: p.86) suggests that tourism has always involved spectacle, and reminds us of the fierce competition amongst seaside resorts “to provide visitors with the grandest ballroom, the longest pier, the highest tower, the most modern amusement park, the most stylish holiday camp, the most spectacular illuminations, the most beautiful gardens, the most elegant promenade, and so on”. Finally, carnival (as an outlet for self-expression, the mockery of authority and the exhibition of base human emotions) presented a challenge to the realisation of an orderly and highly disciplined society (see Section 5.2.4). However, experience suggested that its repression resulted, not only in violence, but in making it “an object of wrenching speculation and curiosity” (Rojek, 1995: p.87). It was, therefore, ‘kept at arm’s length’ by consolidating it into certain times and spaces (e.g. the ‘official’ bank holiday, the seaside funfair). Shields (1991: p.7) designates such spaces ‘liminal zones’, and defines them as “thresholds of controlled and legitimated breaks from the routines of everyday, proper behaviour”, as with Brighton beach, which was transformed – in the mid nineteenth century – from a site of medical recuperation into a site of pleasure. Here, as on other resort beaches, the holidaymaker could exorcise those pent-up emotions that had accumulated during the year, within certain prescribed limits of behaviour and without fear of recrimination (unless he or she exceeded those limits). This ‘carnivalesque’ spirit was further compounded by the large concentration and turnover of ‘strangers’ (i.e. people who had never met before and, crucially, were never likely to meet again).

Ever conscious of its image as a utopia for the pleasure-starved inhabitants of Lancashire and the West Midlands, the Rhyl of the 1950s worked hard to differentiate itself from those
conurbations in which so many of its visitors lived and worked. This was evident in the
town’s treatment of its two other significant industries, namely retailing and brick-making.
The former, being complementary to its mission of attracting outsiders (whether as day
trippers, tourists or permanent residents), was actively encouraged, especially in relation to
‘major league’ retailers such as ‘Marks and Spencer’ and ‘Woolworths’. The latter, made
possible by the presence of heavy underlying clays, was an altogether different proposition.
Strict municipal intervention, dating back to the 1850s, restricted the various brick-works (of
which there were fourteen at one time) to the edge of the town, well away from the seafront,
thus ensuring that the air, visual and noise pollution generated by such operations did not have
an adverse impact upon the resort’s tourist trade. This stigmatisation of ‘heavy’ industry was
also reflected in the resort’s municipal brochure, which made much of the benefits of visiting
an area free of the extractive and manufacturing trades:

After a year’s hard work in factory, mine or office, nothing is more soothing to
the holidaymaker than wide spacey beaches gently fanned by the sea breezes so
full of health-giving ozone.

(RUDC, 1950: p.1)

Moving on, as one of Britain’s premier seaside resorts, Rhyl could justly claim to be more
spectacular than most. Indeed, the townscape and municipal brochure texts of this epoch were
replete with signs of spectacle, as epitomised by two of the resort’s principal entertainment
buildings – the Pavilion Theatre and Royal Floral Hall. The architecture of the former was
truly sensational (see Plate 5.2). Constructed out of local brick (thereby fostering a ‘regional’
sense of place), its distinguishing feature was an enormous dome (presumably inspired by
Brighton Pavilion), akin to those seen atop ecclesiastical buildings in Russia and the
subcontinent. Indeed, it met, and surpassed, the defining criteria of spectacle – its huge
dimensions allowed it to be seen for miles around, its countenance was ‘foreign’ (at least to
the majority of those spectators who had never been overseas), and it possessed a level of
detail and embellishment well in excess of that normally reserved for amenities constructed without a ‘serious’ purpose in mind (i.e. production, religious worship or government). Less spectacular, but still remarkable, was the Royal Floral Hall (dubbed the “Eighth Wonder of Wales” by the resort’s promoters). Comprised almost entirely of glass, it was built, late in the decade, as home to an impressive variety of non-indigenous plant life and was the culmination of an age-old strategy to position Rhyl as some kind of horticultural paradise (complemented by regular victories in the annual ‘Wales in Bloom’ competition). This presentation of nature at its most flamboyant, diverse and exotic, had parallels in many other British seaside destinations, in the guise of aquaria, aviaries, Winter Gardens and zoos, and invoked reminders of the Victorian obsession with collections of unusual flora, fauna and minerals. Incidentally, unlike the architecture of spectacle that pervades today’s cities, “with its sense of surface glitter and transitory participatory pleasure, of display and ephemerality, of jouissance” (Harvey, 1989: p.90, emphasis his), such sites were not easily reproduced and so had an aura about them that positively invited the tourist gaze. In contrast, so much of
postmodern architecture, not to mention life, is anti-auratic, including those attractions that replaced the Pavilion Theatre and Royal Floral Hall in the 1980s and 1990s (see Section 8.2.1).

Carnival, too, was a fundamental feature of 1950’s Rhyl (not just in the literal form of ‘May Week’, which was more of a local festival than a tourist event) – the last decade in which the seaside was accepted as the principal, if not the only, arena for self-expression in (modern) Britain. If one attraction epitomised the carnivalesque, it was surely the combined Ocean Beach and Marine Lake Funfair(s), as demonstrated by the advertisement reproduced in Plate 5.3, in which two defining features of features of carnival may be detected, namely: (i) the channelling of a large number of people into a finite, and ostensibly ‘public’ space (i.e. admittance was free, although the rides were not) in which considerable social mixing occurred, and; (ii) the inversion of the physical and social realities of life ‘outside’ the carnival, as with the ‘excessive’ height and speed of the funfair’s ‘white knuckle’ rides, the various opportunities for children to become adults (e.g. by ‘driving’ one of the “Kiddies’ Cars”) and adults to become children (e.g. by entering the “Krazy Kot”, Rhyl’s equivalent of the ‘House of Fun’), and so on. Elsewhere, a third symptom of the carnivalesque – the exposure of the human body, and the female form in particular – was well and truly in evidence with the appearance of the bikini (invented in 1946 by the French car designer Louis Réard) on the resort’s beaches and in its brochures. The latter, true to form, contained many photographs of the ‘ideal’ (i.e. thin) bikini wearer, in stark contrast to the ‘undisciplined’ or ‘grotesque’ (i.e. obese) body that was regularly observed on both the beach and the ‘saucy’ picture postcard. Given the moral restraint of modern society, however, the sexual connotations invoked by such images were underplayed by the brochure copywriters, at least for the time being (see Section 7.4.2).
5.2.3 Habitus and distinction

The terms 'habitus' and 'distinction' derive from the work of Bourdieu (1984). Habitus may be loosely defined as a set of unwritten rules that is imprinted – at the level of the subconscious – upon members of a given social class, and dictates (to a point) their conduct, preferences and habits (i.e. the socialisation process). Although it corresponds to social status (e.g. there are great differences between a bank manager and a panel beater in respect of their behaviour and the manner in which they interpret the world around them), habitus is a neutral expression that does not invite us to rank, as superior, one individual's way of life over another. Instead, the social evaluation of habitus is captured in the concept of distinction.
Here, classes compete with each other for power, which may be cultural (i.e. ‘symbolic’) as well as economic or political (i.e. ‘material’). In other words, power is not simply a question of wealth or dogma, but also of distinction, a condition that is encapsulated in Thompson’s (1963) explanation of ‘class’:

Class happens when some men [sic], as a result of common experiences (inherent or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.

(pp.8-9)

Bourdieu (1984) implicates three classes in this power struggle, namely: (i) the ‘legitimate’; (ii) the ‘middle-brow’, and; (iii) the ‘popular’. Each possesses varying amounts of ‘cultural capital’, which is “not just a matter of abstract theoretical knowledge but the symbolic competence necessary to appreciate works of ‘art’ or even ‘anti-art’” (Urry, 1990: p.88). In the quest for power, a given social class will seek to increase both the volume of cultural capital that it possesses, in relation to that of other classes, and the value of this ‘stock’ (which, like its economic equivalent, may rise and fall over time). This is reflected in the attempts by various classes to claim certain sites and activities as their own, and label them as markers of high distinction (i.e. ‘my habitus is better than yours’).

It is worth remembering that the popularity and prosperity experienced by most British seaside resorts in the post-war period, occurred at a time when much of society was still ‘working class’ (although one acknowledges that this is a rather nebulous term spanning a gamut of occupations, from skilled artisans to manual labourers). In this context, the nature of working class habitus and its attempts at distinction, together explain why mass market resorts such as Rhyl enjoyed an ‘Indian Summer’ in the 1950s, after the disruption of World War
Two. Specifically, the habitus of the working class may be said to be strong on group and grid, that is, there are clear boundaries between it and other social classes in terms of identity, and a rigid internal system of classification that associates certain times and places with certain activities and experiences – some favourable, some unfavourable (e.g. work/weekdays/factory; rest/weeknights/home; play/weekends/elsewhere). Indeed, Urry (1990) suggests that the heyday of the traditional seaside resort was founded upon strong ‘group’ and ‘grid’. Regarding the former, he reminds us of the powerful community and family bonds that saw workers from the same town, and often the same factory, travel with their families to the same resort, at the same time of year, for their annual summer holiday (as demonstrated by the Wakes Weeks that were popular in the north of England). As for the latter, these visitors associated pleasure with being (far) away from the pain of work, and venerated the seaside over all other spaces, as a utopia or liminal zone to which they could retreat from the demands, tensions and restraints of everyday life (see Section 5.2.2).

If one were to arrange the seaside resorts of 1950’s Britain according to their social tone, Rhyl would most certainly feature at the popular end of such a continuum, its status being the legacy of demand and supply side factors that were, by now, a century old. The monopolisation of Rhyl by, and for, working class families was clearly articulated through the various attractions and events laid on for the visiting public, and the manner in which these were promoted. For instance, the material expressions of high culture (e.g. the art galleries, museums and concert halls) were conspicuous by their absence, whilst those of popular distinction (e.g. the Ocean Beach and Marine Lake Fun Fairs) were provided and promoted as key features of the Rhyl product. Even Rhyl’s principal theatre, once home to opera and Sunday concerts with strong religious undertones, had been ‘usurped’ for the entertainment of
the masses, with a bill of circus performances, variety acts and appearances by radio and television personalities. Much provision was designed with a younger audience in mind, too, such as the Promenade Paddling Pool and the Botanical Gardens Cycling Track (although relatively little was provided for teenagers). Of course, this is not to say that visitors to Rhyl did not encounter the markers of ‘civilised’ society, in which children were ‘seen but not heard’, as demonstrated by the occasional early/late season leasing of the Pavilion Theatre to the Arts Council of Great Britain, for productions such as Shakespeare’s ‘The Merchant of Venice’ and Terence Rattigan’s ‘The Deep Blue Sea’, and the opening of nearby Bodrhyddan Hall to the public on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. However, the infrequency and timing of these events and the minimal coverage afforded to them in the municipal brochure, combined with the location of many of the elements of high culture outside of the resort’s boundaries (e.g. the scenic rural landscape, the local gentry, the historic castles of North Wales), contrived to relegate such phenomena to no more than interesting, but fleeting, diversions from the core, popular visitor experience.

In retrospect, the appropriation and spirited defence of Rhyl as a venue for working class, family-regulated holidays (encapsulated in the resort’s choice of ideal family for the 1955 municipal brochure – see Section 5.4.4, below) did it no favours in light of the social forces underpinning postmodernism, namely: (i) an increase in the number of family units not conforming to the traditional nuclear pattern (e.g. single parents and childless couples); (ii) the ‘terminal’ decline of the working class (see Gorz, 1980), and; (iii) the parallel emergence of a service class that used its considerable stock of cultural capital to denounce seaside resorts, and the entertainments therein, as ‘common’ and ‘vulgar’ (Urry, 1990). That said, it is easy to pass judgement with the benefit of hindsight!
5.2.4 Rationalism and bureaucracy

The ‘Enlightenment Project’ (see Section 3.3) marked the epistemological break with tradition that underpinned what we now know as ‘modernity’ (Barker, 2000). It also had far reaching implications for society, as well as knowledge. Its two instruments – ‘rationalism’ and ‘bureaucracy’ – may be understood as individual (i.e. ‘internal’), and institutional (i.e. ‘external’), regimes of ‘control’, ‘co-ordination’, ‘calculation’ and ‘conformity’, with the shared goal of personal and public progress. Under modernity, each social realm witnessed a particular manifestation of these precepts. For instance, the economy was transformed by the publication of Taylor’s (1964; orig. 1911) ‘Principles of Scientific Management’ (the precursor to Fordism – see Section 5.2.1), the academy by positivism, and leisure and tourism by the Rational Recreation movement that began in the 1860s. Driven by middle class fears that the perceived crisis in moral standards and the elevated rates of bodily infection, amongst the working class populations of the industrialised towns and cities, would somehow lead to society’s downfall, this was an orchestrated attempt primarily on the part of factory owners, but also the church, temperance organisations and other relevant institutions, to civilise the impoverished masses by providing opportunities for betterment through regulated leisure and tourism activities. Sports, handicrafts and excursions with a high educational or religious content (often involving a trip to the seaside) were foremost among those activities approved, championed and arranged in the name of rational recreation, as agreeable alternatives to so-called ‘deviant’ forms of leisure (e.g. the consumption of alcohol, indolence and animal baiting).

Over the course of time, the Rational Recreation Movement lost momentum, as standards of living in urban Britain improved, and attitudes towards the working class became more
tolerant and less rigid. However, some ninety years after its conception, the guiding principles upon which it was founded still informed tourist practices and provision in 1950’s Rhyl, as they no doubt did in many other seaside resorts, suggesting that modernity remained the dominant cultural formation of this epoch (resistance, or at least indifference, towards authority is a defining feature of postmodernity). The notion of a holiday in Rhyl as a means of not only restoring, but improving, physical and mental health, with a view to being better equipped to cope with the deleterious effects of life back home (i.e. pleasure seeking with a ‘purpose’), was heavily articulated in both the townscape and brochure texts of this epoch.

Features of relevance to the former included: (i) the retention and beautification of open space within the resort (e.g. the Botanical and Pavilion Gardens), with an acreage well in excess of what would normally be found in the inland towns and cities; (ii) its setting, in an area of Wales famous for its mountainous terrain, and; (iii) the volume and diversity of facilities laid on for those wishing to take part in various active and passive forms of ‘useful’ recreation (e.g. tennis, roller hockey, swimming, sequence dancing, golf, bowls, fishing and sunbathing).

In the first instance, a healthy body and mind was to be attained by strolling (on a daily basis) through such areas, breathing in air free of exhaust fumes and other pollutants, and drawing inspiration from the colourful displays of flora and fauna encountered along the way. Indeed, just as parks were established as the ‘lungs of the city’, so we might interpret the seaside resort of old as the ‘lungs of the nation’. As for the second, apart from the obvious benefits to fitness derived from scaling heights and breathing in the ‘rare’ air, mountainous regions were celebrated, not only for their aesthetic value, but as a means of ‘getting closer to God’ and seeing all human life ‘in its structure’ (thus fulfilling the need of self-actualisation, which lies at the summit [sic] of Maslow’s, 1954, hierarchy of human needs). Finally, the relevance of the third may be explained in terms of the widely recognised physical and mental rewards of
participation in sport and recreation. Also, the above-named facilities were regularly used for displays of human strength and perfection (e.g. acrobatic displays, diving exhibitions, log rolling and bathing beauty competitions), thus reminding the public of the possibilities for progress that could be achieved from the prudent management of the body (and mind).

The sentiments and alleged rewards of rational recreation were also highly conspicuous throughout the municipal brochures of the 1950s, as demonstrated by the following passages:

*Rhyl has been kindly endowed by nature with an equable climate, and the exhilarating sea breezes and brilliant sunshine soon bring a healthy flush to the faces of the inland town dweller...visitors revel in the joys of boating, bathing, golf, tennis and other pastimes calculated to build happy, healthy bodies and restore faded appetites, giving the holiday-maker a mental and physical fitness that will last long after the resort and its pleasures have been left behind.*

(RUDC, 1950: p.1, emphasis added)

There’s plenty of sun and plenty of space in which to lounge around and get the lovely tan we all secretly wish to acquire, and, indeed, that popular holiday pastime will help us to combat the colds and coughs of the English winter.

(RUDC, 1952: p.4)

The latter extract is particularly interesting, with its implication that even inactivity had a purpose! In ensuing years, however, excuses were no longer sought for ‘idleness’, ‘flânerie’ and ‘mindlessness’, which became accepted, and even promoted, as aspects of the (post) tourist experience (with correlates in one’s obligated time, too). This coincided with ever-increasing resistance to, and the eventual relaxation of, the various bureaucratic devices for policing tourist behaviour at the seaside (e.g. the rules of the guest house, promenade inspectors, illustrations of appropriate conduct in guidebooks and brochures, etc.), sometimes with quite dramatic results (e.g. the beach battles that became an almost annual event in Rhyl, throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and the emergence of a ‘drug culture’ in the resort’s clubs, during the late 1980s and 1990s).
5.3 Establishing the role of the local state as provider and promoter of services to tourists in 1950’s Rhyl

Throughout this epoch and the next, municipal responsibility for Rhyl lay in the hands of Rhyl Urban District Council, which was first elected in 1894 as a successor to the somewhat less democratic Rhyl Board of Improvement Commissioners. During its eighty year tenure, RUDC presided over many of the major developments in Rhyl’s history as a mass tourism destination (e.g. the construction of the Marine Lake in 1895 and the Pavilion Theatre in 1908, and the comprehensive redevelopment of the promenade and its attractions in the 1930s), and exercised a remarkably high degree of ownership and control over the resort’s tourism assets. Every month, the council would meet to approve the minutes of its constituent committees, in which elected councillors would debate issues of significance to, and determine council policy on, their appointed area of expertise. Several of these committees were involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in the provision and promotion of services to tourists. For example, aside of the Publicity, Entertainments, and Parks and Gardens Committees, whose association with tourism was rendered obvious by their titles, the Water Committee was responsible for bathing standards, the Health Committee for meteorological observations and food hygiene, the Road Committee for development control and the maintenance of the built environment, the General Purposes Committee for capital projects and infrastructure, and the Finance Committee for setting budgets and approving expenditure. In addition, issues of sufficient urgency or magnitude would be dealt with by one-off special committees and sub-committees, respectively, whilst the issuing of cinema, petroleum, hackney carriage, donkey and pleasure boat licenses, was conducted under the auspices of the Annual Licensing Meeting. This configuration, in which there was considerable potential for duplication of effort and internal disagreement, was consistent with the rather 'catholic'
nature of tourism in a town such as this, and its sheer importance, above all other industries, to the economy of Rhyl. It should also be noted, however, that certain functions of relevance to tourism in the local area were dealt with at the county, rather than district, level of local government (e.g. planning policy was the responsibility of Flintshire County Council), and so lay outside the jurisdiction of RUDC and its various committees (this arrangement was, as one might imagine, a source of occasional conflict).

The significance of RUDC’s committee structure will become clear in Section 7.3, which addresses the impact of local government restructuring on the post-1974 administration of tourism in Rhyl. The following discussion of RUDC’s involvement in tourism during this epoch (i.e. 1951 to 1960), identifies nine key roles played by the local authority, many of which span more than one of the above-named committees.

5.3.1 The council as landlord

Throughout this epoch, and the late twentieth century as a whole, the ownership of commercial land in the core visitor areas of Rhyl was evenly split between the public and private sectors, with the former owning the bulk of the resort’s principal tourist attractions and sports facilities, and the latter (which was dominated by small, family-run businesses) owning the ‘ancillary’ tourism services (e.g. hotels, boarding houses, restaurants and amusement arcades). It is also interesting to note that the larger corporations, principally the breweries and holiday camp operators, retained a modest presence in Rhyl during this epoch and the next but, befitting their status as a barometer of economic prosperity, gradually disappeared from the resort during the domestic tourism slump of the late 1970s and 1980s.
The policy of RUDC at this time was to retain control over its largest civic amenities (i.e. the Pavilion Theatre, the Victoria Pier and the Town Hall) and sports facilities (e.g. the East Promenade Tennis Courts), whilst letting smaller units to private operators, typically on short-term leases of between one and seven years (RUDC(S)~4(1/2)~3). Where improvements were made to facilities let by the council, the cost was met: (i) wholly by the tenant; (ii) partly by the tenant, with some contribution from the council, or; (iii) wholly by the council (usually with the help of a loan from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government). Option (i) was the norm where minor works were involved (e.g. the refurbishment of the Sports Café – FC~10(213)~14), whilst option (iii) was preferred for large-scale capital improvements (e.g. the enclosure and extension of the Coliseum Theatre – EC~10(211)~1). Suffice to say, option (ii) was an appropriate compromise for developments that fell between these two extremes.

RUDC’s relationship with its tenants was not always harmonious, however, as demonstrated by its long-running dispute with Rhyl Amusements Limited. This started in 1953, when the council discovered that the existing thirty-one year lease upon the Marine Lake site (granted in 1932) was invalid, as such a long term would have required parliamentary approval (FC~10(69-73)~1). Rather than enter into negotiations for a new lease, however, it served notice on the company to quit, purportedly with the intention of creating a yachting marina by joining the lake to the River Clwyd. The matter was ultimately referred to the High Court which, although critical of the council’s handling of the matter, came down on its side, only for an appeal to be lodged by the company. Despite the likelihood that the council would win that, too, it eventually accepted an offer by the company to pay a rent of £4,500 per annum on a seven year lease (commencing in September 1959), subject to each side paying its own costs of the High Court action, and the council paying those costs incurred by the company in respect of the Appeal Action. This apparent capitulation was predicated on the logic that, in the likely event of the council’s case being upheld on appeal, the company would then be
given leave to appeal to the House of Lords, a rather protracted procedure during which the
council would continue to receive rent from the company on the terms of the existing lease
(i.e. at £1,500 per annum). Hence, even if wholly successful in the litigation, the reduction in
rent received over the course of these proceedings and the increased costs involved, would
together far outweigh any benefit to the council who, ever mindful of its ratepayers, was loath
to incur such a loss. This situation serves to illustrate the difficulties experienced by the
council in upholding its principles, in light of its duty to ratepayers and the tight restrictions
on local authority spending imposed by central government.

On a final note, it is significant that the council, in pursuing the above policy to the letter,
refused to consider an offer from a private developer to rent the whole of the pier (on terms to
be negotiated), only six years prior to its closure (EC~10(178)~12). This was particularly
ironic, given that the pier was shut because of the expense involved in making the structure
safe for the public, and an apparent lack of interest from the private sector!

5.3.2 The council as controller of tourism development

As mentioned above, FCC delegated the responsibility for development control in Rhyl to
RUDC (and its Road Committee), although the latter did not have a direct say in the content
of those planning policies that it enforced on the county’s behalf. During this epoch, a large
proportion of the more contentious planning issues in the resort seemed to centre on West
Parade, where the bulk of the aforementioned ‘ancillary’ tourism services were located.
Originally, the premises along West Parade were used (with the odd exception) as boarding
houses and hotels, but a spate of conversions to shops, amusement arcades and cafés,
especially between High Street and Abbey Street, totally altered the character of this part of
the resort, and “destroyed whatever architectural merit the buildings ever had” 
(RC-5(498/9)-1). In a report to RUDC’s Road Committee, a Planning Officer of FCC cited 
the following as reasons for these conversions, which provided a useful snapshot of the state 
of tourism in Rhyl (and the British seaside resort in general) at this time:

(a) The growing popularity of camping and its relative cheapness as a holiday; (b) 
Alternative cheaper accommodation provided by flatlets and dwelling houses; (c) 
Economic difficulty in obtaining domestic labour; (d) Adaptability of premises – 
not readily lending themselves suitable to modern conditions; [and] (e) Increasing 
number of day trippers giving rise to further demand for shopping facilities on the 
sea front. 

(RC-5(498)-1)

The council were evidently concerned that further changes in use would be detrimental to the 
architectural integrity (i.e. on account of the necessity for external structural alterations) and 
amenity (i.e. due to the reduction in both the resort’s accommodation stock and level of 
privacy enjoyed by adjacent landowners) of West Parade. They responded by recommending 
to FCC that the spread of commercial premises westwards along the promenade be checked at 
Edward Henry Street, in the form of a ‘buffer zone’, although the upholding of a subsequent 
appeal against a decision to refuse permission for a change of use at 38 West Parade, from a 
restaurant to an amusement arcade and fast food outlet (on the grounds that similar premises 
already existed in the same terrace) forced the council to consider relocating the buffer zone 
to the block of properties immediately east of Abbey Street (RC-5(566/7)-1). There were, in 
fact, several other occasions on which RUDC were thwarted in their attempts to control 
development along West Parade by a planning technicality. A proposal to convert the Pier 
Hotel to a Nurses’ Home and Training School (which ultimately failed to materialise) was 
given the go-ahead, in spite of strong objections by RUDC, since it did not involve a 
material change of use (both the existing and proposed uses were deemed ‘residential’ – 
RC-3(422/3)-5). Also, the Ocean Beach Funfair, which regularly modernised its attractions
in an attempt to keep up with relevant technological advances and the insatiable, but increasingly hard to please, demand for ‘high-adrenaline’ experiences, did not have to apply for planning permission for a new water chute (RC-5(150)~N/A) and gravity ride (RC-9(606/7)~4) since the entire area had already been zoned for amusement purposes. The council, anxious of the noise generated by such devices, and wishing to protect the amenity of residents in nearby Sydenham Avenue, gave every indication that they would have refused development rights to the parks owners, had they not been powerless to intervene.

It should be noted, however, that the above situations were the exception rather than the rule and, on the whole, RUDC met with few obstructions in executing its powers of development control. Indeed, the council could call upon other statutory powers, in its quest to manage development in the resort. For example, many of the older three-storey Victorian properties along the seafront did not possess a fire escape, since there was no legislation in place at the time of their construction that forced them to provide such a facility. Perhaps mindful of previous instances when property in Rhyl had been destroyed by fire (e.g. the Grand Pavilion in 1901 and Queen’s Palace in 1907), the council served notice on a number of landowners along both West and East Parades (RC-4(650/I)-3), under Section 60 of the Public Health Act (1936), requiring them to carry out the necessary works at their own expense (this exercise would have been conducted in the late 1930s had it not been for the war emergency). This Act also proved useful on other occasions where the council sought to reverse an unwelcome development, as with the case of 28 West Parade, whose dilapidated condition prompted RUDC to obtain (under Section 68) a Court Order requiring the owner of the property to restore it to a satisfactory condition. Having failed to do so within a specified period of time, the council then authorised its Surveyor to issue a contract for the required improvements, and instructed its Treasurer to recover the expenses incurred from the owner.
Judging by the number of vacant and derelict properties in the Rhyl of today, the rigour with which the council pursued such action would appear to have subsided over the years. Another piece of legislation which had its uses during this epoch, was the ‘home-grown’ Rhyl Urban District Council Act (1935), Section 130 of which was used to strictly limit the practice of forecourt trading along West Parade. Doubts were expressed over the visual impact of such operations, especially in respect of the canopies designed to increase the forecourt’s display capacity and shelter the shopper from unfavourable weather conditions, which tended to evolve independently of both the buildings they were attached to and those of adjacent properties. The nature of the business transacted on the forecourt was also a cause for concern, especially where it bore no relation to the approved use of the property in question. Generally, consents were issued for the sale of items such as postcards, ice-cream, toys and newspapers (GPC(RUDC)-6(112/3)-14), but not for photographic requisites, perishables or hot food (GPC(RUDC)-6(625)-7). In addition, some amusement machines with prizes were permitted on the forecourts of West Parade, whilst ‘vague’ additions, such as tables, desks and platforms, were flatly rejected.

With so much of the above discussion devoted to West Parade, one might be led to believe that there were no significant planning issues elsewhere in the resort and its immediate hinterland, during this epoch. This, of course, was not the case and it is appropriate to conclude this subsection with two planning issues of little relevance to the seafront, namely the allocation of open space within Rhyl, and the restrictions imposed on the development of camping accommodation around the resort’s periphery. In the case of the former, a standard of 5½ acres per 1,000 of the population had been set for the county by FCC which, in the opinion of RUDC, neither reflected Rhyl’s status as a holiday resort, nor its demographic structure (much of the remainder of Flintshire was predominantly rural in character, hence the
high estimate). In this instance, RUDC resolved to recommend to FCC that the standard be set at 3 acres per 1,000 which, if the non-appearance of the issue in subsequent minutes is anything to go by, would appear to have been accepted \((GPC(RUDC)\sim2(554)\sim9)\). As for the latter, FCC were of the opinion that the allocation of land in the county for camping purposes (approximately 650 acres, as of 1953, much of which was concentrated in a narrow strip between the A548 coastal road and the Chester to Holyhead railway line) had reached saturation point, and that further development of this kind would be unwelcome, given: (i) the commensurate decline in demand for serviced accommodation in Rhyl and its sister resort Prestatyn; (ii) the visual impact of large-scale camping on the rural landscape (especially where old bus bodies, tram cars and railway coaches were used as accommodation); (iii) the loss of a considerable quantity of agriculturally productive land to such developments, and; (iv) the typically poor standards of those camps that lay outside of local authority control \((RC\sim2(144)\sim4; RC\sim4(476)\simN/A)\). In light of this, applications to RUDC for new camps were refused without exception, whilst proposals to extend existing camps were rarely considered, unless they dramatically enhanced the standard of accommodation (e.g. a reduction in the density of caravans/chalets, landscaping, and the provision of open space for organised games).

5.3.3 The council as instigator of tourism development

The outstanding achievement of RUDC, during this epoch, was the construction of the Royal Floral Hall (opened in 1959). Spurred on by the success of a temporary floral display on the promenade (which, in 1957, attracted 7,500 visitors and generated £375 of revenue), the council sought to redevelop the East Promenade Tennis Courts as a permanent venue for the exhibition of flora, incorporating an information kiosk and a small collection of zoological
interest (P&GC-9(32/3)-14; P&GC-9(124/5)-2). The result was an unqualified success in its first few years of operation, and is described in Section 5.2.2, above. However, the only other scheme of note that was instituted by the council during this decade, was the development of the Sandhills area (on the east promenade) which, as originally envisaged, was to include twenty eight new chalets (with facilities), public shelters, a lost children’s crèche, and an ornamental garden (and, above all, curb the perennial problem of sand drift) (FC~2(405)~2). Modest by comparison to the Royal Floral Hall, the scheme was initially vetoed by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, to whom the council had applied for a loan, on the grounds that it was not sufficiently urgent to warrant public expenditure, in light of the rather austere economic circumstances that prevailed during the early 1950s (FC~3(112)~15). The Ministry eventually relented, after much lobbying by the council, although the scheme only went ahead in a somewhat watered-down form (FC~4(205/6)~19).

The government’s tough stance on local authority capital expenditure was consolidated with the circulation of a memo to all councils, requesting that they secure economies wherever possible, and refrain from undertaking new services ‘on the rates’ or with the help of a government grant (FC~6(305)~9). Citing the wish to curb inflation, alleviate the pressure on Sterling, and maintain full employment as the reasons for this request, the memo further urged RUDC, and its other recipients: (i) to see that capital expenditure for the financial year 1956/57 did not exceed that for 1954/55, and; (ii) not to authorise any further works, unless absolutely necessary to the needs of the area (i.e. where a deferral might endanger life or health, or where an authority was committed to developing one particular service, to which the project in question was vital). Although the necessity for a holiday resort to continually improve its amenities would appear to have been accommodated under the latter clause, a subsequent application by RUDC to the aforementioned government department, to borrow
£6,700 for various promenade improvements \((GPC(RUDC)~8(350)~6)\), was refused (there are parallels here with the experience of Ilfracombe which, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, lobbied without success for a loan to renovate its tourism infrastructure – Morgan and Pritchard, 1999: pp.38-39). Ironically, at the height of these restrictions, the resort’s Ratepayers, and Hotel and Boarding House, Associations were coming up with increasingly grandiose suggestions for improvements, most notably a new pier \((GPC(RUDC)~5(212)~12)\), and a Winter Gardens and Conference Hall \((GPC(RUDC)~5(396)~7)\). In the absence of any interest from the private sector, however, these schemes never left the drawing board and development of this scale was not to be seen in Rhyl until other sources of funding became available, from the late 1970s onwards.

In addition to the above restrictions on local authority capital expenditure, RUDC’s efforts to encourage development in Rhyl were also hampered by the government’s (or, more precisely, the War Department’s) reluctance to de-requisition land in the resort. In the case of the Vale Road Sawmills (an acknowledged eyesore at one of the principal entrances to the town) the department even sought to acquire a long-term lease on the site (for use as a storage depot), thus preventing it from being redeveloped for light industrial purposes \((RC~4(306)~3)\).

5.3.4 The council as caretaker of the built environment

The coastal environment can be a harsh and forbidding one, especially during the winter months. Correspondingly, the cost of maintaining existing seaside amenities in a satisfactory condition, in terms of materials and labour, was (and is) alarmingly high, which partly explains why so little money was available for new attractions (see above). The monthly report of the District Surveyor to RUDC’s Road Committee (a regular feature of the minutes
during this epoch) bore testament to the magnitude of the task awaiting those charged with getting Rhyl ready for the summer season. The inclement weather was the biggest nuisance, with copious quantities of litter and sand routinely deposited on the beach and promenade, respectively. Also, high winds and tides commonly resulted in the scouring of the beach (and the need to change the height of the groynes that prevented the sand from being spirited away en masse), whilst the pier and various metal fittings had to be repeatedly treated for rust (a consequence of the high salt content of the air and water). In such circumstances, a regular programme of painting was necessary to maintain the external appearance of the attractions along the seafront, and various warning notices and tide clocks needed re-lettering/re-fixing in accordance with the council’s responsibility for public safety. As if this was not enough, the council also had to contend with the growing problem of vandalism in the resort, especially with regards to the public shelters and flower beds of the promenade, which were easy targets for the vandals (P&GC~7(628)~12). To this end, it commissioned a team of two permanent promenade inspectors (P&GC~7(27)~8), which was later augmented with further full and part time appointments (the latter being responsible for late-evening patrols), as incidents of malicious damage along the seafront escalated (P&GC~8(98)~7).

Given that the routine maintenance of the resort’s amenities made such high demands on the public purse, the council were always looking for opportunities to cut costs, without reducing the level of care. In one instance, it accepted an offer from a private company to supply (free of charge) litter bins at various points around the resort, and pay an annual rent of £25, in return for the rights to place advertisements thereon (GPC(RUDC)~9(80/1)~9). However, where private capital was not available, it would often seek a low maintenance, low cost solution, as with the surfacing of parts of the Pavilion and Queen’s Gardens, on the
promenade, with tarmac (EC-9(37)-11). With excess enthusiasm, it eventually extended this treatment to both gardens in their entirety, so compromising the aesthetics along West Parade.

5.3.5 The council as entertainer

RUDC’s record in entertaining visitors to Rhyl, during this epoch, was chequered to say the least. That staple ingredient of the traditional seaside holiday, the bathing beauty competition, did not formally reach the resort until the late 1950s when the council, impressed by the publicity that Morecambe derived from hosting the ‘Miss Great Britain’ Contest, organised its own weekly event at the Open Air Swimming Pool (with a top prize of £100 – EC-9(292/3)-6). Originally set up as a means of generating extra revenue for this amenity, the ‘Miss Sunny Rhyl’ Bathing Beauty Competition (as it became known) eventually evolved into a core feature of the Rhyl product (that existed independently of where it was held), and was promoted as such (e.g. the winner of the previous year’s competition regularly appeared on the cover of the resort’s municipal brochure, during the 1960s and early 1970s). Archaic by today’s standards, it was nonetheless de rigueur during the epoch that followed, initially under the pretext of an almost ‘scientific’ appraisal of the female form, but later as an increasingly risqué spectacle for the passing voyeur.

Around the time that the above competition was in its ascendancy, the Rhyl Silver Band – an echo of a bygone age in seaside entertainment – was on the verge of bankruptcy. The band, which was fast approaching its seventy-fifth anniversary, gave daily concerts at the Lawns Bandstand (on the promenade), which often ended in a session of community hymn singing. However, such entertainment was, arguably, too formal and docile for the pleasure seeker of the late 1950s, as suggested by the ever-smaller collections at each of the band’s
performances. Indeed, the issue of whether resorts should retain Military and Brass Bands was raised at the 1957 Annual Meeting of the Institute of Municipal Entertainments Managers (which also noted "serious fallings off at dances", a trend that it attributed to the emergence of Jive and Rock and Roll – PC~8(423)~8). In a final bid for survival, the band approached the council for financial assistance whom, recognising its status as an expression of civic pride, awarded an annual subsidy equivalent to a quarter of a penny rate, for three years commencing on the 1st April, 1957 (FC~8(357/8)~5).

The council’s support for Spring and Autumn productions by the Arts Council of Great Britain, at the Pavilion Theatre, did not come cheaply, either. Each performance was guaranteed a sum of £75 (net) by RUDC which, in one instance, left it with a bill of seventy one pounds, one shilling and seven pence, a somewhat exorbitant price for the entertainment of a few locals and early/late season visitors (FC~6(356)~9)! It is unclear whether the council’s motive for funding these performances was to: (i) spread the season; (ii) bring the resort ‘upmarket’; (iii) both, or; (iv) neither; but it certainly suggested the perils of providing entertainment outside of both the tourist season, and the scope of popular culture. Subsequently, most of the amenities in Rhyl were closed between 31st October and the 1st April (e.g. the promenade skating rink – EC~3(221)~15), and the council ceased the practice of subsidising so-called ‘elite’ forms of entertainment.

5.3.6 The council as host

As part of its publicity remit, the council regularly made arrangements to receive and welcome certain groups of visitors to Rhyl, principally conference delegates, participants of its budget holiday scheme for senior citizens, and beneficiaries of various ‘social tourism’
initiatives. With regards to the first breed of visitor, seaside resorts were, by and large, the natural choice of venue for conference organisers in these ‘pre-urban tourism’ days, and Rhyl, though not attracting the same number of conferences as, say, Brighton or Llandudno, still captured a reasonable slice of this highly lucrative market. By way of a yardstick, in the six months to July 1953, the resort hosted the conferences of the Licensed Victuallers Association, the Clerical Workers Union and the Fire Brigade Workers Union, each of which was treated to a dinner and/or a civic reception (for which money was set aside by the Finance Committee – PC-3-416-13). This (albeit small) ‘sample’, mirrored the situation that prevailed in the resort during this epoch, with the trade union movement (which, at the time, was at the height of its powers) accounting for the majority of conferences in the resort. Unfortunately, any potential to expand upon this sector was stifled by the lack of a venue within the resort with sufficient capacity for the larger corporate and political conferences (delegates normally had to ‘make do’ with the Pavilion Theatre or the Town Hall). Had there been such a facility, Rhyl might have emulated the feat of other resorts that successfully pursued diversification strategies, in the late 1970s and 1980s, in response to major inroads into the core, long holiday market.

RUDC’s ‘Old Age Pensioners Holiday Scheme’, whereby accommodation and various entertainments (e.g. bowls competitions, whist drives) for the ‘shoulder’ months of May and September were packaged into one product and sold at a much reduced price to those old enough to qualify, prefigured the current state of the market for British seaside holidays with its ‘top heavy’ demographic profile. It might, indeed, seem unusual that a council, which was responsible (above all) for the welfare of its residents, should extend its duty of care to a particular (albeit loyal) segment of the visiting public, although one must remember that this was an era in which society looked after its elderly (e.g. through generous company pension
schemes and the like), in recognition of their erstwhile contribution to the country’s productive and defensive capabilities. Such altruism was also reserved for visitors to the resort who hailed from disadvantaged backgrounds. In one case, a Liverpool-born, Canadian businessman paid for a group of children from his home town to have a week’s holiday in Rhyl, during which time they were cared for, and entertained, by the council and various local organisations who had volunteered their assistance (*PC-3*(*607*)*-14). In turn, this gesture generated several column inches of useful publicity in the local newspapers of an area that was one of Rhyl’s leading sources of holidaymakers.

5.3.7 The council as publicist

Advertising and publicity were, in the words of one district councillor, “a cause that is the very lifeblood of our town” (*PC-2*(*620*)*-5). Correspondingly, the council’s Publicity Committee approved a variety of devices (ranging from the complementary to the downright expensive) for promoting Rhyl to outsiders, namely: (i) the annual municipal brochure and other printed literature; (ii) advertising in newspapers and on posters; (iii) ‘free’ publicity, and; (iv) familiarisation trips for (foreign) travel agents. It should be noted, however, that these were by no means exclusive to this epoch, but feature in this chapter on account of their many appearances in the minutes of the day.

Such was the importance of the annual municipal brochure, or holiday guide, that it warranted its own sub-committee (*PC-3*(*259*)*-10), which would convene over the off season to commission a cover design, approve its editorial content, sell advertising space to the resort’s principals, issue tenders for printing, and oversee its distribution. If one considers that it cost £2,970 to print 30,000 copies of the 1953 ‘Sunny Rhyl’ Holiday Guide alone (*PC-2*(*620*)*-6),
without taking into account other overheads (e.g. payment to the cover artist), then it is possible to see why the municipal brochure was consistently the single most expensive item on a local authority’s marketing budget (Pritchard and Morgan, 1995). Of course, some of this outlay was recouped by charging for advertising space within the brochure (e.g. a two-colour, full page advertisement in the 1957 edition, cost the princely sum of £50 – PC~8(19)~8) and by putting a price on the brochure itself (although this, naturally, reduced its circulation). In addition to the official holiday guide, RUDC published a range of complementary literature, most notably an illustrated folder and district map (with an initial order of 100,000, in 1952 – PC~3(195)~6) and an events guide entitled “What’s On in Rhyl” (PC~4(436)~9).

Although there was some uncertainty regarding the conversion rate between requests for the annual municipal brochure and firm bookings, the former was used as a means of evaluating the effectiveness of the council’s various poster and newspaper advertising campaigns. For instance, applications for the Rhyl holiday guide in the first three weeks of 1954, were up by 25 per cent on the equivalent period for 1953, which was attributed to the launch of RUDC’s press advertising scheme (PC~4(436)~6). This data would appear to have vindicated the high cost of placing advertisements for the resort in both the national and regional press (which amounted to £1,800 during that financial year – PC~4(218)~6), a luxury that the council could not have afforded, had it not been for significant contributions from British Railways and the resort’s Publicity Association. Indeed, the council worked very closely with the railways in promoting Rhyl as a holiday destination, with the latter financing a third of the cost of newspaper advertisements (PC~5(290)~6), posters (PC~2(79)~14) and illustrated folders (PC~8(265)~6), throughout this epoch. Several other resorts enjoyed a similar relationship with BR who, in return for this particular investment: (i) profited from the increased number of passengers to Rhyl; (ii) had considerable say in the design and placement
of the posters (which were updated every two years), and; (iii) gained further exposure with a page of railway information in the illustrated folder. Joint initiatives were also carried out with the Rhyl Publicity Association, a voluntary body that raised funds to supplement the council’s promotional efforts, and which was once responsible for the publication of the annual holiday guide and the advertising of the resort, in the days when the council had no money to spend on these functions.

Even allowing for the help of others, it does not take a mathematician to work out that the promotion of Rhyl, to an increasingly mobile and fickle travelling public, made substantial demands on the ratepayer, a rather uncomfortable situation given that such ‘frivolous’ uses of public money were frowned upon by a government who, at the time, perceived tourism to be a ‘candy floss industry’. Correspondingly, the council sought, wherever possible, to generate some ‘free’ positive publicity for the resort, a task that became more and more difficult over the years as Rhyl ceased to be newsworthy (at least for the ‘right’ reasons). Apart from the aforementioned ‘gift holidays’ to the underprivileged (see Section 5.3.6), RUDC sought to publicise Rhyl by, amongst other things, regularly hosting the annual Daily Express Fashion Contest (PC-2(226)-9; PC-6(590)-6), exhibiting an award-winning floral display at the 1957 Chelsea Flower Show (P&GC-8(40)-9), arranging for the resort to appear as one of two teams on BBC Television’s “Top Town” (a talent contest that was broadcast to some 7½ to 8 million viewers – PC-9(545)-10), and organising dances in Rochdale, Liverpool, Prestwich, and other towns within the resort’s catchment area, in connection with the ‘Rhyl Holiday Girl Competition’ (PC-5(665)-9; PC-6(24)-11). Another promotional strategy that cost the council ‘next to nothing’ (though with poor results) was the provision of hospitality to parties of foreign travel agents and press representatives, who would arrive in the country at the
expense of British European Airways and the Welsh Tourist and Holidays Board, to visit various resorts for two to three days at a time (PC-4(137)-9; PC-4(558)-10; PC-5(290)-8). Delegations were welcomed from countries as far afield as Belgium, France, Switzerland and the United States, although very few of their fellow citizens appear to have followed them (after all, the traditional seaside holiday was a uniquely British experience).

As an endnote to this subsection, it is worth considering, firstly, where the above-mentioned advertising and publicity campaigns were targeted and, secondly, how the council dealt with negative publicity. Regarding the first, it would appear that RUDC considered Rhyl’s sphere of influence to extend across the area served by the London Midland Region of BR, with whom it was in close contact. This took in the key urban conurbations of Lancashire and the West Midlands which, for some time, had close associations with the resorts of North West England and North Wales. By way of illustration, BR ran around 150 half day excursions to Rhyl, during July and August of 1957, the various points of departure including Accrington, Alderly Edge, Birkenhead, Birmingham, Blackpool, Blythe Bridge, Coalville, Colne, Coventry, Dudley, Eccles, Leamington Spa, Leicester, Manchester, Mansfield, Northampton, Nottingham, Nuneaton, Oldham, Ramsbottom, Reddish, Rochdale, Stalybridge, Stoke, Walsall, Wigan and Wolverhampton (PC-8(84)-8). Incidentally, it is interesting to note that, early in the decade, the council tried to extend the resort’s catchment area by undertaking ‘special advertising’ in South Wales, Scotland and Yorkshire (PC-2(226)-7). However, the preferences of these regions were known to lie elsewhere, and the experiment was not repeated. As for the second of the above issues, RUDC were quick to spot and challenge anything that portrayed Rhyl in a ‘bad’ light, as demonstrated by their representations to the BBC regarding ‘misleading’ weather forecasts for the area (the corporation, in their wisdom,
gave a prognosis for the North Wales region as a whole, thus allegedly diluting Rhyl’s ‘fine’ sunshine and temperature records with readings taken from the more mountainous, and wetter/cooler, areas of Snowdon and the Vale of Clwyd – PC-6(149)-8).

5.3.8 The council as lobbyist

A peculiar feature of this epoch was Rhyl’s almost total dependency upon three particularly large and powerful national institutions – the government, the railways and the trade unions. Each was subject, on at least one occasion during the 1950s, to some intense lobbying by RUDC, either directly or through a trade association of which it was a member, in its efforts to secure a better deal for Rhyl and seaside resort sector as a whole. The council’s fight to win a loan from central government for various improvements to the resort’s amenities and infrastructure, in light of severe restrictions on local authority expenditure, has already been documented in this chapter (see Section 5.3.3). Therefore, it is appropriate to concentrate, in this subsection, on those instances when RUDC came into conflict with the second and the third of the above-named institutions.

As mentioned in the previous subsection, the resort enjoyed a close working relationship with the railways, in respect of their mutual attempts to encourage increased traffic to the area (e.g. the joint advertising scheme, the provision of half day excursions, and so on). Both parties benefited enormously from the contribution of the other, and it is easy to forget that each was pursuing its own agenda, such was the apparent harmony of this arrangement. Of course, the balance of power was a little one-sided, in that any day-to-day resolution of RUDC was unlikely to substantially reduce the number of rail passengers to Rhyl or, for that matter,
bankrupt BR. On the other hand, given that car ownership was still relatively rare, and that improvements to the road network were needed before the bus and coach companies could realistically compete with the railways, a decision by BR to increase fares to destinations in North Wales, or reduce the level of excursions to the town, could profoundly impair Rhyl’s prosperity as a seaside resort (there are parallels, here, with the relationship between the larger vertically-integrated tour operators of today, and the mass market resorts of the Mediterranean Coast that rely upon them for trade). In this context, the otherwise amicable relationship between RUDC and BR was soured by the latter’s decision to issue cheap tickets from certain stations in Manchester and other Lancashire towns, during their wakes holidays of 1955, to Blackpool (Rhyl’s largest regional, if not national, competitor), which met with several protests by the council and generated much coverage in the minutes (commencing with PC-5(532)-14). RUDC opposed this action on the grounds that it was unfair to single out a(nother) resort for special treatment, to the detriment of other resorts in the area (an argument which was premised upon a ‘zero-sum’ situation, that is, by giving to one, you take away from another). In response, the Chief Commercial Manager of the London Midland Region said that the decision had been taken “solely from the point of view of securing the maximum net revenue to British Railways”, and cited the need to utilise spare capacity on the services in question, which was such that there was a reasonable prospect of generating sufficient additional business by reducing fares. He further added that the circumstances relating to Rhyl were not the same as those for Blackpool (i.e. the resort was too remote, plus there were fewer empty seats on the trains that served the North Wales coast), and so there was little point in extending the offer to include the resort (PC-5(664/5)-8). Despite subsequent reassurances that the reduced fares to Blackpool had not affected incoming ordinary traffic to Rhyl (i.e. passengers staying for at least one night actually increased by 2.72 per cent, between 1954 and 1955), RUDC continued to lobby BR and solicit support for its stance from other resort
authorities, eventually winning a small concession with the introduction of ‘Midweek Holiday Tickets’ to the resort (PC-6(591/2)-9). However, it is unclear whether this could be described as a victory for the council, since these tickets were subject to a minimum fare of 25 shillings, which was equivalent to 100 miles, and were therefore of no use to those living in nearby Lancashire (the nearest, and most obvious, source of holidaymakers for Rhyl).

A rather less protracted, but just as unproductive, exercise in influencing the establishment was the resort’s involvement, as a member of the North Wales Publicity Club, in discussions with workers’ representatives from towns such as Bolton and Wolverhampton, with the intention of persuading them to reschedule their holiday, or wakes, weeks to a time other than late July and early August (PC-4(501)-13). This was part of a wider agenda to spread the season and eliminate congestion at peak periods, by staggering holidays throughout the summer and shoulder months, although such tactics failed to foresee a future where the trade unions no longer had the authority to tell their members what to do and when to do it. Other bodies that lobbied on the resort’s behalf (in return for an annual subscription and a nominated representative of RUDC) during this epoch, were the Welsh Tourist and Holidays Board (which sought an amendment to the licensing laws for Wales and Monmouthshire, to permit hoteliers to sell alcohol with food to non residents on a Sunday – GPC(RUDC)-8(251)-7), and the Association of Health and Pleasure Resorts (which urged central government to transfer control of ‘mock auctions’ to local authorities – PC-4(218)-8).

5.3.9 The council and quality assurance

The council’s task, in ensuring that both holidaymakers and excursionists to Rhyl enjoyed a (more than) satisfactory experience, was not an easy one. Even allowing for the large number
of amenities that were owned and operated by RUDC, there were still many individual (and largely self-regulating) businesses within the resort, which provided services to visitors. Indeed, each of these had its own views on running a business, which were not always compatible with the council’s efforts to provide a total quality product. The extent to which RUDC could influence these private operators depended upon: (i) whether they owned their premises outright, or leased them from the council, and/or; (ii) the nature of the business transacted. In the first instance, where a publicly-owned amenity was leased to an individual trader or company on a short-term basis (e.g. three years), the council could refuse to renew the lease if the quality of the goods and/or services sold on those premises were judged to be substandard (see Section 5.3.1). As for the second, the sale of particular commodities (e.g. ice-cream) required a licence from RUDC’s Health Committee, which was granted on a per annum basis and could be revoked at any time, that is, where the council had sufficient grounds to do so. Annual licenses were also issued for certain operations of ‘no fixed abode’ (e.g. taxi hire, pleasure boat cruises), which were subject to the same stringency.

There were occasions, however, when the statutory powers of the council did not extend far enough. For instance, it could not take up the suggestion of the Hotel and Boarding House Association, that accommodation within the district be subject to a system of compulsory registration, since it did not have the legal right to require or enforce compliance in such a scheme (GPC(RUDC)-9(458)-6). That said, it did prevent those establishments that had received a certain number of complaints from advertising in the municipal brochure (PC-3(259)-10), thus allowing it to “claim without fear of contradiction that our landladies set out to make your holiday really comfortable” (RUDC, 1950: p.19).
5.4 The official guide to ‘Sunny Rhyl’ (1951 to 1960) – sign and referent in near perfect harmony

Earlier in the thesis, reference was made to the obligatory gap between the tourism resources of any given place and the images used to promote them to potential visitors. In this respect, it is interesting to note that, throughout this epoch (but particularly at its outset), the extent to which images of Rhyl, within its municipal brochure, deviated from what the resort was ‘really’ like at this time (in as much as the latter can be ascertained from historical evidence), was negligible – a claim that is reflected in the title to this section and which unites the various themes discussed below.

5.4.1 The Official guide (with a capital ‘O’)

A defining characteristic of the first municipally-produced holiday guides for Rhyl was the formality with which they portrayed the resort to their readers. That said, their tone was not exceptionally serious, since fun and play has always been central to the tourist experience, albeit in a controlled and appropriate manner under (high) modernity. This is illustrated to good effect by the inside cover of the 1937 municipal brochure (Plate 5.4), the underlying function of which seems to be an educational or emancipatory one, suggesting that the studious contemplation of Rhyl’s many attributes was a necessary precursor to a truly satisfactory and thoroughly enlightening holiday in the resort. Note, in particular, its polished language, with words such as “endeavour” and “acquaint” (which convey the seriousness with which the local authority – as custodian of Rhyl’s image – set about their task of winning the hearts and minds of would-be visitors), in stark contrast to the jocular and modish brochure editorials of the 1960s, or the magazine-style introductions to the guides of the 1990s.
It has not gone unnoticed that this brochure extract precedes the epoch allegedly reported in this chapter. However, it is the most outstanding example of a disposition that ran throughout the municipal brochures of the 1950s, albeit in an increasingly subtle manner. Indeed, each of these editions contained a rather verbose, and almost ‘scientific’, account of the benefits of taking a holiday in Rhyl, in which the local authority, as addresser, was positioned as a reputable and credible source of information. This ‘textbook’ style of delivery was also reflected in the high word count and precise arrangement of photographs, almost all of which were of the ‘classic’ portrait and landscape varieties (see Sections 5.4.2 and 5.4.3, below).
On a final note, it is helpful to remember that any text is constructed in the image of those institutions that produced it. In light of this, the formality with which these brochures communicated the features and advantages of Rhyl as a holiday destination should be seen as an expression of, at the micro level, the authoritative personality of its creator (i.e. RUDC) and, at the macro level, the rational and bureaucratic nature of society under ‘high’ modernism (i.e. culture).

5.4.2 Information overload

Readers of the municipal brochure, during this epoch, were confronted with far more (written) information on Rhyl than they ever realistically needed to know. An obligatory feature of each edition was the ‘General Information’ section, which ran to several pages and spelt out, in minute detail, virtually every single characteristic of, and service available within, the resort (e.g. its population, rates, and annual sunshine records, plus the addresses of its sports facilities, places of worship, banks, post office, police, fire brigade, public library, and even the local tax inspector[!]). Also, the balance of words to pictures was heavily weighted towards the former with, on average, a paragraph of text per photograph (indeed, it was only at the end of the decade that single line captions appeared, and then only sparingly).

Explanations for the dominance of the written word over the graphic image in the municipal brochures of the 1950s, may be sought at both the primary and secondary levels of discourse (i.e. the nature of advertising and culture, respectively – see Cook, 1992, and O’Barr, 1994). At the first level, Febas Borra (1978) notes that, where text in tourist brochures is accompanied by a photograph(s), the former informs and the latter confirms. Therefore, if photographs have no message (of their own) to communicate, other than that contained within
the commentary to which they are appended, it follows that the written, as opposed to illustrative, content of the brochure (which, after all, was the primary means of informing the holiday market of Rhyl’s presence and attributes) should take precedence. At the second level, modernism (as the dominant cultural formation of this epoch) privileged writing and speech over image and gesture, and contrasted the purity and certainty of the former with the obscurity and ambiguity of the latter, which could not be trusted, by itself, to convey the desired or ‘proper’ message. In contrast, so much of postmodern life, whether represented in literature or on the ground, celebrates the ambivalence of surface imagery, whilst questioning the veracity of writers and speakers.

5.4.3 Denotation over connotation

Definitions of denotation and connotation were provided in Section 3.5. To recap, a sign is said to be denotative when its signifier bears a literal or obvious relationship with its signified (i.e. it evokes a single, stable meaning), and connotative when its signifier is less transparent and open to interpretation, with the result that it may be attached to a number of different signifieds (i.e. it evokes several, less stable meanings). In practice, however, signs generally possess one denotative, and many connotative, meanings.

The signs contained within the municipal brochures of this epoch may be said, with few exceptions, to be more denotative than connotative, at least compared to those of later editions. Of the six verbal (i.e. comparison, key words/keying, testimony, humour, languaging, and ego-targeting) and four visual (i.e. colour, format, visual cliché, and connotation procedures) techniques that Dann (1996a: pp.171-198) identifies as fundamental to the ‘language of tourism’, and which might be used to turn an otherwise denotative
description or depiction of a given tourism resource into a connotative exposition or rendition of the same, only a handful may be observed in these brochures. Generally, the written copy is very descriptive (as opposed to persuasive), and is unusually honest for a piece of place promotional literature (e.g. “We boast no pier of great length”, RUDC, 1950: p.4).

Meanwhile, each page is printed in black and white (due to cost) thus precluding the use of ‘visual isotopes’ (e.g. ‘warm’ colours, such as yellow or red – see Febas Borra, 1978: p.95, p.97, p.116), and few photographs show any obvious signs of manipulation (e.g. cropping, superimposition, and overexposure). Verbally and visually, metaphors and similes are scarce, as are examples of what Dann (1996a: p.48) terms ‘indexical transference’, either because the brochure’s authors were confident in the ability of the resort’s attributes to ‘speak for themselves’, rather than through association with other objects or people that were felt to convey the desired qualities, or because they were not aware of the (potency of the) technique.

The notable exception to this ‘tell [and show] it like it is’ rule, lay with the artwork that appeared on the front of, and within, these brochures. Unconstrained by the limitations and expense of the photographic production process, and only by his or her imagination, the artist(s) in question made full use of colour (front cover only), visual cliché (popular images included the sun, the clown’s face and underwater scenes) and aestheticism (which commonly involved ‘over-painting’ a photograph to emphasise certain artistic elements), either to catch the eye or depict an image that would be difficult to capture on film. The cover of the 1955 municipal brochure (Plate 5.5.1), in which a father, mother and their three children (who are subsequently introduced as the ‘ideal family’ – see Section 5.4.4) are pictured standing on Rhyl beach, with the locally renowned landscape of the Pavilion Theatre and the Clwydian Hills in the background, was characteristic of the connotative artwork/photography that
featured during this epoch (note the ‘touching up’ of the theatre’s dome and the blurred outline of the hills) as, indeed, it needed to be, if it was to catch the eye of the potential reader and holidaymaker.

5.4.4 Narrative and testimony

The narrative structure of those municipal brochures that belonged to this epoch was as formulaic as a news bulletin or a romantic novel. Typically, the brochure would begin with a ‘welcome’ or ‘invitation’, which made regular use of the first-person (e.g. “In summer or winter, once you feel the spell of Rhyl and delve into its diversions, you long to stay on” (RUDC, 1950: p.1, emphasis added) in an attempt to integrate the reader into the narrative, thus appealing to his or her ego and providing the basis for turning the act of browsing into the act of visiting. This was followed by a tour of ‘Sunny Rhyl’, the order of which was almost always the same, namely: (i) the ‘core’ attractions of the beach and promenade; (ii) the appeal of the resort for children (or ‘kiddies’, to use this era’s vernacular); (iii) the ‘tried and trusted’ delights of swimming, bathing and boating; (iv) the facilities available for those (men) wishing to participate in their favourite sport; (v) the opportunities for relaxation and quietude provided by the resort’s gardens and floral displays; (vi) the variety of evening entertainments laid on for the visiting public (with a ‘pecking order’ that rarely deviated from Prince’s International Circus, followed by concerts at the promenade bandstand, variety at the Pavilion, Gaiety, Coliseum and Queen’s Theatres, dancing at the Queen’s Ballroom, and movies at the Regal and Odeon Cinemas), and; (vii) the many places of interest to the tourist that lay further afield (principally Rhuddlan Castle, the cathedral city of St. Asaph, and Snowdonia). Of course, it should not be forgotten that the significance of these elements is
Plate 5.5: Front cover of the (1) 1955 and (2) 1957 ‘Sunny Rhyl’ Holiday Guide (Rhyl Urban District Council)
paradigmatic (i.e. their selection tells us much as regards the manner in which Rhyl’s promoters sought to seduce the holidaymaker of the 1950s), as well as syntagmatic, although our concern in this subsection is with the latter.

The editorials of the 1955 and 1957 brochures provide a subtle variation on the rather predictable pattern described above, being devoted in their entirety to testimonies from the O’Briens (a family from Liverpool who were selected because they were considered to be typical of those holidaymakers that visited Rhyl), and Jean Parry (winner of the 1956 ‘Miss Rhyl’ bathing beauty competition – see Plate 5.5.2). These correspond to the two generic sources of testimony used to promote a desired destination image(s), as identified by Dann (1996a: pp.176-179), namely: (i) the celebrity and; (ii) the satisfied customer. The former relates to the endorsements of “recognisable spokespersons” (e.g. the inclusion of an interview with the actor, Anthony Hopkins, in a recent publication promoting Wales to the outside world – see Morgan and Pritchard, 1998) and ‘name-dropping’ (e.g. the association of the Welsh poet, Dylan Thomas, with Swansea, in literature promoting the town of his birth). ‘Miss Rhyl’, though comparatively minor in the celebrity stakes, would have functioned as such a figure (it is worth remembering that the winners of such competitions, in the 1950s, were held in much higher esteem than their counterparts of the 1980s – the decade in which many seaside bathing beauty contests were scrapped). In contrast, the latter, in using ordinary people for the purposes of place promotion, does not convey the same sense of prestige or ‘star quality’, yet works because the reader often feels that (s)he has something in common with the person to whom the testimony is accredited, and is therefore more likely to believe their assessment of the destination in question. This is certainly true of the first of the above brochures, in which the O’ Briens’ holiday in Rhyl is presented in diary/scrapbook form, mixing images of the ‘ideal family’ at play with stock photographs of the resort’s principal

184
attractions. They are clearly seen to be enjoying themselves, although the narrative is short on superlatives and candidly transparent (e.g. “This particular Saturday was not a bright day...”), thus upholding the denotative tradition established in other brochures of this epoch (see Section 5.4.3, above). In addition to its apparent honesty, the brochure’s strength lies in the intimacy it engenders between the reader and the family who, pertinently, are always referred to by their Christian names. Indeed, by the time they are pictured departing for home (by train, of course), such is our knowledge of them that their testimony seems almost as acceptable and believable as the recommendations of close friends and relatives. Also, in the eyes of a largely ‘blue-collar’ readership, many of whom had served in the Second World War, the head of the family and alleged decision-maker, John (a forty-year-old stonemason and former ‘Redcap’), would have appeared to be a credible, and like-minded, witness to Rhyl’s credentials as a tourist destination, and somebody worth emulating (at least in respect of the reader’s choice of venue for next year’s holiday).

5.4.5 England-by-the-Sea?

A paradigmatic analysis of a given text is as concerned with signs that are absent, as it is with those that are present. Typically, the paradigms to which a text’s constituent signs belong are articulated as simple dichotomies (e.g. gender: ‘male/female’; culture: ‘high/low’), one half of which is represented within the text, the other half not. One dichotomous paradigm of particular interest to the Rhyl municipal brochure, is that of nationality or, to be more specific, whether the signs therein are discernibly English or Welsh in origin. During this epoch, signs of ‘Welshness’ became increasingly rare, a trend that was carried forward into the 1960s with their apparent ‘extinction’ (although they made something of a comeback in the late 1980s – see Section 7.4.3). When they did appear, it was often in the form of the daffodil – the
national symbol of Wales – and the Welsh costume (as worn by women), two of the more recognisable signifiers of the Principality. The second may be seen on the cover of the 1953 ‘Sunny Rhyl’ holiday guide (Plate 5.6.1), in which a harpist is portrayed floating magically over the west end of Rhyl, thus lending a touch of fantasy to the resort’s staple attractions (i.e. the Pavilion Theatre, the pier, the pleasure cruises, and the gardens). Along with the accompanying caption (“Sunny Rhyl will charm you”), this image marked one of the few instances, during this epoch, whereby the resort’s promoters played upon the unique, and near mythical, properties of Welshness, in order to differentiate Rhyl from its (English) competitors – a function insinuated by a cartoon printed to coincide with the brochure’s launch (Plate 5.6.2), which humorously reminds us that, however one chose to portray the destination, the popular sights and delights of the British seaside holiday (here embodied in the form of the bathing belle) were remarkably consistent from one resort to another.

In searching for an explanation as to why signifiers of ‘Welshness’ in the Rhyl municipal brochure became the exception, rather than the rule, one should remember that, unlike the devolved constitution of the present day, Wales was amalgamated with England as one administrative unit at this time, and so the Welsh identity was subsumed within the British personality (which was remarkably Anglo-centric in its disposition). Moreover, it is widely recognised that traditional ‘sun and fun’ destinations were, and are, inclined to mirror the characteristics of their clientele (which accounts for the large proportion of ‘British’ and ‘German’ pubs in the modern day resorts of the Spanish Mediterranean coast). Therefore, given that the overwhelming majority of Rhyl’s visitors hailed from across the border (i.e. the North West and Midlands), it is not surprising to see Celtic imagery used sparingly, and then only in reference to certain expressions of ‘native’ Wales which lay outside of the (characteristically English) tourist enclave that was Rhyl.
Plate 5.6: Front cover of the 1953 ‘Sunny Rhyl’ Holiday Guide (1), with topical cartoon (2) (Rhyl Urban District Council; Flintshire County Council)
6 Results and Discussion of Second Epoch:

6.1 Introduction

Throughout the epoch recounted in this chapter, portents of Rhyl’s decline as a (long) holiday destination manifested themselves with greater regularity and severity, on both the demand and supply sides. With regards to the former, concerns were expressed at the growing proportion of day trippers visiting the resort, which put increased pressure on its resources during the busy summer months, whilst failing to generate revenue for the already beleaguered serviced accommodation sector. As for the latter, Rhyl lost several key attractions between the years of 1960 and 1974, most notably the Victoria Pier and Pavilion Theatre, whose combined demolition brought the epoch to a rather unpalatable close.

Consistent with the approach adopted elsewhere in this thesis, the cultural and (local) political mechanisms that facilitated such supply-side developments are dissected and discussed in this chapter, as are the strategies that were used to promote Rhyl’s contracting mix of accommodation and amenities in its municipal brochure. Its title is a ‘tongue-in-cheek’ reference to the ‘Carry-On’ series of films, made by the Rank Organisation, which were immensely popular at this time. They celebrated crude bodily humour, the art of the double-entendre, the mockery of authority, and the characters’ uncanny ability to ‘foul up’ at every opportunity, ‘qualities’ that were highly pertinent, firstly, in relation to Rhyl and other British seaside resorts of this era (as sites of increasingly irreverent and rebellious leisure experiences) and, secondly, in respect of the decisions made by Rhyl Urban District Council
As befits what was a highly volatile period in the history of Rhyl, the 1960s and early 1970s bore witness to material and symbolic transformations (at the resort level) that prefigured postmodernism, suggesting that modernism’s age-old grip upon contemporary cultural consciousness was loosening. That said, a substantial proportion of the resort’s tourism resources and place images remained cast in the image of modernism, and so one might conclude that modernity still had some years left to run (in any case, the events that have been credited with the rise of the postmodern condition all occurred towards the end of this epoch – see Section 9.6). To reflect each of these arguments, the cultural ‘sub-formation’ reported in this chapter has been entitled ‘late modernism’, thus distinguishing it from that which prevailed in the previous epoch (for which the prefix ‘high’ was used), with the added advantage of avoiding the fallacy of postulating a clean break between modernity and postmodernity. Furthermore, in accordance with Rojek’s (1995) conception of modernity as comprising two opposed, yet coexistent, sets of forces – namely ‘order and control’ and ‘disorder and fragmentation’ (he uses the labels ‘Modernity 1’ and ‘Modernity 2’ to distinguish between the two) – it is contended that the cultural experience of ‘late modernism’ (contrary to that of ‘high modernism’) had more in common with the latter than the former. Three aspects of this ‘experience’ were highly conspicuous in the Rhyl townscape and municipal brochure texts of this epoch, namely: (i) ‘restlessness’; (ii) ‘flexibility’, and; (iii) ‘privatisation and enclosure’; each of which brought about transformations by the resort’s
producers that, in the wider scheme of things, ultimately diminished its reputation as a long holiday destination.

6.2.1 Restlessness

In this thesis, the term ‘modern’ is used to refer to a specific socio-historical configuration or cultural experience (depending upon whether it is suffixed by ‘-ity’ or ‘-ism’). In common parlance, however, when something is described as ‘modern’, it is taken to be ‘new’, ‘innovative’, ‘novel’, or ‘at the cutting-edge’, all of which imply the notion of ‘change’, which is, incidentally, a fundamental feature of modernity. Traditionally, modernists promoted change as a means of attaining progress, if not perfection, and believed in the “power of science, rationality and industry to transform our world for the better” (Barker, 2000: p.134). Yet, to the likes of Baudelaire (1964) and Berman (1982), the dynamism of modernity led, not to permanent, universal and stable solutions to social problems, but rather to uncertainty and doubt – characteristics of a society where knowledge was continually revised and change was breathless and intimidating. Indeed, one is reminded of Marx and Engels’ (1968: p.38) oft-quoted phrase, “all that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned” – a reference to the transformations initiated by capitalism, but one that could equally be applied to modernism.

Modernism was, therefore, a culture of ‘restlessness’, always looking for the next discovery and never satisfied with the ‘way things were’. These sentiments were certainly manifest in 1960’s and early 1970’s Rhyl which, mindful of an increasingly competitive marketplace for long holidays and the considerable age of many of its constituent products, set about reinventing itself as a ‘modern’ tourist destination with vigour and, some might say, undue
haste. Most dramatically, this saw the closure and removal, or adaptation, of several key amenities (by both the local authority and private operators) that were felt to give off an 'outdated', 'archaic' or 'unfashionable' impression of the resort to visitors, in addition to the more obvious (and, in all likelihood, interrelated) excuse of falling patronage and revenues. These included the Queen's Theatre (closed in 1960), the Victoria Pier (1966), the Marine Lake Fun Fair and the Sussex Street Baths (both 1969), and the Pavilion Theatre (1974).

Underpinning these closures was a growing distaste for Victorian (and, to a lesser extent, Edwardian) tourism plant, amongst both 'consumers' (i.e. visitors) and 'producers' (i.e. owners/operators) which, apart from its age and the difficulties of adapting it to suit modern-day demand (e.g. the need to provide en-suite facilities and disabled access in hotels), was related to an indifference and, in certain (younger) circles, contempt towards the Victorian (and Edwardian) way of life and the infrastructure that supported it. Indeed, for all but the older generations, which still cherished some of its ideals, it represented an unnecessarily austere and 'stuffy' regime, quite out of touch with the progressive attitudes of the 'Swinging Sixties' and of little relevance to the future (it is, of course, ironic that nostalgic interest in the Victorian era, and its various legacies, is now at an all-time high, as suggested by the popularity of London's Victoria and Albert Museum and the pressure put upon local planning authorities to safeguard and restore even the most mundane examples of Victorian architecture).

In the case of Rhyl's Victoria [sic] Pier, it has already been noted (see Section 3.4) how the decision to demolish it was taken on a wave of apathy towards the crumbling structure, by people that, in all likelihood, did not share the Victorian fascination for unusual vantage points from which to take in the sea air (itself an outdated concept) and gaze in wonderment
upon the land (naturally, it almost goes without saying that there were other pressing reasons for its removal, not least the expense to the council of maintaining the structure in a suitably safe condition). As with the demolition of the Pavilion Theatre, less than a year later, the powers that be failed to see beyond the current (and apparently unprofitable) use(s) of the pier, to appreciate its historical significance. Indeed, had either structure remained extant a few years longer, it would most likely have survived to the present day, commodified as part of the resort’s heritage and adapted to serve another purpose (a characteristically postmodern solution).

Unfortunately, few new amenities were built during this epoch, to offset the contraction of the Rhyl ‘product’. Of those that were, only one – the Grange Road Indoor Swimming Baths – could be said to be of an appreciable size, the others being small-scale ventures such as the Pentre Bach Model Village, constructed opposite the Pavilion Theatre in 1965. The modernisation of Rhyl, where it did not involve demolition, was therefore confined, in the main, to improvements to existing attractions (e.g. the extension of the Royal Floral Hall in the early 1960s) and the provision of temporary amenities, as with the late-season illuminations along the promenade. In the absence of a major construction project, Rhyl was reinvented in the pages of its annual municipal brochure, with the frequent use of descriptors such as ‘modern’, ‘progressive’, and ‘far seeing’, which were less evident in those editions published during the preceding epoch, and an increasingly selective and imaginative portrayal of the resort’s amenities (see Section 6.4).

In summary, the sheer pace of modern life that visitors to Rhyl had to endure back home, and from which the were no doubt trying to escape, was matched by developments in the resort between 1960 and 1974. This restlessness, underpinned by a coolness towards the past and the
Victorian era in particular, followed an epoch in which very little of note happened in Rhyl, so intensifying the feelings of uncertainty and loss that were presumably felt by its loyal army of repeat visitors, during the 1960s and early 1970s. It is interesting to note that these very feelings later gave rise to the sweeping nostalgia that is so closely associated with postmodernism (see Section 7.2.2, and Hewison, 1987).

6.2.2 Flexibility

In Section 5.2.1, mass tourism was equated to Fordism, a highly inflexible regime under which “demand is dictated by the supplier who therefore sets the economic and moral standards for all types of consumption activity, including leisure behaviour” (Rojek, 1995: p.141). By the late 1960s, Fordism was in crisis (see Section 2.3) and a new regime of ‘flexible accumulation’ was born that promoted “flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption” (Harvey, 1989: p.147). This had a profound effect upon domestic long holiday destinations such as Rhyl (especially in respect of the supply of tourist accommodation and the manner in which visitors travelled to the resort), as suggested by Rojek (1995):

The refusal to holiday in the same seaside resort, the relative decline in the cost of long-distance air travel, the development of multiple forms of leisure practice in one’s leisure career as opposed to rigid, monolithic commitment to a single form, point to the enlargement of flexibility in leisure culture.

(p.145)

Signs of consumer resistance to mass production and consumption could be observed in 1950’s Rhyl, as with the closure of several guest houses and the declining popularity of outdoor concerts (tourism’s capacity to pre-empt wider social change has already been noted in this thesis). However, it was not until the 1960s that such signs appeared with sufficient
frequency and severity to suggest a fundamental shift in attitudes amongst both producers and consumers. Two developments, in particular, warrant a mention. Firstly, the rising number of self-catering holiday flatlets in the resort, and the expansion of the caravan parks at its periphery, reflected the visiting public’s distaste with the unyielding rules of the guesthouse and holiday camp, which governed the tourist experience from ‘rise and shine’ to ‘goodnight campers’. In these ‘new’ forms of accommodation, families could escape the wake-up calls and the fixed menus, and assume control over their holiday, as implied by the advertisement for the Marine House Holiday Flatlets (Plate 6.1), featured in the 1963 municipal brochure. This connotes the values of ‘freedom’, ‘versatility’ and ‘pseudo ownership’ that became synonymous with self-catering, and was one of several such advertisements that appeared in the annual municipal brochures of this epoch, once the local authority reversed its policy of exclusively promoting hotels and guest houses. Secondly, the escalating number of motor vehicles on Rhyl’s roads, from the 1960s onwards, and the corresponding reduction in rail services to and from North Wales, bore witness to a new era of flexible and private (pleasure) travel, in which visitors were no longer constrained by the fares and timetables of British Rail, nor powerless to choose who they travelled with, but free to come and go as they pleased. The resort’s umbilical cord with the railways, which had sustained it for over a century, was well and truly cut, and it found itself having to compete, not only with other seaside resorts that were fortunate enough to retain a rail link (for many branch lines were closed and lifted, during the 1960s, in an attempt to make the railways more profitable), but also with the attractions of rural Britain (e.g. nearby Llangollen), for a slice of the (domestic) tourist pound. Even those that chose to stay in Rhyl, could not be relied upon to spend every waking hour there, such was the ease with which they could explore its hinterland. Correspondingly, claims of accessibility made in later municipal brochures played upon Rhyl’s alleged proximity to the ever-expanding motorway network, and British Rail ceased the customary
in addition, Rhyl repositioned itself as a touring centre, with – for the first time – fold-out maps of the entire North Wales area (which even included its ‘sworn rivals’, Llandudno and Colwyn Bay), and statements such as the one below:

TWO HOLIDAYS IN ONE...RHYL AND SNOWDONIA...Holiday contrasts for all...where else such choice?...Rhyl...and the beauty of Snowdonia on your doorstep.

(RUDC, 1964)

In later years, the resort found it difficult – despite such efforts – to attract those visitors that enjoyed greater mobility, in light of the above, not to mention inward investment (which had become increasingly ‘footloose’).
6.2.3 Privatisation and enclosure

Under (high) modernity, the seaside resort (along with the less accessible countryside) represented the ‘great outdoors’ for many urban dwellers, where they could be at one with nature – the unconfined vistas, abundance of flora and (to a lesser extent) fauna, and open-air amenities, existing in stark contrast to the enclosed and ‘unnatural’ spaces of everyday life (e.g. ‘down the pit’, ‘in the office’, and the like). These sentiments had first surfaced during the Romantic Movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a (highly relevant) legacy of which was the enduring fashion for sea bathing (Urry, 1990: p.20).

Contrary to the above, the 1960s saw a marked increase in the provision of indoor attractions at the seaside that was sustained throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. Although it is easy to lay the blame for this with the ‘warm and wet’ nature of the British summer (especially as owners/operators were starting to take the competitive threat of ‘sunnier’ overseas destinations seriously), one must not forget that the onset of postmodernism saw a tendency, amongst people, to retreat away from the public spaces of the exterior, and spend a greater amount of free time indoors (as with the growth of home-based leisure), the relevance of which is confirmed by Rojek (1995):

As more and more leisure facilities become compatible with privatized settings the public leisure space of the resort loses its appeal. A common entrepreneurial strategy followed by leisure entrepreneurs faced with this situation is to extend the range of indoor games and activities available to the public. Hence, the growth of computer game technology in English sea-side resorts like Weston-super-Mare and Brighton.

(p.136)

As with ‘flexibility’ (see Section 6.2.2), this tendency ran counter to the tenets of mass tourism (principally ‘volume and homogeneity’ – see Section 5.2.1), by giving rise to
alternative leisure spaces that, in light of their finite size, catered for relatively small and specific groups of visitors (e.g. the development of the amusement arcade as a ‘teenage hangout’). This, in turn, was facilitated by the gradual replacement of (larger) mechanical with (smaller) electronic technologies, and their incorporation into a new generation of leisure attractions and experiences (miniaturisation being a key feature of postmodernity).

In Rhyl, the conversion of properties along West Parade to amusement arcades, the enclosure of the Coliseum Theatre and the diminished exposure offered to high-capacity public spaces such as the Open Air Swimming pool in the resort’s promotional literature, were all consistent with this trend (which was perpetuated with the opening of the Sun Centre, in 1980). This represented an abrupt reversal of the policy championed, a mere decade earlier, in the 1952 edition of the municipal brochure, whereby:

Most people on holiday like to spend as much time as possible breathing in the health-giving ozone. We have taken this point into consideration by providing a good variety of entertainment in the open air.

(RUDC, 1951: p.8)

Running alongside this was a decline in the importance attached by holidaymakers to ‘rational’ forms of recreation at the seaside, which invariably took place outdoors and in the company of numerous others (see Section 5.2.4). Consequently, one of Rhyl’s, and the seaside’s, remaining unique selling points – its extraordinary location and landscape, as a setting for the regeneration of body and mind – was devalued, as attention shifted to the anonymous spaces of the interior (and, eventually, ‘cyberspace’) which, with the requisite technology, could be recreated almost anywhere (see Section 7.2.1 on simulation, and Section 7.2.3 on globalisation).
6.3 Evaluating the role of the local state as provider and promoter of services to tourists in 1960's and early 1970's Rhyl

Section 5.3 identified several key policies of Rhyl Urban District Council, with regards to the provision and promotion of tourism in 1950’s Rhyl, which continued to be enforced during this epoch (e.g. the refusal to grant planning permission for the development of amusement arcades away from designated areas along West Parade, and the restrictions imposed upon the expansion of caravan parks at the resort’s periphery). However, times were changing and new challenges emerged that required fresh thinking, affecting – amongst other things – the council’s approach in relation to publicity, entertainments, capital projects and transportation (four policy agendas that consistently appeared in the minutes of the day). This section will evaluate RUDC’s ‘track record’ in each of these areas, over the course of the period 1960 to 1974, against the backdrop of a stagnating market for domestic long holidays (i.e. low growth, though not low volume), as demonstrated by a rapid decline in both the number of serviced accommodation providers within the resort and the receipts at some of its traditional attractions (e.g. the Open Air Swimming Pool – E&PC-21(165)-4). First of all, though not discussed below, it is worth recounting ‘other’ initiatives undertaken by RUDC that had a bearing upon tourism in Rhyl during this epoch, including: (i) the issuing of ‘Holiday Concession Cards’ permitting ‘free’ entry into various council-owned amenities, this forming part of an inclusive package holiday product sold via the Rhyl Hotel and Guest House Association on behalf of its members (GPC(RUDC)-17(497)-13; E&PC-20(237)-8); (ii) substantial improvements to measures designed to ensure the safety of the public on the beach and promenade (GPC(RUDC)-16(528/9)-11; E&PC-21(166)-7); (iii) several (unsuccesful) representations to the Board of Trade, in an attempt to obtain ‘Development Area’ status for the Rhyl district, this being necessary to the council’s mission of attracting light industry to
the locality and, consequently, diversifying an economy that was heavily dependent upon tourism (GPC(RUDC)-16(648)-8; GPC(RUDC)-17(229)-12), and; (iv) opposition to the government with regards to the imposition of a tax on amusement machines, which threatened to result in the closure of several arcades in the resort, and the loss of up to 300 seasonal jobs (FC(S)-20(92)-2).

6.3.1 Of publicity and partnerships

In the early years of this epoch, RUDC continued to promote Rhyl through the traditional media of the annual municipal brochure or holiday guide, illustrated folders, newspaper advertising and railway posters, not to mention one-off publicity initiatives (e.g. in connection with the world’s first scheduled hovercraft service, from Wallasey to Rhyl, in 1962 - PC-13(220)-8). ‘Free’ publicity aside, this represented an expensive commitment and one that could not be met from the rates alone. Thankfully, considerable sums of money were invested in resort publicity schemes by British Railways and its predecessors (the London, Midland and Scottish Railway, in the case of Rhyl), with a view to increasing traffic and, therefore, receipts on the line(s) serving the destination in question (see Section 5.3.7).

Not surprisingly, the decision by BR to substantially reduce its resort advertising programme, announced in the mid 1960s, was a potential ‘hammer-blow’ to RUDC’s attempts to promote Rhyl as a popular, long-holiday destination. There were several immediate consequences of this, including strict limitations on the use of colour in the municipal brochure (introduced in the early 1960s), smaller print runs of the resort’s illustrated folder, the loss of the railway’s creative input into its posters and a greater dependency upon forms of promotion other than advertising. That said, Rhyl’s publicity machine had built up considerable momentum over
the years, and was not to be halted by a reduction in funding. In fact, once the initial shock waves had passed, the emphasis switched from cutting back upon RUDC’s expenditure on advertising and publicity to securing the best value for its money, to the point of monitoring – ever more closely – the effectiveness of various promotional initiatives. Information pertaining to the council’s press advertising campaign for 1967 shows this to good effect, with Table 6.1 summarising both the cost of placing advertisements in the various publications involved (PC-17(267-9)-22/3), and the number of related enquiries for the municipal brochure received by the 20th February of that year (PC-17(516)-11 – this marking the first appearance of such data in the minutes) from which the cost per enquiry for, and thus the effectiveness of, each publication was determined. Incidentally, excluding the provincial ‘Dailies’ and ‘Sundays’, it is apparent that the likes of the ‘Sunday Mirror’ and ‘The People’ were more (cost) effective than their upper and lower class competitors (e.g. the ‘Daily Express’ and ‘The Sun’, respectively), suggesting that Rhyl was particularly favourable with the ‘C2’ market at this stage (this being prior to the resort’s ‘down-market drift’ in the late 1970s and 1980s).

For some time, it had been RUDC’s normal policy to appoint agents to administer its newspaper advertising scheme (PC-11(147/8)-5). However, perhaps mindful of the need for increased efficiency and effectiveness, the council went one step further by engaging an agency (Barnaby and Tarr Limited) to oversee both its advertising campaign and the production of the municipal brochure, for the financial years 1968/69 to 1970/71 (PC-19(108-11)-7). To facilitate this, it resolved that certain councillors and officers be given a measure of authority, so as to avoid the necessity of constant reference to the Publicity Committee when settling (minor) matters with the above-named agency (PC-19(195/6)-3). This new, and streamlined, arrangement predictably resulted in profound changes to RUDC’s
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publication</th>
<th>Number of enquiries (a)</th>
<th>Total cost of advertising (£)</th>
<th>Cost per enquiry (£) (b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Weekly News (Dundee)</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>0.099</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Holiday Guide</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Mirror</td>
<td>2121</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>0.198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Mercury (Birmingham)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The People</td>
<td>2320</td>
<td>516</td>
<td>0.222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Travel (Holidays in Britain Guide)</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>0.243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News of the World</td>
<td>2219</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>0.260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Sun (Newcastle)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0.265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mirror</td>
<td>773</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>0.272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>0.324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday Haunts in Great Britain</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>0.327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Post (Glasgow)</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>0.329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
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<td>Sunday Express</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday Citizen</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>0.938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holiday Guide to Wales (WTB)</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.163</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES:**
(a) A further 5,905 miscellaneous enquiries were dealt with, as of the date in question;
(b) It must be remembered that the figures in the final column predate decimalization (i.e. 1971).

*Table 6.1: Number and (total/relative) cost of enquiries for the 1967 municipal brochure (as of 20/02/67), attributable to publications used in RUDC’s press advertising scheme*

‘promotional mix’, with the regular placement of advertisements in a *limited* number of Sunday newspapers (and one daily), the withdrawal of poster displays and the publication of folders (due to cost), and the modernisation of the design and content of the municipal brochure (which saw its editorial matter repackaged into a full-colour ‘A4’ magazine, physically divorced from the resort’s accommodation listings). Running alongside this was a
more aggressive approach to selling advertising space in the dedicated brochure including, from the financial year 1970/71, provision for the incorporation of advertisements from certain accommodation providers outside of the immediate area (on the basis that this would be to the council’s financial advantage). As for the effectiveness of the above, it is interesting to note that, upon reviewing their first-year’s performance, representatives of the agency spoke of a ‘disappointing’ increase of 5 per cent in replies to newspaper advertisements, justifying this in the context of a 5 to 7 per cent reduction across the sector (a sign, perhaps, of the forthcoming slump) (PC-20(94-7)-2). The notion of Rhyl ‘holding ground’ was repeated at the second annual review of the agency’s performance, in light of the increasing cost-per-reply of newspaper advertising (the agent disputed the suggestion that competition from holidays abroad had a bearing on this, citing the growing number of domestic holidays taken in Britain at that time – see Demetriadi, 1997). This prompted consideration of alternative media, most notably television which, although expensive, could be secured as part of a £1,800 ‘package deal’ of three 15-second slots on each of the Granada (North West) and ATV (Midlands) networks in December 1970 and January 1971, complemented by colour advertisements in the appropriate editions of the ‘TV Times’ and a handling/reply service for brochure enquiries (which would have to be distributed free-of-charge) (PC-21(95-8)-7). The decision to proceed with this package, in addition to the £3,700 spent on placing advertisements in the national press and the £6,700 allocated to producing the municipal brochure, bore witness to the council’s faith in its appointed agents. However, after another year of below-par results, this faith quickly dissipated and the council resumed control of the publication and distribution of the municipal brochure (in its pre-1969 ‘A5’ format), whilst vesting responsibility for a less ambitious press advertising scheme (i.e. excluding television) in the hands of a local agency (North Wales Publicity Services Limited) (PC-22(267)-I).
The aforementioned inclusion of advertisements in the municipal brochure for hotels, guest houses and camps located outside of the urban district, suggested a less parochial stance on the part of RUDC, which was consolidated with a number of advertising and publicity initiatives carried out in conjunction with the neighbouring resorts of Prestatyn, Colwyn Bay and Llandudno, as with the joint stand at the 1968 ‘Planning your Holidays’ exhibition in Glasgow (PC-18(198)~9). This stemmed from a meeting in Llandudno, some three years earlier, between the Chambers of Commerce and Hotel and Guest House Associations of the North Wales resorts (PC-16(16)~10), with a view to working together for the furtherance of tourism in the region, thus marking a distinct ‘thaw’ in relations between what were once fierce competitors for the tourist pound. By way of explanation, it was earlier postulated that this had something to do with the greater mobility and flexibility offered by the motor car (in comparison with rail travel) and the corresponding increase in multi-centre holidays (see Section 6.2.2). Equally, the perceived threat of holidays abroad (also a product of transport improvements and ‘time-space compression’) might have provided a common ‘enemy’ for these one-time rivals to unite against.

6.3.2 Top of the bill?

It was noted in Section 5.3.5 that, towards the end of the 1950s, traditional seaside entertainments such as ballroom dancing and military bands were becoming less popular with visitors, a trend that was carried over into the 1960s with the continuation of subsidies for the Rhyl Silver Band (to offset falling attendances at open-air concerts – EC-11(135)~10) and the amendment of the covenant restricting the use of the Coliseum Theatre to a “concert party only”, so as to permit “any form of stage entertainment including boxing and wrestling” (EC-11(185)~12). In the course of finding some alternative means of ‘keeping the punters
happy', the Entertainments Committee observed that the most successful resorts of the day offered the public the chance of seeing performances from 'top of the bill' stage and television personalities, and an opportunity presented itself – with the end of a thirteen-year run, in 1961, of Captain Prince Cox’s International Circus at the Pavilion Theatre – for RUDC to reproduce this ‘winning formula’ at a venue big enough to accommodate the average ‘full house’. To this end, it contracted a theatrical agency (Johnny and Harvey Riscoe Limited) to provide the artistes, costumes, musical direction and stage management for a thirteen-week ‘Summer Startime’ production at the Pavilion Theatre, commencing for three years in June 1962. From the outset, this was an expensive – albeit successful – undertaking on the part of the council, given that various improvements to the theatre (totalling £5,000) were needed in order to get the best possible returns from the production, and monies had to be set aside for publicity (including provision for 30,000 leaflets to be inserted in that year’s municipal brochure, which had already gone to press by the time the contract was agreed). However, in the words of the Chairman of the Finance Committee, “it is perfectly obvious...that a show of that standard...must be considered more in the light of a necessary amenity in a seaside resort than as a source of possible revenue” (RUDC(S)~13(578)~3).

Ultimately, pressure from the Ratepayers’ Association – alarmed at the ‘extravagant’ cost of ‘Summer Startime’ (EC~14(429)~11) – and disagreements between the council and the agency over the cast for the 1964 production – especially in relation to the absence of a ‘beat’ group, the perceived need for which was indicative of developments within popular culture, during the 1960’s (EC~14(555/6)~1) – saw the termination of the above arrangement, and a short-lived flirtation with a policy of leasing the Pavilion Theatre (EC~15(383)~11), prior to the council resuming full possession of it in April 1968 (RUDC(S)~18(544/5)~2).
All in all, this epoch held mixed blessings for Rhyl as a place of entertainment, with the opening of the Little Theatre in May 1963 (where children could learn the disciplines of the stage and gain experience of performing in public – P&GC-13(750)-11) counterbalanced by the demolition of the Pavilion Theatre in February 1974 (see Section 6.3.3). To this must be added the discontinuance of the ‘Miss Wales’ Bathing Beauty Competition at the end of the 1968 season, which was deemed by the resort’s advertising and publicity agents to be an expense that it could ill afford (PC-19(196)-4), and the hosting – for the first time – of the ‘BBC Radio 1 Roadshow’ at the Marine Lake in August 1973, a highly popular event that returned to Rhyl every year, at least until the late 1990s (E&PC-24(127)-8).

6.3.3 Refitting the ‘shop window’

Elsewhere in this thesis (and the academic literature – see Demetriadi, 1997; Urry, 1990), the period to which this epoch relates (i.e. 1960 to 1974) has been characterised as one of stagnation in relation to British seaside resorts per se, with a pronounced lack of public and private sector investment paving the way for their subsequent decline (in terms of trips, nights and expenditure) as long-holiday destinations. This is certainly true of Rhyl, with regards to the net reduction in its stock of attractions and accommodation over the course of the above-named period, but it must be said that such a perception overlooks the various (frustrated) attempts on the part of RUDC to initiate major capital works in the resort, not to mention some of the minor improvements made to the Rhyl ‘product’ during this epoch. These will be reviewed in this section, which concludes with a more thorough analysis, than has been attempted previously, of the (local political) circumstances leading up to the controversial closure and demolition of the Victoria Pier and Pavilion Theatre which, prior to the financial year 1973/74, were arguably Rhyl’s two principal visitor attractions.
Recognition of the need for the comprehensive redevelopment of the promenade (the resort’s ‘shop window’) came as early as 1960/61, when architects were engaged to prepare draft sketch plans for a new theatre and dance hall (on the site of the Children’s Cycle Track), capable of housing ‘large’ conferences and exhibitions and estimated to cost in the region of £300,000 (EC~11(247/8)~13). This was followed, one year later, by a proposal for an indoor swimming pool (EC~12(457)~10), to be achieved: (i) by covering and heating the existing Open Air Swimming Pool, or; (ii) as a new-build project (costed at £116,000 and £115,000, respectively – EC~14(563)~12). Having made little progress on implementing either scheme, the council incorporated both concepts into plans for the redevelopment of the area between the pier and the East Promenade Bowling Greens, which envisaged an indoor swimming and ‘learners’ pool, restaurant and café, multi-purpose assembly hall and any ‘other’ revenue producing features that might be considered desirable (EC~15(703/4)~15). The overall development was to be phased in over a number of years, as dictated by the availability of public funds (the idea of ‘joining forces’ with the private sector had yet to be explored at this stage), but nothing happened until the financial year 1969/70, when the indoor swimming pool (which was to comprise the first phase of this undertaking) was given the go-ahead as part of a separate sports facility, sited away from the promenade in Grange Road and funded on a joint basis with Flintshire County Council (for the primary benefit of schoolchildren and local residents, but not holidaymakers). The remainder of this so-called ‘Entertainments Complex’ was abandoned at the ‘drawing-board’ stage, on account of “being over expensive and under ambitious” (although it was later to form the ‘blueprint’ for the combined Sun Centre and New Pavilion Theatre, a two-stage development opened in 1980 and 1991, respectively). Instead, the council sought expressions of interest from private developers wishing to fund – in whole or part – the construction of a ‘Winter Gardens’, comprising a theatre for 1,500 to 2,000 patrons, conference, dancing and banqueting facilities, and a
licensed restaurant *(E&PC(S)-20(155-6)-2C)*. Unfortunately, both this and a subsequent competition organised by the Rhyl Hotel and Guest House Association (which, for some years, had consistently lobbied the council with regards to the lack of suitable conference facilities in the town) failed to produce any meaningful propositions from the private sector and, in 1973/74, the matter was referred to the incoming Rhuddlan Borough Council, along with a contribution of £120,000 from RUDC's resources towards a "suitable alternative entertainment undertaking" on the lines of that described above ("alternative", that is, to the recently flattened Pavilion Theatre – *RUDC(S)-24(208-12)-2; RBC(S)-I(27-9)-14*).

In addition to the above, RUDC sought to redevelop the Marine Lake as a 'leisure park' and, to this end, inserted a clause into the new lease granted to Rhyl Amusements Limited, in 1967, giving the council the right to resume possession of the site as and when it was required for an alternative use *(E&PC-17(479)-16)*. This was duly exercised in 1969, resulting in the closure of the Marine Lake Funfair (with the transfer of some rides to its neighbour, Ocean Beach) and the clearance of the site (including the popular Rhyl Miniature Railway) in preparation for an aborted yachting marina with berths for 240 vessels, which would have required the breaching of the embankment separating the lake from the adjoining river *(E&PC(S)-19(471)-1)*. The marina, along with proposals for a floating restaurant at the Foryd Harbour *(GPC(RUDC)-23(175)-4)*, was part of a regeneration scheme for the area surrounding the mouth of the River Clwyd, which was foiled by engineering problems (most notably the differing levels of the lake and river) and, once again, an inability to secure the necessary funding.

In the absence of the major development project that Rhyl so desperately needed, if it was to bolster its contracting share of the long holiday and conference markets, RUDC's
achievements were confined, in the main, to small-scale capital improvements. These included an extension to the Royal Floral Hall, to accommodate a ‘Continental Zoo’ (which saw a twofold increase in receipts between 1961/62 and 1962/63 – P&GC~13(75)~4), the construction of the Pavilion Lounge Bar (RC~12(588)~1), coinciding with the first season of the ‘Summer Startime’ show (see Section 6.3.2), and the above-mentioned opening, in 1963, of the Little Theatre in Vale Road. It will be remembered, however, not for these minor additions to Rhyl’s mix of amenities, but for the removal of the Victoria Pier and Pavilion Theatre at the ‘eleventh hour’ of its administration. Routine maintenance had stopped on the pier as early as 1961/62, when missing screens and rotten timber decking were replaced for the last time (RC~13(381)~3). Not surprisingly, the structure quickly became ‘unsafe’, prompting the council to authorise remedial repairs (at a cost of £250) in Spring 1965 (E&PC~15(700)~10). Still alarmed at its dilapidated state, and with little money available for further repairs, the council took the pragmatic option and closed the pier to vehicular traffic, prior to the commencement of the 1966 season, after which it was ruled ‘off-limits’ to all but the Coastguard (GPC(RUDC)~17(254)~15). There followed a succession of policy ‘U-turns’ – first the pier was to be demolished (RC/E&PC(J)~16(466)~3), then a covenant excluding amusement uses was lifted, as a precursor to a request, by advertisement, for proposals from those interested in redeveloping the structure on the basis of a long-term lease (E&PC(S)~20(154)~2) before, finally, tenders were issued for its demolition, upon receipt of the necessary statutory authority (GPC(RUDC)~23(380)~22). The Pavilion Theatre, on the other hand, fared marginally better during this epoch before it, too, was removed. Indeed, some £5,000 of improvements were made to the theatre in preparation for the first season of the aforementioned ‘Summer Startime’ show, including provision of a new floor and seating in the auditorium, the latest stage lighting and sound equipment, and a complete repaint – both internally and externally (FC~12(332)~14). By 1964/65, however, RUDC’s policy in
connection with the facility was under review, the outcome of which was a decision to lease it to private enterprise (in coming to this conclusion, the council overlooked a suggestion made by the Rhyl Hotel and Guest House Association, to redevelop the theatre as a conference centre – RUDC(S)~15(208)~2). This arrangement lasted all of three years, during which time the theatre became progressively run-down, and it was on this pretext that the council resumed possession of the structure in 1967/68 (RUDC(S)~18(544/5)~2). Unfortunately, proposals to convert it into a ‘licensed entertainment venue’ (RUDC(S)~18(535/6)~1) came to nothing, and its condition deteriorated further until, in 1972/73, the idea of adapting the theatre for use as a night-club resurfaced, only to be ‘sucked’ into the ‘policy vacuum’ that eclipsed the run up to local authority reorganisation in 1974 (E&PC(S)~23(298/9)~7). In lieu of a major adaptation scheme, the council authorised repairs to the theatre for the coming season. Sadly, preparatory works revealed ‘extremely serious’ structural defects that would have cost some £132,000 to put right and, for a building with an uncertain future, this represented a ‘step too far’. Hence, RUDC, in its wisdom, decided to demolish both the theatre and the Pavilion Lounge Bar, with the reluctant blessing of Rhuddlan Borough Council’s ‘shadow’ Amenities and Recreation Committee (thankful, no doubt, of being spared a difficult decision) (RUDC(S)~24(208-12)~2).

6.3.4 Pay and display

The failure of supply to keep up with demand, in respect of car and coach parking in Rhyl, had been a problem for some time prior to the publication of the infamous ‘Beeching Report’ of 1963, which set in motion the rapid elimination of the railway’s ‘surplus’ capacity, whilst putting increased pressure upon the nation’s fledging road network. Seaside resorts had every right to fear this process, given their dependency upon the railways as the chief carrier of
holidaymakers to and from the coast, and RUDC – along with its sister authorities in North Wales – was not slow to respond to the threat of branch line and station closures which, in its eyes, were solely directed at railway economies and seriously likely to prejudice the holiday industries of all resorts, by virtue of cutting off traditional ‘source’ areas (i.e. those in which the majority of their visitors resided) (RC~14(61/2)~8). Initially, services to the neighbouring towns of Prestatyn and Abergele were to be terminated, which would have put considerable pressure upon roads within the district due to the necessity of conveying passengers from Rhyl station to their accommodation in these resorts. Thankfully, this threat did not materialise, although the traffic did, as more and more people began to enjoy access to, and the flexibility of, a car.

The need for motor parking in Rhyl was addressed – at least in part – as long ago as 1951/52, with the opening of the Greenfield Place Municipal Coach Park (GPC~2(471)~16). This, however, could not be expected to cope with the increased demand for off-street parking, during the 1960s, and much tarmac was laid in the resort in an attempt to cater for the motorist, including the provision of new car parks on the Marsh Road Refuse Tip, the East Promenade Sandhills and the area to the west of the Pavilion Theatre (GPC(RUDC)~11(135)~11; P&GC~13(73)~9; MPC(SP)~13(337/8)~2). On other occasions, however, the council were frustrated in their attempts to alleviate Rhyl’s traffic problems, most notably when a compulsory purchase order for land in Brighton Road (RUDC(M)~18(90/1)~2), on which a multi-storey car park was to be constructed, was abandoned after the County Planning Officer withdrew his support for the scheme, citing the results of a survey which showed that the need for additional parking spaces was restricted to high season only (RUDC(S)~19(561)~1). This followed the shelving of proposals for an underground car park in front of the Amphitheatre, when the Special (Motor Parking)
Committee balked at the proposed cost of £260,000 (this being one of the many ideas for the redevelopment of the promenade that were resurrected in the early 1990s) \((MPC(SP)\sim 13(630)\sim 3)\). Without such facilities, Rhyl continued to struggle with the problems of traffic congestion and illegal parking, which further took the shine off a place that was once reputed for its clean air and unhurried atmosphere.

6.4 The official guide to ‘Sunny Rhyl’ (1960 to 1974) – popularising the resort for a younger audience

A penchant for (visual) clichés, an approach to selling Rhyl as a holiday destination that verged on the aggressive, and an increasingly wordy account of the resort’s many attributes and virtues, were all notable characteristics that set the municipal brochures of this epoch apart from those that preceded them (see below). They were, in turn, part of a wider strategy of repackaging Rhyl for a younger (family) audience with more modern tastes, in line with contemporary changes to the prevailing demographic and socio-cultural order (as explained in Section 2.3).

6.4.1 Visual (and other) clichés

In discussing the tautological properties of the language of tourism (i.e. as a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ or ‘circular phenomenon’), Dann (1996a: pp.65-67) reminds us of the importance of clichés, whether visual or verbal, to the discourse of place promotion, a theme also alluded to by Krippendorf (1987), who goes as far as to list some of the most common metaphors (over)used in the name of advertising a given destination:
...deep blue ocean, white sand, sunset, palm trees, beautiful tanned holiday makers, picturesque fishing and mountain villages, happy and laughing colourfully dressed locals, turquoise green swimming pools, eternal sunshine, eternal snow, untouched landscapes, virgin ski slopes, opulent self-service buffets, parents and children radiating health and happiness, adventurous trips, imposing sights, exciting nights, sex life and so on.

(pp.21-22)

If one allows for the ‘unique’ geography of the North Wales coast, it is possible to detect some of these metaphors throughout those editions of the municipal brochure published during the 1950s. What is remarkable about the brochures of the 1960s and early 1970s, however, is their descent into a world of ‘seaside stereotypes’, in which certain clichés (none of which were exclusive to Rhyl) were “so often repeated as to render the message in question trite or even devoid of meaning” (Dann, 1996a: p.194). Not surprisingly, heliocentric imagery dominated these brochures, in the form of the ‘Sunny Rhyl’ brand-name and various iconic and indexical representations of the sun itself (in contrast to earlier editions, which took the more realistic approach of highlighting the ‘bracing’ qualities of the British maritime climate and the health giving properties thereof). Indeed, rarely did the reader come across a photograph of an outdoor scene that was not taken in bright sunshine, a characteristic shared by most tourist brochures (subject matter permitting) that, when employed to excess, becomes equivalent to a guarantee of good weather (Febas Borra, 1978: p.116). Other customary icons also featured heavily, such as the luggage label (which connoted the act of travel) and the palm tree (a marker of more exotic climes, and one that just about qualified for inclusion by virtue of those few hardy examples that made it onto Rhyl promenade – a somewhat chillier environment than the hotel forecourts of Devon and Cornwall). To these were added images indigenous to the British seaside, including the ‘Punch and Judy’ stall, donkey rides on the beach and the (victorious) bathing beauty contestant (all of which, for various reasons that need not be explored here, have little place in today’s ‘politically correct’ society). The end-product was a reliance upon a set of all-to-predictable signifiers (as evidenced by Plate 6.2),
contrary to the approach taken in previous years, by which images that could only be observed in Rhyl (e.g. scenes of the Pavilion Theatre and the Open Air Swimming Pool) took precedence over all others. By way of explanation, it could be argued that, as more of the resort’s traditional attractions fell out of favour (to the point where they were removed or replaced), so there was less to promote to prospective tourists (the concept of a ‘shrinking product’ will be further explored in Section 7.4). On the other hand, it might just be that Rhyl Urban District Council (in conjunction with its advertising and publicity agents) considered the above imagery, however commonplace, to be part of a ‘tried and trusted’ recipe for attracting domestic holidaymakers (Fordist forms of tourism were, after all, renowned for being formulaic – see Section 5.2.1).

Verbal, as well as visual, clichés were prevalent throughout the municipal brochures of this epoch, in the form of shallow, yet succinct, slogans such as ‘The Floral Resort’, ‘The Tonic Holiday Centre’ and, naturally, ‘Sunny Rhyl’, not to mention spatial metaphors (e.g. the rechristening of the East Promenade Bowling Greens as the ‘Plymouth Hoe of North Wales’) and colloquialisms such as ‘the tops’ and ‘A.1’. Also detectable was a fondness for ‘poems, prose and puns’ (e.g. “The air at Rhyl is bracing / It blends from land and sea / To dispel that tired feeling / And gives new vitality”, “‘Tis not in mortals to command success...But Sunny Rhyl offers you the next best thing”, and “It’s time to Rhylax!” – RUDC, 1965: p.6; 1963: p.3, p.7), some of which were better executed than others. To explain, the pun “signals communication between intellectual equals, [and is] a playful device used to gain readers’ attention and intrigue them sufficiently to read further” (Gold, 1994: p.30), a description that could equally be applied to poems and prose. It is interesting to note that, along with a number of ‘word games’ (e.g. an ‘A to Z’ guide to Rhyl that matched at least one of the resort’s attractions or qualities to each letter of the alphabet, including notoriously ‘difficult’
Plate 6.2: Front cover of the (1) 1966 and (2) 1967 ‘Sunny Rhyl’ Holiday Guide (Rhyl Urban District Council)
letters such as 'Q', 'X' and 'Z'), such linguistic 'trickery' resembled a characteristically 'postmodern' style of writing, heavy on rhetoric but light on content.

6.4.2 The hard sell

Following the economic depression of the 1920s and 1930s, a new orientation to business emerged that emphasised the importance of the selling process. Dubbed the 'sales concept', it assumed that a good salesman [sic] could sell anything to anyone, whether or not it was required (Proctor, 1996: p.9). In its extreme form, the so-called 'hard sell' approach was characterised by over-confident claims in the benefits to be derived from purchasing the product in question, deliberate 'ego-targeting' through use of the 'first-person imperative' (i.e. singling out the reader, or addressee, and inviting or commanding that individual to comply with a prescribed course of action – see Dann, 1996a: pp.79-84, pp.185-188) and persistent repetition. All of these traits were particularly evident in those municipal brochures published in the mid and late 1960s, at a time when the powers that be were becoming acutely aware of the counter-attraction of foreign holidays (the actual, or perceived, threat of over-supply often triggered an organisation into adopting a 'sales orientation'). In respect of the first, one could almost forgive the copywriters for 'talking up' their resort with proud claims, such as "the attractions of SUNNY RHYL are without equal around the coast of Britain" (RUDC, 1967: p.4), but the promise of "a better tan than the continent" (p.14) clearly smacked of desperation, and only worked because the average reader possessed neither the relevant empirical data nor the necessary first-hand experience with which to challenge that particular assertion. These were but two of a growing number of questionable assurances made in order to attract would-be holidaymakers, the most outstanding example of which must surely be the following extract from the introduction to the 'Sunny Rhyl' holiday guide for 1966:
The first stroll along the promenade is always exciting because you meet Mr. World – they are now coming to Sunny Rhyl regularly by rail and by road from all parts of Britain, by sea and air from France, Canada, Sweden and America – his wife and family.  

(RUDC, 1965: p.1)

As we know, the British seaside has always struggled to attract overseas visitors (there is no reason to assume that Rhyl was any different), unlike places such as London, Oxford, Stratford-upon-Avon, the Lake District and Edinburgh, whose identities are more in keeping with how the rest of the world perceives ‘England’ [sic]. Clearly, the resort’s publicity manager (to whom the above passage is credited) was not alert to the dangers of misrepresenting one’s ‘place product’ (although this was, perhaps, one of the less harmful overstatements, given that the average holidaymaker was unlikely to choose Rhyl on the strength of its alleged cosmopolitan atmosphere).

With regards to the second trait (‘ego-targeting’), the self-same brochures adopted a casual (or conversational) approach, whereby clearly defined roles for the addresser and addressee were achieved through the use of identifiers such as ‘we’, ‘us’, ‘our’, ‘you’ and ‘your’. A number of commentators have acknowledged the importance of this technique in travel and tourism advertising (e.g. Reilly, 1988; Selwyn, 1993; Boyer and Viallon, 1994), the consensus being that this reduces anxiety in the targeted subject, elevates that individual from the crowd and engenders an intimacy between the two parties in question. Needless to say, all of these qualities are conducive to the act of selling, as embodied in the following extracts:

A tonic holiday for you and yours is certain if you come to Sunny Rhyl...PLUS a warm welcome from everyone here!  

(RUDC, 1964: p.1)

...we could never hope to tell you of all Sunny Rhyl’s good things here, so you’ll simply have to come and see for yourself, won’t you, at Sunny Rhyl this year!  

(RUDC, 1964: p.10)
Make health the excuse, if you like, with pleasure the real purpose...
(RUDC, 1965: p.15)

A holiday at Sunny Rhyl is free from all minor irritations and your kiddies are our VIP’s.
(RUDC, 1972: p.3)

Clearly, the ego being targeted is that of the patriarch, although there were occasions on which the copy was written with other family members in mind. For example, passages such as “...you will find the Punch and Judy man, the best ice cream, lettered rock to take home for big brother and big sister, for Auntie and Uncle, and for Grandpa and Grandma” (RUDC, 1968: p.4) were evidently pitched at a younger audience (of course, one might argue that it was the children who were the ‘real’ decision-makers of the family). This particular extract is also significant for identifying those relatives that could be expected to stay at home (from which it might be inferred that the brochure’s editors were trying to position Rhyl as a holiday destination for young families, at least in the high season).

An element of repetition may also be observed in the above extracts and, for that matter, throughout the municipal brochures of this epoch (often in relation to verbal clichés, such as those identified in Section 6.4.1). The aim, here, was to plant certain beliefs in the reader’s subconscious, by repeating them so often that they became self-explanatory (e.g. ‘the sun must always shine on Sunny Rhyl’). It also reflected the dogged determination of the door-to-door salesperson in wearing down consumer resistance to a product, although such an aggressive approach was not to everyone’s taste, especially in ensuing years when more subtle methods of promoting goods, services and issues came to the fore. Indeed, disaffection with the ‘sales concept’ might explain why the tone of later brochures was passive and defensive by comparison, as demonstrated by the following appeal to readers of the 1973 edition:
We take catering for our holidaymakers seriously at Rhyl. The average British tourist and holidaymaker counts his pennies and expects value for money. You will not be disappointed at Sunny Rhyl.

(RUDC, 1972: p.3)

It is interesting to note that, in respect of the above passage, the resort should chose to promote an intangible concept such as 'value for money', over its more tangible amenities. This was, in fact, symptomatic of the aforementioned 'shrinking product' syndrome that prevailed during the next epoch (see Section 7.4), whereby the immeasurable attributes of the Rhyl 'experience' were promoted in place of recently departed (and, therefore, ineligible) attractions such as the Pavilion Theatre.

6.4.3 Wither the written word?

In Section 5.4.2, it was suggested that the municipal brochures of the 1950s contained an excess of information on Rhyl and its environs, in what was a relatively comprehensive exposition of the resort's many attributes. This epoch, however, saw profound changes to the volume and content of the written copy within the municipal brochure, as the captions that accompanied photographs were scaled down and verbose accounts of the resort's history and geography were replaced with hackneyed descriptions of 'golden sands', 'gay, colourful promenades' and the like. Correspondingly, the 1960s marked the municipal brochure's transition from 'guidebook' to 'coffee table publication', as persuasion, rather than education, became the order of the day.

A comparison between the 1951 and 1973 editions of the 'Sunny Rhyl' holiday guide illustrates the diminishing importance of the written word in promoting Rhyl to would-be visitors. Whereas in the former, the ratio of words to pictures on each page was around '1:1',
by the time of the latter, text could only be found on alternate pages, and then at an adjusted ratio of approximately ‘1:4’. This was achieved, without compromising the ability of the brochure to sell Rhyl as a holiday destination, through the greater use of captions (the most intelligent of which were, arguably, equivalent to a paragraph or two of writing – see Section 6.4.1), and a more selective approach to communicating the essential features of the Rhyl ‘product’ (i.e. those that were pertinent to the needs of tourists). Such minimalism was carried forward into the brochures of the following two epochs (see Section 8.4.4), conceivably in deference to the maxim ‘less is more’.

With less room for text, it was important that the brochure’s editors did not ‘waste’ space with ‘unnecessary’ copy. Consequently, out went the pages of ‘General Information’, which contained a wealth of contact numbers for services that were better suited to the local telephone directory. The rambling historical narratives of the earlier brochures were also jettisoned, since these had little relevance to the modern-day visitor (although they made a partial comeback in later editions, as the resort elected to compete with the comparably newer destinations of the Mediterranean, by playing upon its many years of experience in entertaining visitors). This was no overnight transition, yet the copywriter’s attempts to ‘dumb down’ the content of the municipal brochure are best revealed by a like-for-like comparison between the 1965 and 1966 editions (the latter, in an attempt to cut the costs of production, used the same images as the former, but with different copy, thus permitting a ‘commutation test’ on the lines of that indicated in Section 3.5). Three pages into each brochure, an identical photograph of holidaymakers at play on the beach is accompanied by two radically different captions, to wit:

The name ‘Rhyl’ comes from the Welsh word ‘yr’ (the) followed by ‘hill’ and was first known as Yr Hill. This later became Rhill and, by 1685, Rhyll, finally in 1699 becoming Rhyl. The settlement now known as Rhyl grew up at the foot of a
hill and its first house, which still stands today, was named Ty’n Rhyl – the house at the foot of the hill. Rhyl was noted for good bathing in the 1800’s and by 1825 was an established resort. The Parish Church was built in 1835. The railway arrived in 1840.

(SUNNY Rhyl, 1964: p.3)

SUNNY Rhyl is the gem of the North Wales Coast. Here is a holiday resort with golden sands, top bracket sunshine records and outdoor entertainment for all including fishing, skating, pleasure grounds, sunbathing, donkey rides, tennis, bowls, Punch and Judy, bathing beauties, rosebuds, boating and swimming...There are also theatre shows, ballrooms, cafes, restaurants, hotels, amusement arcades and the magnificent Royal Floral Hall, acclaimed by expert and layman alike as the 8th Wonder of Wales.

(SUNNY Rhyl, 1965: p.3)

Of course, we are not privy to the behind-the-scenes discussions that saw the former replaced with the latter. However, it is clear that the enlightening, yet dull, style of the first extract (historical inaccuracies excepted), belonged to an earlier genre of tourist brochures, whereas the second – a more popular, albeit banal, proposition – offered a glimpse into the future of place promotion. Nowhere else, in the municipal brochures of this, or any other epoch, was the contrast between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’, or ‘substance’ and ‘surface’, more marked.
7 Results and Discussion of Third Epoch: “Bringing the Seaside Inside” (1974 – 1988)

7.1 Introduction

The division between the epoch to which this chapter is devoted, and the one that preceded it, is in many, though not all, respects the clearest of the three ‘turning points’ discussed in this thesis (i.e. 1960, 1974 and 1988). At the macro level, it marked the transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy, precipitated by the oil crisis of the early 1970s and the subsequent recession that so affected the manufacturing and extractive industries of the Western world. Without arguing for economic (or political) determinism, it is generally felt that the defining characteristics of post-Fordism became imbued in the personalities of individuals (e.g. the perceived need to be adaptable and flexible with regard to one’s work), leading to a new way of life that has since been labelled ‘postmodern’. In terms of tourism, this epoch saw a profound decline in domestic trips, nights and expenditure (once the initial shock waves of the oil crisis had subsided), as a growing majority of British holidaymakers switched allegiance to the hotter and dryer resorts of the Mediterranean and Mid-Atlantic (most notably the Balearics, the Canaries and Madeira, the Greek Islands, and the former British dependencies of Malta and Cyprus). This was facilitated by the increased availability of inexpensive package holidays – a product of capacity enhancements (e.g. the construction of new hotels and bigger aircraft) and faster, more convenient, distribution networks (i.e. the high street travel agent). Naturally, this placed traditional cold-water resorts such as Rhyl in a rather precarious position, leaving a legacy of indoor amenities (hence the title of this chapter), down market drift and increasing obsolescence. One other development of note, at the micro
level, was the reorganisation of local government in England and Wales, which invested the municipal responsibility for Rhyl in the hands of Rhuddlan Borough Council (see Section 7.3), a name that was to be associated with the wholesale, yet arguably fruitless, redevelopment of Rhyl as a seaside resort.

7.2 Rhyl and postmodernism (as an emergent cultural formation)

Postmodernity is often thought of as a radical, and near-instantaneous, break with modernity. However, this conception ignores the fact that some aspects of modernism are present in postmodernism, albeit in an extreme or modified form. For example, Harvey (1989) notes that ‘ephemerality’, ‘fragmentation’ and ‘discontinuity’ – characteristics associated with postmodernism – are chronic manifestations of ‘the transitory’, ‘the fugitive’ and ‘the contingent’, which were thought to constitute the very essence of modernism (see Baudelaire, 1964). What this tells us is that it is better to think of postmodernism as emerging from modernism, and of ourselves as in the midst of a process of transition rather than at its conclusion. Although there is some debate as to how far we (as of 2001) have travelled from modernity, the above notion fits in well with this epoch (i.e. 1974 to 1988), in which early glimpses of postmodernism could be detected in the Rhyl townscape and municipal brochure texts of the day. Three such ‘glimpses’ are discussed in this section, namely: (i) ‘simulation and hyperreality’; (ii) ‘nostalgia’, and; (iii) ‘globalisation and placelessness’.

7.2.1 Simulation and hyperreality

Baudrillard (1983: p.2) defines ‘simulation’ as “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality”, and suggests that it is a vital marker of a (postmodern) culture in which the
modernist distinctions between fact and fiction, artefact and symbol, and original and copy have collapsed (a condition known as ‘vertical de-differentiation’ – see Lash, 1990: ch.1). He envisages the cultural experience of postmodernism as comprising an all-encompassing flow of hallucinatory and captivating images, a ‘hyperreality’ where – thanks to the increasingly pervasive influence of the media in society, and new technologies that transcend previous physical constraints on the (re)production process – representations are perceived to be ‘more real than the real’ (see also Eco, 1986). Opinion is divided upon whether de-differentiation is a good or bad thing. Some (e.g. Jameson, 1984) bemoan the depthlessness or emptiness of contemporary culture, whereby simulation robs reality of all that is extraordinary and unique. Others (e.g. Kaplan, 1987) take a more progressive (or transgressive) view, arguing that there is no assured role for the narrator or author under hyperreality, so leading to the replacement of grand narratives (e.g. capitalism, Marxism) with images. Incidentally, simulation is closely allied to the postmodernist notion of ‘intertextuality’, defined as “the accumulation and generation of meaning across texts, where all meanings depend on other meanings...[or]...the self-conscious citation of one text within another as an expression of enlarged cultural self-consciousness” (Barker, 2000: p.386).

The simulation of the ‘real world’ by contrived tourist attractions is nothing new. Indeed, the Queen’s Palace in Rhyl (built in 1902 and destroyed by fire in 1907) contained a ‘Venetian’ lake with replica gondolas, thus predating postmodernism by some sixty to seventy years. However, it was not until 1980, with the opening of the Sun Centre, that Rhyl saw its first wholly ‘postmodern’ attraction. Conscious of the resort’s poor sunshine record in relation to those destinations of Southern Europe that, during this epoch, made such great inroads into the British seaside’s share of the long holiday market, Rhuddlan Borough Council (with a little help from the European Economic Community) invested several million pounds of
public money into a scheme designed to “bring the seaside inside”, thus eliminating the one, otherwise uncontrollable, factor that was thought to stand between Rhyl and renewed prosperity – the rain. The result was the archetypal simulation. Its interior (see Plate 7.1.1) was designed to look and function like a tropical beach – the soft, organic outline of the main bathing pool (with a gently sloping shelf at the shallow end), the air temperature (a constant 81°F), a wave machine, palm trees (a somewhat hackneyed signifier) and poolside paraphernalia such as sun beds and parasols (both practically useless, given that ultra-violet light could not penetrate the 6,400m² tinted glass and PVC structure), all adding substance to this illusion. As if to emphasise the extent to which the Sun Centre borrowed from other texts, its rooftop monorail, which was allegedly “the only one of its kind in the world” (Association of District Councils, 1988: p.15), turned out to be similar to those found in Disneyland and its sister theme parks (a timely reminder of the challenge posed by intertextuality to claims of originality). Incidentally, in contrast to its contents, the Sun Centre’s exterior – which afforded the ability to see out but not in – was relatively featureless (see Plate 7.1.2), this being consistent with the trend discussed in Section 6.2.3, whereby leisure space became increasingly privatised (or enclosed) under late modernity and postmodernity.

Ironically, the same technology that allowed Rhuddlan Borough Council to develop the Sun Centre on Rhyl’s promenade was used to reproduce this highly successful formula elsewhere (Blackpool’s Sandcastle was opened soon after, followed by a glut of inner-city and edge-of-town leisure complexes such as the Wet ‘n Wild Water Park in Newcastle). It seems that, in the present postmodern era, spectacle and simulation are no longer confined to the pleasure periphery (as they were in modern times), but pervade all aspects of our lives, including everyday existence. Correspondingly, we have become desensitised to such sights, to the
Plate 7.1: Rhyl Sun Centre — (1) interior and (2) exterior (Rhuddlan Borough Council)
point where attractions such as the Sun Centre become just another diversion and not, as it must have seemed to many of Rhyl's visitors in the early 1980s, a truly remarkable day out.

### 7.2.2 Nostalgia

Nostalgia is a psychological condition (some might say affliction) that venerates, romanticises and seeks solace in the past, as a response to the sheer pace of change under modernity and postmodernity and the feelings of insecurity, disorientation and loss that this generates. Although the phenomenon may be traced back to the Renaissance (Lowenthal, 1985), it is more readily associated with the post-industrial era, especially in Britain where it is said to have reached 'epidemic' proportions (Urry, 1990). The recent and rapid increase in the number of historical, or heritage, attractions in England, Scotland and Wales would seem to corroborate this claim, although a distinction should be drawn between the 'heritage industry', comprised mainly of properties preserved and maintained in near-original condition (as with those owned and operated by the National Trust), and the 'nostalgia industry' which simulates the sights (and, in some cases, sounds and smells) of past environments and events through the use of artificial 'props' and theatrical representations. Evidently, the former are more 'authentic' than the latter although, in our present state of hyperreality (see Section 7.2.1, above), it appears that few visitors possess either the ability, the time, or the inclination to distinguish reality from illusion. This is central to Hewison's (1987) somewhat indiscriminate critique of the heritage industry which, he suggests, specialises in presenting highly selective, even bogus, (re)constructions of the past. In this respect, he saves his fiercest criticism for industrial heritage attractions (notably Wigan Pier), and their tendency to conceal the 'blood, sweat and tears' of those who once worked in them, in the name of entertaining visitors who, in all likelihood, had never endured such conditions of service. Whether one agrees or
disagrees with Hewison’s assessment (see Urry, 1990: pp.110-112, for an effective counter-critique), it is clear that nostalgia and, for that matter, simulation pose a serious challenge to authenticity, especially in a postmodern culture “dominated by a sign-economy in which fixed referentials have been liquidated” (Rojek, 1995: p.9). Such conditions favour ‘staged authenticity’ (MacCannell, 1989a; orig. 1976), a term that, in this context, refers to the superficial re-creation of the ‘real’ places, or ‘natural’ settings in which ordinary people once lived, worked and played.

Developments in Rhyl, during this epoch, suggest a heightened historical consciousness amongst those charged with planning and promoting the resort for the purposes of attracting tourists and day excursionists. Proposals to demolish the Town Hall (Plate 7.2.1) which, apart from suffering extensive wet and dry rot, stood in the way of a multi-million pound scheme for new shops, offices and a concert venue, met with severe resistance from local residents and interest groups, culminating in February 1981 with the structure being declared a ‘grade two’ listed building by the Welsh Office (in response to a request by the Liverpool branch of the Victorian Society). This meant that, for the building to be demolished, approval had to be sought from the Secretary of State for Wales, who would most likely call a public local enquiry to hear the arguments for and against its removal, the threat of such a protracted procedure forcing Rhuddlan Borough Council to consider retaining the façade of the structure in any future redevelopment project. In the event, the Town Hall (described by Hubbard, 1986: p.431, as “dull, except for a characterful clock tower”) was renovated ‘on the rates’, and reopened to the public in January 1990. Meanwhile, several other buildings and monuments in and around Rhyl were listed over the course of this epoch, in an attempt to safeguard those structures that were considered to be of sufficient architectural and historical significance. These included a semaphore tower on East Parade, the main building, footbridge and down-
Plate 7.2: ‘Historic Rhyl’ – (1) Rhyl Town Hall, and (2) mock-up of the Victoria Pier at Rhyl Library, Museum and Arts Complex (Rhuddlan Borough Council)

platform canopy of the railway station, the Churches of St. Thomas and the Holy Trinity, and Numbers 71 to 75 (inclusive) West Parade (Rhuddlan Borough Council, 1995).

This exercise in preserving Rhyl’s heritage came a little too late for structures such as the Victoria Pier and Pavilion Theatre. However, memories of these once-famous landmarks were revived in the state-of-the-art Rhyl Library, Museum and Arts Complex, opened opposite the new White Rose Shopping Centre in May 1986. The museum’s gallery – a re-creation of a section of the pier, complete with wooden decking and a mural depicting Rhyl promenade circa 1910 (see Plate 7.2.2) – went some way to satisfying the nostalgic yearnings of those local residents and repeat visitors that remembered the resort in its ‘heyday’. In addition, the various items of ‘bric-a-brac’ and local art on display there, and the absence of any ‘rare’ or ‘valuable’ archaeological, biological or geological exhibits, further underlined the museum’s
status as a ‘nostalgia’, as opposed to ‘heritage’, attraction (as per the distinction made above). Interestingly, there are parallels between the museum’s presentation of the pier as a highly original piece of Victorian engineering, and Zukin’s (1988) study of loft living in New York. In the case of both pier and loft, the wrought-iron ornamentation that adorned each structure was depicted as a relic of a bygone age in which individual craftsmanship was preferred to mass production. However, in reality, such embellishments were made up of prefabricated parts that were ordered from an ironmonger’s catalogue (which would explain why much of the ornamental detailing at Brighton’s Palace Pier could be seen in a number of other resorts throughout the country – Lindley, 1973: p.43). This serves to demonstrate the selectivity of the nostalgic memory.

Though not in the same league as the likes of Wigan Pier (it was, after all, as much a facility for the local community, as it was a visitor attraction), the museum did suggest that the powers that be were, at last, recognising Rhyl’s ‘heritage potential’, one of the few potent, albeit ironic, strategies available to those seaside resorts wishing to secure a future as a tourist destination (see Urry, 1990: p.103; who encourages developers and promoters not to resist the trend towards nostalgia). That said, plans for a much bigger ‘Seaside Museum’ at the Foryd Harbour (containing replica bathing machines, Punch and Judy shows, a Victorian/Edwardian themed restaurant, and actors dressed in period costumes) ultimately came to nothing, and those few commemorative gestures that followed were small-scale in comparison (e.g. the £10,000 facelift given to the carousel at the Ocean Beach Funfair, to celebrate its Seventy-fifth Anniversary in 1986). Furthermore, the imagery in the municipal brochures of the day made few concessions to history and, when it did, it was often a case of contrasting ‘modern’ Rhyl with its ‘ancient’ hinterland, instead of capitalising on the resort’s own heritage (some of which spanned the better part of two centuries).
Globalisation is a term that refers to the economic, political and cultural interdependency of otherwise distinct nation-states, and the localities therein. It is an inherently modern concept, yet its outcomes – ‘time-space compression’ and the creation of ‘non places’ – are more readily thought of as markers of the postmodern, at least in their contemporary chronic form (e.g. recent developments such as email have rendered the ‘friction of distance’ obsolete – Gillespie and Williams, 1988). Robertson (1992) identifies four features of globalisation, namely: (i) ‘legal conventions’ (e.g. the growth of international agreements relating to world trade, civil rights and the environment); (ii) ‘communications’ (including global media such as film, pop music, television and, more recently, the Internet, plus increasingly expeditious and efficient transport networks); (iii) ‘knowledge’ (or, more specifically, the internationalisation of knowledge), and; (iv) ‘economic interdependence’ (i.e. the diffusion of corporate interests and power throughout the world). The purists argue that, through a process of ‘disembedding’ (the “lifting out of social relations developed in one locale and their re-embedding in another” – Barker, 2000: p.111), globalisation annihilates the local (e.g. the Americanisation of leisure and retail space in the UK, as epitomised by Alton Towers and the Brent Cross Shopping Centre), so that one experiences the same set of aesthetic and spatial references regardless of where one is in the world (Rojek, 1995: p.146). A complementary perspective on globalisation comes from Ritzer (1996) who – building upon Relph’s (1976) work on the standardisation of tastes and fashions by designers and opinion-formers external to a given locality – suggests that the world is becoming increasingly ‘McDonaldised’ (i.e. like the well-known fast-food chain that prompted this metaphor, ever more “efficient, calculable, predictable and dominated by controlling non-human technologies” – Ritzer and
Liska, 1997: p.97). Although it is difficult to dispute the processes of Globalisation and McDonaldisation, it must be said that localities tend to resist their homogenising effects, hence it is better to think of a dialectic between the local and the global (which Robertson, 1992, terms 'glocalization') whereby the identity of a given place is eroded but not eliminated (localisation is, after all, the means by which situated geographical locales compete for a share of flexible, or mobile, capital).

In the modern era, seaside resorts were thought to be extraordinary places, at least compared to the 'monotonous' towns and cities in which their visitors lived and worked (see Section 5.2.2). However, globalisation has seen the self-same towns and cities become venues, not for the production of goods, but for the consumption of services and information, with the concomitant loss of the onerous by-products of industrialisation (principally pollution). Accordingly, these have become 'nice' places to visit, as well as to live and work in, thereby lessening the need to escape to the seaside or, for that matter, any other tourist destination. The seaside's mass appeal has been further compromised by the imposition of a new set of global signifiers on resorts that, away from the seafront, makes them virtually indistinguishable from any other urban area. Nowhere is this more apparent than in their central business districts, which have lost much of their unique character, thanks to pedestrianisation schemes (which are, by their very nature, homogenous, utilising similar paving surfaces, street furniture and design principles), the construction of shopping arcades and malls, the expansion of major retail and catering chains with their corporate identities and uniform shop frontages (e.g. Marks and Spencer and Woolworth's), and the escalation of land values to the point where smaller (and arguably more characterful) retailers are forced out of the main trading area or, worse still, into liquidation.
In Rhyl itself, many such developments occurred during the early 1980s, with the closure of High Street to traffic in 1981 (which was subsequently pedestrianised), the opening of the White Rose and Plaza Shopping Centres in 1986, and the attraction of several well-known retailers and caterers in the wake of the good publicity generated for the resort by the Sun Centre (see Section 7.2.1). The ensuing placelessness of the town's central business district is conveyed by Plates 7.3.1 and 7.3.2, each of which presents a similar scene to that found at almost any outdoor or indoor shopping precinct in Britain (not to mention 'small-town' America and Australia).

7.3 Reconstructing the role of the local state as provider and promoter of services to tourists in late 1970's and 1980's Rhyl

The passing of the municipal 'baton' from Rhyl Urban District Council to Rhuddlan Borough Council, in April 1974, marked the beginning of a more proactive (as opposed to reactive) approach to the development and promotion of tourism in Rhyl, on the part of the local state. This was no mean feat, given that the lowest tier of government with any 'real' power to effect change within the resort was now responsible for a primarily rural area (at least in terms of acreage, if not population), whose interests lay chiefly with agriculture rather than attracting 'outsiders' (there was, of course, no tradition of farm diversification, back in the mid 1970s). Having said that, there were occasions on which Rhyl had to vie with other settlements in the Borough of Rhuddlan for public sector intervention and investment, even in respect of tourism (which was no longer felt to be an exclusively coastal phenomenon). Furthermore, with a mere five permanent committees ('Finance and Management', 'Planning and Development', 'Environment', 'General Purposes' and 'Amenities and Recreation' –
Plate 7.3: Globalisation at work in Rhyl – (1) the interior of the White Rose Shopping Centre and (2) High Street, circa 1988 (Rhuddlan Borough Council)

*RBC(M)*~1(21)~4, in comparison with RUDC’s ten (as of 1951), there were fewer vehicles within RBC for the consideration of tourism concerns, although one might equally argue that this accelerated the process of drafting and implementing policy, thus allowing the council to maintain the more proactive stance mentioned above (and discussed below).
7.3.1 Ways and means

One of the most striking aspects of RBC's administration, during this epoch, is the extent to which – having inherited the same funding constraints that bedevilled RUDC throughout the 1950s and 1960s – they managed to reinvigorate the Rhyl 'product' with new and 'reconditioned' amenities, in spite of ever-stricter measures, on the part of central government, to curb local authority expenditure on all but the most 'essential' items (F&MC~13(86-8)~149). At risk of oversimplification, the key to the council's success lay with, on the one hand, their initiative in unlocking hitherto unexplored sources of capital and, on the other, the manner in which they sought to 'make do and mend' with regards to Rhyl's ageing, and increasingly shabby, stock of visitor attractions.

The funding arrangements underpinning the development of the Sun Centre, which was opened on the East Promenade in 1980, serve to illustrate RBC's inventiveness in the face of overwhelming odds. Having received the sum of £120,000, upon reorganisation, from RUDC's rate fund balances, and the request that it be spent on a replacement for the erstwhile Pavilion Theatre, RBC quickly realised that the high capital cost of such a building, coupled with the slim chances of it making a profit, would preclude any investment from sources other than its own which, in any case, were insufficient to fund such a venture (F&MC~15(625-30)~1207). In seeking inspiration for a more profitable undertaking, the council embarked on a tour of entertainment facilities in other resorts and, impressed by the success of a recently opened indoor leisure pool at Whitley Bay, they invited the same firm of architects to prepare a similar scheme for Rhyl (with provision for a 1,064-seat theatre that could 'double up' as a conference hall) (A&RC(S)~2(213)~4). It was reasoned that the trading surplus produced by the 'Sun Centre' (as it quickly became known) would offset part, or
indeed all, of the theatre’s trading deficit, an argument that was pivotal in securing agreement with an unspecified merchant bank (on a ‘lease and leaseback’ basis) for the necessary capital. However, although external funding of this nature was quite ‘legal and proper’, and not without precedent, the Department of the Environment advised the financial institution in question that such an arrangement – in circumventing the ‘unwritten rule’ upholding restraint on local authority capital expenditure – was not acceptable to central government, thus putting paid to its interest (F&MC-3(257/8)-534). Faced with abandoning the £3 million project, and incurring costs in the order of £450,000 for contracts already agreed, the council responded by postponing the theatre part of the scheme (priced at £1.75 million), and diverting the capital that accrued from a precept on the rates – initially set at 1½ pence in the pound and imposed for the purposes of meeting the ‘lease/leaseback’ facility mentioned above – into a special fund that was periodically reduced by payments to the main contractor (whose tender of £2,916,270, minus £887,391 for the aborted theatre, was accepted in December 1975) (F&MC-3(323-5)-664). In the event, construction work on the Sun Centre – which was scheduled for completion by May 1977 – was not finished until June 1980, thanks to industrial action, a number of subcontractors going into liquidation and the need to repair defective workmanship. This did, however, give the Borough Treasurer time to explore other sources of funding, namely: (i) a European Regional Development Fund grant of £558,300; (ii) interest (totalling £873,318) earned by investing monies set aside for meeting the contractor’s payments, during the eight-month strike, and; (iii) loans amounting to £2 million, which were raised at various stages of the development (Lake, 1985). Despite being the smallest of the three, the ERDF grant (which represented 30 per cent of the total cost of the Sun Centre, this being the maximum allocation available at that time) was arguably the most significant, for it was the first to be awarded to a tourism project – previous aid having been directed towards manufacturing industry and infrastructure works (GPC(RBC)-6(74)-154).
Indeed, this entailed much persuasion on the part of RBC, which won the day by convincing the EEC that tourism, although perceived to be a ‘flippant’ and ‘frivolous’ activity, was Rhyl’s staple ‘industry’ (accounting for 22 per cent of its rateable value, compared to the 2½ per cent attributable to manufacturing), and that the Sun Centre, in addition to producing some 200 direct jobs, would create demand for additional bedspaces in the town, thus offsetting the contraction of its serviced accommodation base (an argument that was used, to good effect, in subsequent applications for grant aid, from Rhyl and other resorts).

The innovation shown by RBC in securing the necessary finance for the construction of the Sun Centre extended to other attractions, too. For example, the 1986-built Rhyl Library, Museum and Arts Centre owed its existence to an agreement between RBC and Clwyd County Council, whereby the former contributed a ‘once and for all’ payment of £60,000 towards the complex, and the latter met the remaining capital and trading costs (GPC(RBC)-10(260)-445). By designating the centre an ‘educational facility’, the funding partners received Welsh Office approval for the scheme, and RBC obtained an attraction that appealed to the up and coming ‘heritage and hikes’ market (a lucrative segment in terms of expenditure, if not of nights), without having to commit itself to the long-term financing of a loss-making service to the local community.

If RBC learnt one valuable lesson from the Sun Centre experience, it was surely that, in committing its resources to a single major capital project, little else could be achieved until such time as any debts outstanding on the scheme had been discharged. Indeed, the council was unable to consider a rolling Capital Programme for the Borough until the financial year 1983/84, the earliest opportunity after all of the urgent works deferred during the period 1975 to 1981 (coinciding with the construction and commissioning of the Sun Centre) had been
completed \((F&MC-L1(257-62)-449)\). That said, even during these ‘lean’ years, many minor capital projects were undertaken, often through the prudent redevelopment and repackaging of existing amenities such as the Open Air Swimming Pool and the Promenade Skating Rink. The former, which succumbed to closure in 1975, was to be redeveloped – in four phases – into an aquarium, with displays of British marine and freshwater species, a ‘shark pen’ and a trout farm \((T&AC(S)-8(234)-386)\). Ultimately, only the fourth phase (dubbed ‘Rhyl Fishing Village’) was implemented, at the ‘bargain’ price of £43,500 (including the repairs that brought about the pool’s closure in the first instance) – just in time for the 1981 summer season \((T&AC(S)-8(403)-647)\). The latter, another attraction of a bygone age, was rebuilt as a skateboard park, some three years earlier, at a similarly ‘modest’ cost of £60,000 \((A&RC-5(262)-497; A&RC-5(397/8)-754)\). In this case, however, skateboarding proved to be more of a ‘fad’ than a ‘fashion’, and the facility reverted to its former use (after RBC briefly flirted with the idea of converting ‘Skateworld’ into a ‘mini-motorbike circuit’) in 1983 \((T&AC-11(131)-249)\).

Incidentally, the council’s prudent approach to managing the Rhyl ‘product’ extended beyond the (re)construction of visitor attractions. For instance, in 1978/79, it purchased several illuminated set pieces from Blackpool Corporation, with a view to addressing a three year hiatus in the provision of seasonal illuminations on sections of the promenade \((T&AC-6(212)-375)\). On another occasion, in 1984/85, it reclassified the Marine Lake and its environs as a ‘park and open space’, thus allowing the District Valuation Officer to remove the rating assessment on the area \((T&AC(S)-12(404/5)-721)\). Although this resulted in the exclusion of those amenities that were inconsistent with the Marine Lake’s new status, it meant that the operation as a whole stood a better chance of breaking even, if not making a small profit, something that it had not achieved since the termination of the lease held by
Predictably, given the scale of its commitment to the Sun Centre project, when the council settled on a five-year programme of capital investments within the Borough, in 1984/85, only one project of note was located in Rhyl (the demolition of the Sports Café and reconstruction of the adjacent Crown Green Bowling Centre – to include a new pavilion, restaurant and terraced spectator area) (F&MC-12(526-8)-927). Scheduled for 1987/88, this was brought forward a year when the Sports Café became the latest in a long line of amenities in Rhyl to be destroyed by fire (RBC(M)-14(180-2)-361), thus bringing to a close an epoch in which the resort benefited from an injection of public money on a scale not seen since the 1930s. This was just as well, for little investment was forthcoming from the private sector, with only three relevant initiatives of note being recorded in the minutes of those council meetings held between 1974 and 1988, namely: (i) the reinstatement of the Rhyl Miniature Railway at the Marine Lake, in 1978 (A&RC-5(261/2)-496; T&AC-6(212)-375); (ii) the construction, in 1980, of a promenade monorail (running from the Pavilion Car Park to a point just east of the Gaiety Theatre) which was removed a mere two years later upon the owners going into receivership (T&AC(S)-6(519/20)-901; T&AC(S)-9(479)-775), and; (iii) the combination, in 1985, of the aforementioned Fishing Village and adjacent Royal Floral Hall, into one attraction christened ‘Rhyl Ocean World and Butterfly Jungle’ (T&AC-12(261/2)-449; T&AC-12(705)-1210). On an associated point, it is interesting to note that each of these
developments were undertaken by individual entrepreneurs (one under the guise of a private limited company), thus reflecting the prevalence of the small business culture at the seaside (see Shaw and Williams, 1997b).

7.3.2 Retail therapy

With an unemployment rate of 17.6 per cent, in November 1975, rising to 22.3 per cent in January 1985 (compared with a national average of 13.7 per cent), Rhyl was clearly struggling to shake off its reliance upon tourism throughout this epoch (A&RC~3(276)~558; GPC(RBC)(S)~10(605)~1020). As early as 1975, a memorandum to the council from the Rhyl branch of ‘Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg’ (the ‘Welsh Language Society’), warned of “the problems arising from the present over dependence on tourism...[and]...the shortcomings of the present situation economically, socially and culturally” (A&RC~3(275)~557) — evidence that Rhyl, like most other seaside resorts, possessed a powerful and, at times, antagonistic (that is, with regards to tourism) residential lobby (a theme pursued by Morgan and Pritchard, 1999, in the context of the Devon resorts, and Sidmouth in particular).

Having largely failed in its attempts to attract light industry to Rhyl (or rather its immediate environs), RBC focussed its energies upon courting the high street retailer, with promises of new and refurbished shop units and a town centre free of traffic and litter. Accordingly, it pursued, over several years, a joint scheme for a shopping centre and a multi-storey car park on land bounded by High Street, East Parade, Church Street and Russell Road, starting with a Compulsory Purchase Order in December 1974 (in tandem with a property development company) (P&DC~2(283)~545). Evidently, little progress had been made by February 1977,
when the council commented on the difficulty of comprehensively redeveloping land that was neither in its ownership, nor that of a private partner, in the preamble to a resolution approving the anticipated involvement of the Land Authority for Wales in helping secure the site (F&MC~4(464)~941). This clearly had the desired effect, for a planning application was submitted later that year (P&DC~5(314)~606), although further delays ensued when the Manchester-based development company behind the project pulled out, resulting in the plans being scaled-down (GPC(RBC)~9(625/6)~1004). Finally, nearly ten years after it was first proposed, the White Rose Shopping Centre opened for business and, like the Sun Centre before it, was quickly appropriated as a marker of the ‘new’ Rhyl (thus becoming one of the many ‘non-attractions’ to be promoted in the resort’s municipal brochure – see Section 7.4.1).

Unfortunately, the opening of the White Rose Shopping Centre coincided with the worst recession in Britain for over a decade and, rather than encouraging fresh investment in Rhyl, the mall simply welcomed retailers that had relocated from elsewhere in the town. Indeed, the number of vacant shops in the town centre rose from eleven in April 1983, to thirty in November 1985, resulting in the nucleus of the resort’s retail district gravitating towards the northern half of High Street. The conversion of the former Plaza Cinema, opposite the White Rose Shopping Centre, into an indoor market, just two years later, did little to offset this unwelcome tendency and further undermined the viability of speculative retail development schemes such as that earmarked for the Town Hall. The brief for this most dilapidated of buildings (which had become a headache for the council ever since it was granted Grade II listed status, thereby preventing its demolition – see Section 7.2.2) envisaged the repair and refurbishment of the stone structure, at the expense of the developer, and the redevelopment of the ground and upper floors for commercial and office use, respectively, in return for a ninety-nine year lease at a ‘peppercorn’ rent (GPC(RBC)~13(359-62)~624). However, the
early 1980’s recession, coupled with an abundance of inexpensive retail units and offices to let in the town, rendered the scheme a ‘non-starter’. Even after the economy had picked up, the continued reluctance of developers to construct purpose-built shops without pre-letting them to tenants, meant that the Town Hall remain empty, at least until it was renovated at the expense of RBC, as part of its capital programme for the period 1989 to 1994 (which also saw the pedestrianisation of High Street) (F&MC~16(800-3)~1489).

7.3.3 Destination marketing and damage limitation

The narrow approach to advertising and publicity previously adopted by RUDC (namely its reliance upon the annual municipal brochure and newspaper advertisements, targeted at the traditional ‘blue-collar’ markets of Lancashire and the West Midlands), was progressively widened throughout this epoch, with a greater emphasis upon marketing per se. Correspondingly, RBC’s priorities, over the period 1974 to 1988, centred upon the exploitation of previously untapped market segments and the lengthening of the season, in an attempt to compensate for the damage sustained by Rhyl’s long-holiday trade in light of the counter attraction of overseas destinations. Initiatives designed to realise these objectives included: (i) the promotion of the resort to the Irish market, via joint arrangements with Sealink (operators of the Dun Laoghaire to Holyhead ferry service) for a stand at the annual Dublin Show, the provision of hospitality to Irish travel agents visiting the Borough, and the packaging of ferry and coach travel, accommodation and admission to council-run attractions into one inclusive product (A&RC~5(29)~37; T&AC~12(491)~868); (ii) a scheme to encourage short breaks (i.e. of one to three nights duration) during the ‘shoulder’ months (i.e. May and September), in conjunction with the Rhyl Hotel and Guest House Association (T&AC~6(212)~376), and; (iii) the inclusion of a contingency reserve, within the 1977/78
press advertising campaign, for research into strategies designed to increase the volume and value of tourism to Rhyl (A&RC-5(261)-495). These measures enjoyed the support of the resort’s business community, yet the same could not be said of the Amenities and Recreation Committee’s insistence upon promoting the Borough of Rhuddlan as a single visitor destination (A&RC-2(365)-N/A) – a brand which meant little, if anything, to the people who traditionally visited Rhyl and Prestatyn (see Section 7.4.3). Moreover, it could be accused of hypocrisy for subsequently objecting to the county council’s decision to spend money on a promotional campaign for the whole of Clwyd, and not its constituent parts (T&RC-10(488)-802).

Taking into account the amount of money spent on its construction, it is not surprising that the Sun Centre became the ‘signature’ attraction for Rhyl (not to mention Prestatyn and the Borough of Rhuddlan as a whole), throughout the latter half of this epoch (a function previously taken up by the late Pavilion Theatre). Its perceived importance in projecting an image of the resort as a popular destination for family holidays was such that the council spent some £15,000, in 1979/80 alone, on raising awareness of the soon-to-be-opened attraction through radio and television advertising, posters, leaflets, press/trade kits and hospitality, thus exceeding the entire press advertising budget for 1977/78 by some £2,000! Remarkably, this figure was doubled for the financial year 1980/81, to further accommodate the publication of a colour brochure, a supermarket carrier-bag promotion and the painting of two buses operating in the Merseyside and Greater Manchester areas into an appropriate livery (A&RC-5(261)-495; T&AC(S)-7(569-71)-990). This clearly had the desired effect for, apart from encouraging 314,420 and 538,900 people to visit the Sun Centre in its first and second seasons (a number of whom would have stayed in the resort for that very purpose), it was the catalyst for a brief resumption of the ‘special relationship’ between Rhyl and British
Rail, in respect of deal (initiated by the latter, no less) comprising a programme of excursions to the resort and a poster campaign promoting the attraction on some four-hundred-and-fifty 'prime' sites across England and Wales (T&AC-9(53)-102).

In the wake of a mid-1980's slump in the circulation of the annual municipal brochure (coinciding, perhaps, with the diminishing 'novelty value' of the Sun Centre) (T&AC-12(324/5)-583), the council formed a marketing consortium in conjunction with the Wales Tourist Board and First Leisure (owners of the Ocean Beach Funfair), with a view to increasing the number of staying visitors and day-trippers to Rhyl and Prestatyn (the first time the latter were acknowledged as a 'good thing', in the committee minutes of RBC). The first task of the consortium, in 1984/85, was to produce a four page 'A4' leaflet advertising the principal attractions of the two resorts, a rather modest initiative that reflected the limited financial support available from the three partners (T&RC-12(666)-1129). Nevertheless, by 1985/86, membership of the consortium had increased, with the addition of Haven Leisure, Pontins, Clwyd County Council and several accommodation and attraction proprietors (all of whom were required, like the three founder members, to finance the consortium's various initiatives, through an annual contribution proportionate to the size/standing of the business or institution in question), thus affording it the opportunity of implementing a more ambitious campaign, consisting of advertising on regional television and in affiliated publications (e.g. the 'TV Times') (T&AC-13(53/4)-95). Furthermore, by holding some press advertising expenditure over until March and April, the consortium succeeded in shifting all 40,000 copies of the 1987 municipal brochure (compared to 23,784 in 1983/84 and 26,769 in 1982/83) and capturing some 'late' bookings – a hitherto untested strategy. In spite of the consortium's accomplishments, however, the excessive competition for long holidays meant that it was increasingly difficult for individual resorts to maintain recognition and visibility in
the marketplace, and so a joint campaign was arranged with the neighbouring authorities of Aberconwy and Colwyn, to promote Llandudno, Colwyn Bay, Rhyl and Prestatyn under the banner of the 'Premier Resorts of North Wales', in national daily and Sunday newspapers during December, January and February of 1987/88 (T&AC~15(434)~835; T&AC~15(611)~1177) — a reportedly successful undertaking that was repeated on an annual basis, over the next few years, thus putting the four resorts on an equal footing with those UK destinations that enjoyed a comparatively large marketing budget (e.g. the English Riviera).

It is fitting to conclude this section with a brief account of RBC’s relationship with another member of the above-mentioned consortium, namely the Wales Tourist Board, for this had a significant bearing upon the marketing of Rhyl during this epoch. Evidently, the WTB were quick in responding to the fall-off in visitor nights at the seaside, from the late 1970s onwards, if their involvement (for the first time) in joint promotions with individual resorts, and the funding of a £150,000 national television campaign for the Welsh seaside, are anything to go by, both of these measures being implemented in the financial year 1977/78 (A&RC~5(261)~494). Welcome though these were, the relationship between the nation’s tourist board and the only Welsh seaside resort of national repute (allegedly) was not always a harmonious one, as suggested by RBC’s eagerness to pin the blame for a downturn in requests for the annual municipal brochure upon the ‘poor display’ offered by the WTB’s 1984/85 advertising campaign (T&AC~12(324/5)~583). That said, it rarely resisted an initiative of the WTB, however inconvenient it might have been, as was the case with the Board’s ‘voluntary’ system for the verification and classification of tourist accommodation (T&AC~12(410)~727). In an attempt to encourage proprietors to submit to the procedure, the WTB ruled that it would only be prepared to distribute local authority guides limited to premises that were either verified or awaiting verification, a measure that would most likely reduce the
circulation and/or the advertising revenues of RBC’s ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ brochure, given that only twenty-five of the establishments therein had been inspected in 1985/86, rising to forty in 1986/87. Nonetheless, the council, recognising the need to raise standards in the Borough, gave its backing to the WTB’s stance, and fought hard to persuade accommodation providers (many of whom were unwilling to participate in the scheme) to seek verification at the earliest opportunity (T&AC~13(330/1)~583). Thereafter, the accommodation section of the annual municipal brochure was drastically slimmed down, evidence that RBC continued to ‘tow the party line’ with regards to this issue.

7.4 The official guide to ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ (1974 to 1988) -- promoting a shrinking product

When Rhuddlan Borough Council assumed responsibility for promoting Rhyl as a holiday destination in April 1974, it faced an immediate and pressing dilemma. After more than a decade in which many of the resort’s material attractions were closed and demolished, what was there left for inclusion in the municipal brochure? The answer was ‘very little’ (save for the beach, the Foryd Harbour, the Gaiety and Coliseum Theatres and the Royal Floral Hall), and so the council embarked upon a more imaginative portrayal of that which remained, which placed emphasis upon the Rhyl ‘experience’, and those who participated in it, rather than the setting in which its constituent activities took place (Section 7.4.1). This approach even withstood the opening of the Sun Centre, at the very mid-point of this epoch, and subsequent attractions such as the Rhyl Fishing Village and White Rose Shopping Centre, which were promoted in terms of the social encounters that occurred therein, as opposed to their physical dimensions or external appearance. In addition, Rhyl was increasingly sold via the benefits to be derived from visiting, instead of its intrinsic properties, particularly in
respect of the none-too-subtle promise of sexual adventure and fulfilment (Section 7.4.2), a tactic that was also used, to good effect, by the popular package holiday destinations of the Spanish Mediterranean Coast and, more recently, resorts such as San Antonio in Ibiza and Ayia Napa in Cyprus. Finally, with fewer attractions in the town itself, and a brief to promote the Borough as a whole, RBC took the opportunity to sell the resort as an ideal touring centre for rural North Wales, accompanied by Celtic imagery and brief guides to the Welsh language (Section 7.4.3).

7.4.1 Portraits, not landscapes

In theory, the photographs contained within tourist brochures may take any shape although, for expediency's sake, most follow the rectangular form of their negatives (Boyer and Viallon, 1994: p.118). Those that do can be further subdivided into two types, namely "the Italian style photograph (with a longer horizontal side) and the French style photograph (with a longer vertical side" (Dann, 1996a: p.193). The former is usually favoured for portraits, the latter for landscapes and so, barring the odd exception to this rule (and, of course, photographs that have been modified so as to conform to some other configuration, such as the square or oval), the dominance of one over the other, in any given tourist brochure, says much about the content.

Given the above, it is not insignificant that an increasing number of photographs in the municipal brochures of the late 1970s and early 1980s were of the portrait, rather than landscape, variety, for it confirms that the emphasis, during this epoch, switched from the physical environment to the human subject. Indeed, this was one of the few options open to the brochure's editors, after an uncomfortable period in the mid 1970s when, restricted to a set
of photographs featuring recently departed attractions such as the Pavilion Theatre, they had little choice but to edit out the unwanted structures through pernicious cropping and some crude (by today’s standards, at least) connotation procedures. Naturally, this was highly unsatisfactory, hence the council commissioned some new photographs of the resort, a number of which contained those attractions that had survived the previous administration’s axe. However, the remainder and, it seems, the majority were of the tourists themselves, whether alone or within a small group of friends, relatives or fellow holidaymakers.

Representations of tourists as individuals, rather than as part of a crowd, correspond to the well-used technique of ‘ego-targeting’ (see Section 6.4.2). Generally speaking, subjects are chosen that match the ‘ideal’ visitor, with the aim of invoking a ‘me too’ response (i.e. ‘if it’s good enough for them, it’s good enough for me’). Furthermore, given that the discourse of place promotion is inherently tautological (see Section 6.4.1), the choice of subject(s) within tourist brochures has a great bearing upon who actually visits the featured destination(s). Likewise, the activities that they are seen to engage in, tend to be perpetuated in the behaviour of those tourists who have chosen to visit on the strength of such imagery. In this context, it is not difficult to understand why the carefully posed photographs of tourists that graced the ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ holiday guides of this epoch, tended to omit certain categories of people (e.g. obese, elderly, physically or mentally handicapped, non-Caucasian, and so on – see Uzzell, 1984), and particular activities (e.g. drinking alcohol in public or riding a motorcycle along the promenade, neither of which were exceptionally unusual sights in Rhyl). Instead, the reader was treated to a procession of the ‘usual suspects’, namely the ‘innocent child’, the ‘bathing beauty’, the ‘amateur sports(wo)man’ and, in the case of group shots, the ‘happy family’ – all with the obligatory suntan. Such stereotyping was also extended to the
occasional host-guest encounter, which invariably featured the likes of the entertainer, the lifeguard and the hospitable local resident.

Regardless of the featured subject(s), these shots generally revealed little of the surrounding environment, either because it was: (i) deliberately out-of-focus; (ii) substituted for a neutral (usually white) background, or; (iii) omitted from the frame, altogether. When they did, it was rare to see a recognisable attraction (within Rhyl, at least), with several external scenes containing rather ubiquitous markers such as inter-war, semi-detached housing and anonymous shop frontages (the feeling of ‘placelessness’ that this engendered was symptomatic of globalisation, and very much a feature of those municipal brochures published during the next epoch, as discussed in Sections 7.2.3 and 8.4.2, respectively). Admittedly, landscapes peculiar to Rhyl appeared with greater frequency in later editions although, even here, numerous devices were employed to mask the ‘gaps’ in the Rhyl ‘product’ (e.g. the use of a telephoto lens to capture the entire range of amenities along the promenade so that, in the resultant image, they seemed much closer together than was actually the case). In the event, only a handful of recognisable attractions were pictured in close-up, almost all of which were either: (i) built for a purpose other than attracting tourists (e.g. the White Rose Shopping Centre, St. Thomas’s Church), but deemed to be of interest, nonetheless, or; (ii) fresh additions to the resort’s ‘product mix’ (e.g. the recently constructed Sun Centre and the not-so-new Open Air Swimming Pool, that is, after its conversion to Rhyl Fishing Village). Ironically, an excessive proportion of the written and visual content of the municipal brochure was given over to these attractions – especially in the case of the Sun Centre, which dominated its front cover and inside pages throughout the 1980s (see Plate 7.4) – thus betraying the lack of ‘new’ amenities, elsewhere in the resort.

248
Plate 7.4: Front cover of the (1) 1983 and (2) 1988 'Rhyl and Prestatyn' Holiday Guide (Rhuddlan Borough Council)
7.4.2 Sex sells

During the previous epoch, successive editions of the municipal brochure progressively downplayed the health motive for visiting Rhyl (as well as other tenets associated with ‘Rational Recreation’ – see Section 5.2.4). Correspondingly, the imagery, rather like the (mass) tourist practices of the late 1960s and beyond, became increasingly hedonistic, with ‘pleasure’ (a definition of which was provided in Section 5.2.2) promoted for its own sake and not as a means of enlightenment. Having said that, the municipal brochure tended to offer a rather conservative account of Rhyl as a holiday destination, and so its various incarnations in the 1960s and early 1970s failed to fully convey the sense of revolt, immediate gratification and sexual licence that one associates with hedonism. By the mid 1970s, however, it had caught up with the prevailing holiday ‘mood’, and signalled its intention to promote Rhyl as a rival to the ‘sun, sand, sea and sex’ resorts of the Mediterranean, by titillating its male, heterosexual readers with images of young, bikini-clad women at play, sexually loaded (though not explicit) copy and several references to the resort’s night life (including ‘swinging discos’ and ‘late night adult movies’).

A comparison of the front covers of the 1973 and 1978 municipal brochures (Plate 7.5), lends some perspective to the above claim. In the former, the first-placed entrant in the 1972 ‘Miss Sunny Rhyl’ Bathing Beauty Competition is seen with her prize, atop a winner’s rostrum in front of the Open Air Swimming Pool – a scene that, through a process of indexical transference, connotes the idea that Rhyl, too, is held in higher regard than its competitors. This is, of course, ‘a sign within a sign’, for the competition itself (and others like it) was considered, at the time, to be a permissible and tasteful exhibition of the female form, albeit unencumbered by ‘practical’ clothing (note that the setting justifies the one-piece swimsuit).
Plate 7.5: Front cover of the (1) 1973 'Sunny Rhyl' and (2) 1978 'Rhyl and Prestatyn' Holiday Guide (Rhyl Urban District Council; Rhuddlan Borough Council)
The latter, however, could not be more different, even though its subject matter is not
dissimilar. Here, we are presented with *two* young women (a male fantasy, perhaps), with
more revealing swimwear but no winner’s sash or trophy to ‘legitimate’ this manifestation of
bare flesh. In addition, the subjects (accompanying by suntans and a beach ball to denote the
act of play) appear to be advancing out of the sea and, one might surmise, into the arms of the
reader, in what is yet *another* example of ‘ego-targeting’. It seems that, five years on, those
charged with producing the municipal brochure no longer needed an ‘excuse’ (i.e. the ‘Miss
Sunny Rhyl’ Bathing Beauty Competition) for selling Rhyl via its more ‘attractive’ female
visitors, although this increasingly debatable, not to mention unoriginal, practice was dropped
in the early 1980s (as was the competition itself). This was just as well for, as Dann (1996a:
p.197) notes, “destinations which have to resort to the use of scantily clad women in order to
promote themselves are in reality admitting an identity and image problem” (see also Boyer
and Viallon, 1994).

Such images were not the sole preserve of the municipal brochure’s front cover, for each
editorial published during the 1970s contained a section dedicated to the aforementioned
beauty contest, populated by photographs of the ‘attractive’ female holidaymaker. To allow
for the possibility that the images, in isolation, were insufficient to convey the desired
message, the written copy that accompanied them left little to the imagination (although it did
stop short of describing the resort, itself, using overtly sexual language, a technique used at
the time to advertise more ‘exotic’ destinations such as Trinidad and Tobago – Dann, 1996a:
p.128), for example:

*Wednesday afternoons are a must with the holiday dads and boyfriends, for it is
then, at the Open Air Bathing Pool that the weekly heats of the Miss Sunny Rhyl
competitions are held, with some of the loveliest young ladies parading to catch the judge’s eye...*

(RBC, 1974: p.16)
No holiday resort seems complete without its traditional Bathing Beauty Contest. You'll have the chance to see a bevy of beautiful blondes and brunettes competing for the coveted titles of 'Miss Sunny Rhyl' and 'Miss Prestatyn'.

(RBC, 1977: p.6)

It was rare to find such sentiments expressed in the municipal brochures of the post-1970s era, perhaps because the 'Carry On' culture described in Section 6.2 had run its course. One might also speculate that, for the first time in many a decade, Rhyl witnessed a net increase in its stock of attractions, thereby providing fresh ammunition for the brochure's editors and, in turn, allowing them to lay the tired old clichés to rest – permanently (see Section 8.4.4).

7.4.3 “We’ll keep a welcome in the hillsides...”

Thus pledged the introduction to the 1976 ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ holiday guide, the first in a series of twenty one municipal brochures to feature the attractions of the Borough of Rhuddlan as a whole, and not just its principal settlement. With a scene of Rhuddlan Castle on the front cover, and several images of rural North Wales pictured throughout, this brochure marked a real turning point in the history of promoting Rhyl as a tourist destination, and demonstrated that RBC, like several other ‘second-tier’ authorities created as a result of the April 1974 reorganisation of local government in England and Wales, was chiefly concerned with marketing its own municipal identity, rather than its constituent resort products (see Morgan and Pritchard, 1999: p.134; on the promotion of Torbay). Undeniably, Rhyl continued to command ‘centre-stage’ in those brochures published after 1974. After all, it was a bigger draw than Prestatyn and the smaller towns and villages of the Borough put together. However, to extend the ‘theatre’ analogy a little further, the stage in question had become rather crowded and, consequently, the lead role occasionally struggled to be heard above the supporting cast, as evidenced by the following extract:
Welcome to Sunny Rhyl and Prestatyn, in the new holiday area of Rhuddlan – six miles of golden coastline surrounded by a hinterland of verdant countryside. An area rich in sunshine hours where the warmth of the temperature is equalled only by the warmth of the welcome extended to you by its people.

(RBC, 1975: p.1)

This was the last occasion on which Rhyl was prefixed by the word ‘Sunny’ – the ‘final bow’ for a brand-name that might not have seemed wholly appropriate (at least in terms of the weather, if not the welcome), but one that was certainly well-recognised in the marketplace for domestic long holidays. The changes did not stop there, either, for an alternative world of castles, cathedrals, waterfalls, country walks, stately homes, agricultural shows, village festivals and ‘Ploughman’s’ lunches, suddenly emerged to challenge or, rather, to complement the attractions of Sunny Rhyl [sic], which was repositioned as the ‘obvious’ place to stay for those wishing to tour North Wales by car. Furthermore, whereas Rhyl was unashamedly English in its orientation, the Borough of Rhuddlan was a uniquely Welsh phenomenon – a land of unrivalled scenery populated by people that spoke a different language. Not surprisingly, the council attempted to make capital out of the ‘mysterious’ and ‘undiscovered’ properties of the Borough, in respect of their mission to attract holidaymakers to the comparatively down-to-earth surroundings of Rhyl and Prestatyn. Subsequently, each edition of the municipal brochure contained a page-long welcome in Welsh only, and a short (and, for all practical purposes, futile) English-Welsh vocabulary (comprised of standard phrases, such as ‘Bore da’, ‘Sut ydych chwi?’ and ‘Gwyliau hapus’, translated as ‘Good morning’, ‘How are you?’ and ‘Happy holiday’).

Towards the end of this epoch, emblems associated with Wales (e.g. the ‘Red Dragon’, the daffodil), and images unique to the nation (e.g. photographs of schoolchildren in traditional Welsh dress) made a reappearance, having not been seen in the municipal brochure since the 1950s (see Section 5.4.5). These continued to feature in the brochures of the next epoch,
which also resurrected the ‘Vale of Clwyd’ brand-name first used in the 1930s (see Plates 3.3 and 5.4) – a sensible strategy (and one that complemented the Wales Tourist Board’s various advertising campaigns for the Principality) given the growing interest in rural tourism. There was, however, some tension surrounding the promotion of Rhyl (and Prestatyn) using ‘green’, over and above ‘blue’, imagery (see Section 8.3.2) as, indeed, there had been when the first of the Borough’s holiday guides were published.
8 Results and Discussion of Fourth Epoch: "Costa Del Dole" (1988 – 1996)

8.1 Introduction

This chapter, in a similar fashion to the three that preceded it, grounds the material and symbolic transformation of Rhyl within the cultural and (local) political 'climate' of the period 1988 to (March) 1996. Spanning a mere eight and a quarter years, it is perhaps paradoxical that this epoch is, arguably, the most curious and contradictory of the four discussed in this thesis. However, this was a time of considerable change in Rhyl (on a scale not seen since the 1930s), both for the better and the worse. Commencing on a tide of great optimism, generated by news of a comprehensive redevelopment scheme for the promenade and West Rhyl (which saw the construction of several new attractions and associated environmental improvements), the epoch concluded with renewed doubts in the resort's ability to attract tourists, and patently obvious signs of urban deprivation akin to those witnessed in many inner city areas. By this time, Rhyl was attracting much bad publicity from newspaper contributors and travel writers alike, one of whom (MacFarlane, 1996) dubbed the resort "Costa Del Dole" (which explains the title of this chapter), after the large number of unemployed residents who had migrated to the area in search of work or, failing that, a 'better' environment in which to draw their benefits.

Incidentally, this epoch falls three years and nine months short of the Millennium by virtue of: (i) the restructuring of local government in April 1996 (see Section 8.3), and the desire to avoid the fallacy of evaluating the involvement of a new administration (Denbighshire County
Council) in matters relating to Rhyl, so soon into their tenure; (ii) the fact that there were no significant new-build projects in the resort, after the opening of the East Parade Car Park in March 1996, and; (iii) the need to establish some form of closure so that events (and their causal mechanisms) might be recounted in the past tense. However, this was not felt to contradict earlier claims of understanding the late twentieth century development of Rhyl as a seaside resort, since nothing came to light in the forty-five months to January 2000 (if, indeed, we assume this to be the end of the century) that would have altered the author’s analysis in any way.

8.2 Rhyl and postmodernism (as a dominant cultural formation)

Elsewhere in this thesis, the difficulty of ‘clinically’ separating the historical or sociological configurations of modernity and postmodernity or, for that matter, the cultural experiences of modernism and postmodernism, has been discussed at length (see Sections 2.3, 7.2 and 9.6). In light of this, and bearing in mind that signifiers of the postmodern are thought to point to the future rather than mark the arrival of the present, it might therefore seem radical to claim that postmodernism was the dominant cultural experience of this epoch. Nevertheless, the suffix ‘dominant’ has been used to convey the impression that we have moved on from the tentative (or ‘emergent’) situation that prevailed during the preceding epoch, to a point where symptoms of the postmodern condition appeared in Rhyl with considerable frequency and intensity. The most pertinent of these so-called ‘symptoms’ have been aggregated under the following four subheadings, and discussed accordingly, namely: (i) ‘aestheticisation’; (ii) ‘de-differentiation’; (iii) ‘acceleration and obsolescence’, and; (iv) ‘contingency and risk’. The conditions described under each heading were manifest in the townscape and brochure texts of this epoch, but it must also be remembered that they transcended Rhyl (as did all of the
signifiers of modernism and postmodernism discussed in Sections 5.2, 6.2 and 7.2), and their articulation with other places also had a profound effect on the resort (e.g. the rise of urban and rural tourism in Britain). We might therefore speak of both the 'internal', and 'external', consequences of cultural change for Rhyl and, indeed, any tourist destination (see Section 9.3).

8.2.1 Aestheticisation

Aesthetics may be understood as referring to "the philosophic investigation of beauty and the perception of beauty" (Rojek, 1995: p.165). Under modernity, this practice was, by and large, restricted to the arts. In the postmodern era, however, it is an all-pervasive feature of everyday life, as culture per se (the sign-world) has come to infuse ethics, economics and politics (the real world), and distinctions between 'high' (i.e. elite) and 'low' (i.e. popular) culture have been eradicated. Correspondingly, appearance takes precedence over function (which explains the current preoccupation with gesture politics), and material 'facts' become symbolic 'values' (see Featherstone, 1991). Under such a regime, an individual's identity ceases to be a product of his or her occupation. Instead, it is fashioned [sic] by what (s)he is seen to consume (the visual nature of this phenomenon cannot be overstated), which is consistent with the recent passage from Fordism, and mass forms of production, to post-Fordism, and niche forms of consumption. This is why so much of contemporary life has been described as 'depthless' (although, in our present 'three-minute culture', there is little time to penetrate the surfaces that we see about us).

Much of our understanding of the growing prominence of aesthetics in everyday life is drawn from studies of postmodern architecture – which is felt to have reintroduced variety into the
urban landscape, as a revolt against the uniformity and symmetry of modern built form – in both its 'spectacular' (e.g. Zukin, 1991) and 'vernacular' (e.g. Ley, 1985) guises. Textual analyses of spectacular postmodern architecture, like those of contemporary music, film, theatre and fashion, regularly make reference to 'bricolage' (the appropriation and juxtaposition of previously unconnected signifiers, in order to connote a new, and quite different, signified concept), 'pastiche' (like parody, this involves both imitation and mimicry, though without the 'ulterior motive' of satirising the unconventional) and 'playfulness' (a rather vague, yet oft-used, expression that seems to be reserved for designs that are highly experimental, eclectic and entertaining). Such was the radical nature of the attractions constructed along Rhyl's promenade, between 1988 and 1996, that these expressions could almost have been conceived with them in mind (they were, of course, first cited in works that were published prior to this epoch, and applied to more 'obvious' postmodern built environments such as Disneyland and Las Vegas). With the exception of the Skytower (which was imported from the 1987 Glasgow Garden Festival to satisfy the neo-Victorian desire for an unusual vantage point from which to view the resort) and the New Pavilion Theatre (a somewhat nondescript extension to the Sun Centre), the architecture of Rhyl's new seafront attractions celebrated all of the above postmodern tendencies and more and, in doing so, bent or shattered many of the rules of modern architectural practice. Of all the new additions to the promenade, the Children's Village was, by far, the most extravagant (see Plate 8.1.1). Built to house novelty retailers and the local Tourist Information Centre, it resembled the architecture described in children's fairytales with its turrets, domes, arches, shuttered windows, mosaics and brightly painted brickwork. Ironically, few businesses expressed an interest in leasing one of the units therein, hence it became a near-empty signifier of the new Rhyl. However, since use is secondary to appearance under postmodernity, this did not undermine its existence, at least as far as the local authority was concerned (a situation that existed in stark contrast to the
Plate 8.1: Rhyl’s latest visitor attractions – (1) Children’s Village (2) Sea Life Centre (3) Events Arena, and (4) Apollo ‘5’ Cinema
circumstances surrounding the unprofitable Pavilion Theatre, which once occupied an adjacent site on the promenade and was demolished *in spite* of its extraordinary architecture – see Section 6.2.1). Indeed, the value of the Children’s Village as a spectacle, if not as a venue for leisure shopping, was emphasised in the 1995 edition of the ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ Holiday Guide, the first to be published after its construction:

The brand new Children’s Village is at the hub of the promenade’s vibrant attractions. *Eye catching* and unusual architecture keeps the cameras clicking all day and night. This is Rhyl like you have never *seen* it before.

(RBC, 1994: p.4, emphasis added)

One must also mention the Sea Life Centre (Plate 8.1.2), with its pitched roof that almost reached ground level, the Events Area (Plate 8.1.3), a vast and highly contrived public space surrounded by pre-cast concrete walls designed to look as though they were made out of sand, the Apollo ‘5’ Cinema (Plate 8.1.4), with its huge arched windows modelled on those of the erstwhile Pavilion Theatre, and the (privately owned) Knights Caverns, whose audio-visual exposition of the medieval Welsh legends of the ‘Mabinogion’ allowed visitors to ‘interact’ with some of its characters and settings. Together with the Children’s Village, these belong (for they are still extant) to a new breed of postmodern attractions that celebrate (amongst other things) magic, excess, pla(y)giarism, historical allusion and anti-authenticity, although it should be said that some of these tendencies were also present in modern forms of tourist entertainment. However, it is ironic that, whilst Rhyl was turning to the postmodern in its attempts to secure a future as a tourist destination, so too were other towns and cities (e.g. Wigan, Bradford). Hence, the distinction between modern and postmodern tourist attractions lies not only with the degree to which the above qualities may be observed within them, but also the sense in which the latter, unlike the former, are not unique to the pleasure periphery, if such a zone can be said to exist in a post-Fordist era that has seen the end of economic specialisation by region (see Section 5.2.2).
So far, this discussion has focussed upon spectacular, as opposed to vernacular, forms of postmodern architecture, and it is necessary to redress this balance by considering the latter. It is generally felt that the growing interest in the preservation of indigenous architecture, however ordinary or mundane it might seem, is symptomatic of the way in which localities seek to resist the homogenising effects of globalisation (see Section 7.2.3). In the case of contemporary seaside resorts, the traditional Victorian, Edwardian and Art Deco styles of earlier buildings are a major selling point although, in many instances, they have been compromised by ‘modernisation’ (a term that encompasses everything from the removal of exterior embellishments to demolition). During this epoch, the importance of Rhyl’s architectural heritage was (re)asserted with the publication of a design guide and the offer of financial assistance, on the part of Rhuddlan Borough Council, with the aim of securing improvements to property in the west end of the resort. Specifically, their intention, as articulated through the guide, was to “focus upon the conservation of the original character particular to each building, with an emphasis on the use of natural materials for renovation, and...the reintroduction of ornamental detailing”, an ambition that was reinforced with a number of three dimensional sketches to show what various properties in Rhyl would look like as a result of the council’s intervention (see Plate 8.2, which shows a potential future for Nos. 77 and 78 West Parade, two of the least attractive buildings along the resort’s seafront).

Ultimately, the wholesale gentrification of Rhyl failed to materialise, with only a handful of landowners buying into the scheme (Rhyl’s ambitions to be an up-market resort were arguably killed off in the mid nineteenth century, when land was sold off in small parcels on a freehold basis, and the railway allowed quick and easy access from the industrial conurbations of Lancashire and the West Midlands, circumstances which prompted subsequent development to follow the ‘lowest common denominator’ – see Walton, 1983, and Fletcher, 1993). Even so, it was indicative of the characteristically postmodern (and inherently ironic)
Re-introducing Lost Character

Due to previous trends in ‘modernisation’ (or just simply cost of maintenance or replacement) many original features have been lost, especially from the Victorian buildings of West Parade.

Every aspect as detailed previously can detract from a building’s visual appeal due to a depletion of the original character.

When this happens to such an extent that the frontage becomes void of all detailing a building loses value and becomes an immediate disadvantage as a business base.

With the free architectural assistance available through the Borough Council, crucial initial guidance can be given on how best to achieve your requirements, and how to cost-effectively re-introduce the lost character and appeal to your premises in order to boost desirability.

Plate 8.2: A proposed renovation scheme for Nos. 77 and 78 West Parade (Rhuddlan Borough Council)
strategy, attempted by many local authorities, of selectively appropriating elements of the past in order to ensure a future for their localities. It is debatable, however, as to whether all things Victorian was a ‘better’, or more realistic, alternative to ‘fish and chips’, at least with regards to ‘Sunny Rhyl’.

8.2.2 De-differentiation

According to Lash (1990: ch.1), modernism involved the separate development of a number of social institutions, such as the economy, the state and leisure/tourism, in a process known as ‘structural differentiation’. Hence, leisure and tourism occupied a discernible space and time under modernity, and existed for a specific purpose, as reflected in the development of purpose-built resorts, the phenomenon of Wakes Weeks and the Rational Recreation Movement (see Rojek, 1995: pp.38-40, and Sections 5.2.2 and 5.2.4). Furthermore, each institution possessed its own set of conventions for determining the value of that which fell within its remit (e.g. religious, architectural and cultural codes distinguished the holy from the profane, the spectacular from the vernacular, and the high from the low, respectively). However, recent developments suggest that these distinctions have been eroded under postmodernity, in a process known as ‘de-differentiation’. This has occurred both horizontally, with the result that institutions have become inextricably intertwined with one another, and vertically, so leading to the breakdown of value systems within each institution.

The consequences of horizontal de-differentiation for Rhyl, not to mention its sister seaside resorts, cannot be understated (vertical de-differentiation was addressed in Section 7.2.1). Traditionally, tourism was perceived to be the antithesis of work, hence resorts developed in isolation to industrial towns and cities. However, the crisis of de-industrialisation has
generated a sense of loss for all things industrial, and an opportunity for those very same towns and cities to redevelop and repackage redundant land, buildings and infrastructure, with a view to attracting (staying) visitors and regenerating their economies. Correspondingly, tourism is now ‘everywhere’ and not just at the seaside, with the added irony that resorts were, by their very nature, devoid of heavy industry and therefore poorly placed to benefit from the current fashion for industrial heritage attractions. Meanwhile, the integrity or exclusivity of resorts as tourist destinations has been degraded, if not destroyed, as de-differentiation has seen the emergence, within these one-time utopias, of a number of non-tourism functions, not all of which are conducive to the business of courting and entertaining ‘well-to-do’ outsiders. Indeed, they have become ‘heterotopic spaces’, a term conceived by Foucault (1982: p.25) to refer to the “juxtaposing in a single real place [of] several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible”.

In Rhyl, the transition from utopia to heterotopia was most apparent along West Parade. At the height of the resort’s popularity, the properties beside this stretch of the promenade were, with few exceptions, occupied by providers of tourist accommodation by virtue of their proximity to the sea – a situation that was consistent with Barrett’s (1958) model of a typical British seaside resort, in which higher land values along the seafront excluded all but the most prestigious or largest establishments. Over time, however, many of these properties were converted to serve other purposes, thus diminishing the town’s ability to attract, accommodate and entertain tourists, with the result that, by the end of this epoch, those few ‘B&Bs’ that remained were interspersed amongst a variety of alternative land uses. Specifically, of the sixty nine separate properties that were extant along West Parade, at the time of a land use survey conducted by the author in March 1996 (see Figure 8.1), only eight were still in use as lodging houses, and then it was not clear as to how many of these served the tourist trade as
opposed to the homeless (who, thanks to the benefits provided by the Department of (Housing and) Social Security, or D(H)SS, had emerged in the 1980s as a more dependable source of revenue for the resort’s accommodation providers). In comparison, there were fourteen retailers (specialising, for the main part, in souvenirs and beach requisites), thirteen amusement arcades (concentrated between High Street and Abbey Street), eleven food and drink outlets (not all of them licensed to sell alcohol), ten private residences (further split into self-contained flats), and one entertainment complex (the Superbowl – which was subsequently destroyed in a fire), forming a highly fragmented pattern that was compounded by the presence of twelve vacant properties (one of which, the former Pavilion Arcade, was patently derelict – see Section 8.2.3, below). There were, of course, several immediate forces at work here, including decisions on the part of landowners as to what constituted an economically viable use for their property, and the enforcement of development planning policies on the part of the local authority. However, underlying each and every one of them was the loss of Rhyl’s exclusive status as a long holiday destination which, in turn, is related to the fact that, in a society obfuscated by de-differentiation, there is no longer any room for the ‘one industry town’. Beyond the confines of West Parade, the blurring of the boundaries between tourism and other social institutions was further reflected in the selection of images for the municipal brochures of this epoch, with community leisure facilities promoted as tourist attractions (e.g. the Grange Road Indoor Swimming Baths, the Superbowl and the Rhyl and District Labour Club), and the retail spaces of the resort (re)positioned as ‘nice’ places to visit. Given that, in all likelihood, similar (if not superior) comforts existed in the would-be visitor’s home town or city, the inclusion of these so-called ‘non attractions’ emphasised the extent to which Rhyl was no longer extraordinary, and demonstrated the difficulty of separating tourism from retailing and leisure per se, in these postmodern times.
Figure 8.1: Primary land uses along West Parade, Rhyl (as of March 1996)
8.2.3 Acceleration and obsolescence

A fundamental feature of both modernism and postmodernism, is that the pace of living accelerates exponentially, as successive transport and communications technologies (e.g. the railway locomotive, the motor car, the jet engine, the fibre-optic cable) systematically compress time and space. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the two cultural formations on this issue, and that is, whereas the former compresses time and space, the latter obliterates it, so leading to a heightened awareness of simultaneity, or "spatially remote processes which co-exist with our immediate environment" (Rojek, 1995: p.158). Simultaneity has been interpreted as both a positive and negative force, on the one hand enriching our knowledge and understanding of the world and, on the other, increasing our awareness of 'opportunity-loss' (e.g. in choosing to visit one destination, we are painfully aware of missing out on others which, for all we know, might have offered a more rewarding experience). Of course, this awareness of far away places, coupled with the means of getting there, was responsible for the huge increase in the number of Britons taking a holiday overseas, from the late 1970s onwards, and the parallel 'decline' of traditional cold water resorts such as Rhyl.

One effect of chronic acceleration is that fashions come and go at an alarming rate (this is also linked to what Harvey, 1989: p.147, terms 'flexible accumulation'). Correspondingly, the time it takes for a product to pass through its life cycle, from launch to obsolescence, is drastically reduced. In the Rhyl of today, this is reflected in the apparently poor prospects of those visitor attractions built during this epoch to remain extant for as long as their predecessors, and the overt signs of disuse, dereliction and demolition within the resort's once impeccable core visitor areas, dating from the late 1980s. Regarding the former, the Sea Life
Centre and Children's Village have recently been put on the market by their respective owners, less than a decade after their construction which, though unlikely to lead to their demise, attests to the 'faddishness' of contemporary tourism products (the epitome of which must surely be the Millennium Dome). These somewhat brief periods of stability seem all the more pertinent when one considers that the Victoria Pier (1867), Pavilion Theatre (1908) and Royal Floral Hall (1959) lasted for one-hundred and six, sixty-six and thirty-three years, respectively (a sequence that is also indicative of the trend described above, and which excludes attractions that were prematurely destroyed by fire). Similarly, one cannot overlook Denbighshire County Council's reported reluctance to fund essential repairs to the Sun Centre, which is beginning to show its age. The all-too-obvious signs of obsolescence along West Parade and in the town centre (See Section 8.2.2 and Plate 8.3) also bear witness to the diminished fortunes of a modern resort (in the historical, as opposed to contemporary, sense) in a thoroughly postmodern era – as corroborated by the municipal brochures of this epoch, in terms of their predictable tendency to feature (to the point of excess) those increasingly rare vistas within the resort where urban blight was not apparent, whilst omitting ever larger sections of the resort's 'recreational business district'.

8.2.4 Contingency and risk

The widespread recognition, amongst social actors, that life is not simply a matter of destiny, but of societal, or secular, processes that are external to the individual, is encapsulated in the notion of 'contingency' – one of the more obvious markers of postmodernism (Rorty, 1989; Bauman, 1992; Tester, 1993). It may be contrasted with the pre-modern, or traditional, condition of 'determinacy', whereby people generally accepted that life-enhancing
Plate 8.3: Urban blight in Rhyl – (1) the Pavilion Arcade (2) the Coliseum Theatre, and (3) the Sussex Pub
opportunities were constrained by one’s place in society, a hegemony that was “reinforced by powerful religious beliefs which operate[d] to legitimize inequality in this world by promising paradise in the after-life” (Rojek, 1995: p.156).

Given that we understand our lives to change through accident, rather than by design, it is not surprising that ‘postmodern contingency-consciousness’ (Bauman, 1992: pp.132-133) engenders a keen awareness of risk. Moreover, the perception that the self and society (not to mention the natural environment) are in danger of annihilation, has intensified under postmodernity to a point where certain hazards (e.g. crime against the person, AIDS, death by rail travel, and so on) take on an aura of inevitability that greatly overlooks the statistical probabilities involved (Beck, 1992). The inability of individuals to make a realistic assessment of risk has given rise to a multitude of mechanisms and strategies for (seemingly) policing and insuring against these ‘uncontrollable contingencies’, several of which have penetrated the formerly carefree spaces of leisure and tourism.

In many respects, this epoch marked the transition of Rhyl from a ‘place of pleasure’ to a ‘place of [perceived] risk’ which, in turn, saw its townscape and municipal brochure suffused with various symbols of reassurance. For example, the introduction of Closed Circuit Television (or CCTV) onto the resort’s streets, in 1996, was a response to a series (though by no means an epidemic) of well-publicised acts of violent aggression against visitors, the precedent for which was set with the beach battles of the late 1960s and 1970s, and was promoted in recent editions of the municipal brochure with a map indicating those areas (i.e. the entire promenade and town centre) that were now officially ‘safe’ spaces in which to enjoy a ‘happy, family holiday’ (Denbighshire County Council, 1996: p.35). Meanwhile, bathing standards at Rhyl were also generating cause for concern, after a report credited the
resort with one of the fourteen worst beaches in the country for sewage pollution, with bathers at risk of infection and serious illness (Groves, 1996). This prompted a clean-up operation by Welsh Water, resulting in the resort winning the coveted ‘Seaside Award’ for 1997. By this time, however, the fashion for ‘taking the waters’ had long since diminished, with many visitors choosing to omit immersion in the sea, and even the beach itself, from their itineraries.

In addition to the above, one might speak of a ‘risk culture’ that pervaded the Rhyl of this epoch, which extended far beyond concerns for personal safety and generated a diversity of outcomes. These included an obsession with safeguarding Rhyl’s architectural heritage from the ravages of ‘modernisation’ (in spite of the fact that many of the resort’s listed buildings were structurally unsound, at least according to the editors of www.rhylinfo.com, a local community web site) and the various devices for ensuring a ‘quality’ stay in the resort (e.g. the grading of tourist accommodation, the exclusion of advertisements for unclassified/unlicensed hotels and guest houses from the municipal brochure, and the local Tourist Information Centre’s booking service).

8.3 Reconsidering the role of the local state as provider and promoter of services to tourists in early 1990’s Rhyl

Towards the end of the 1980s, there were signs of recovery in the domestic market for long holidays at the British seaside, and so it is fitting that this epoch started so optimistically with the launch of a second five year programme of major capital investments in Rhyl, on the part of Rhuddlan Borough Council, supported by copious amounts of grant aid from quasi-governmental sources and the European (Economic) Community (or Union, as it is now
known). This was, quite possibly, the most ambitious (yet fruitless) package of regenerative measures ever implemented in a British seaside resort, and it is for this reason that much of the following discussion is devoted to an evaluation of this exercise in ‘pump-priming’ (i.e. using public money to stimulate private sector investment in a locality). This section will also briefly consider RBC’s policy on place promotion, during this epoch, in light of the pressure – from both within and without – to promote Rhyl, not by itself, but as part of a larger and predominantly rural destination (i.e. the Borough of Rhuddlan and North Wales as a whole).

8.3.1 The pitfalls of pump-priming

Whereas Rhyl Urban District Council had to rely upon its own resources, and the occasional loan from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, its successor had the luxury of eligibility for grant aid from a number of sources (principally the European Economic Community, the Welsh Development Agency and the Wales Tourist Board), although this must be weighed against a substantial reduction in the council’s ‘capital allocation’ (the amount set aside for local government expenditure on non-housing projects, as determined by the Secretary of State for Wales) throughout the 1980s. However, for reasons that will be explored below, the various developments financed by the above-named institutions did not, as envisaged, lead to the wholesale resurrection of Rhyl as a long holiday destination – giving rise to an unwelcome legacy for Denbighshire County Council, which succeeded RBC in April 1996.

Over the period 1989/90 to 1993/94, by far the majority of the grant aid supplied to RBC for capital projects in Rhyl came from the European Regional Development Fund, which was established in 1975 to finance infrastructure improvements in disadvantaged regions of the
EEC, as a first step towards regenerating their economies. Thanks, in some small way, to RBC’s pioneering application (and subsequent lobbying) for financial assistance from the ERDF in connection with the Sun Centre (see Section 7.3.1), ‘structural funds’ (as they are known) became available for tourism-related development schemes in regions that were lagging behind economically (e.g. Clwyd). Subsequently, the area incorporating the towns of Shotton, Flint and Rhyl was awarded ‘Objective 2’ status under the ERDF’s three-year Integrated Operations Programme for Assisted Areas that commenced in 1989, thus allowing it to benefit from grant aid set aside for regions suffering from industrial decline (see Table 8.1). Furthermore, in spite of concerns to the contrary, this was extended for a further two years (after intensive representations to the European Commission), by which time aid totalling £9,187,535 had been approved for some sixteen projects in the Borough, the majority of which were located in Rhyl, with a view to improving its standing as a tourist destination (Table 8.2) (F&M C-21(215-7)-370).

The first round of applications, submitted in the financial year 1990/91, received a rather modest sum of aid compared to those that followed (T&AC-18(442/3)-838), the one outstanding scheme of note being the purchase of the Sky Tower – the centrepiece of the 1987 Glasgow Garden Festival – and its erection on the site of the former Pavilion Theatre (which had been used as a ‘temporary’ car park ever since its demolition in February 1974). Surprisingly, this proved to be an instant success (considering that it was never meant to be a ‘stand alone’ attraction, but rather the first step towards the comprehensive redevelopment of the promenade), capturing no less than 111,293 visitors in the first seven weeks after opening (T&AC-17(270)-543). The ‘serious money’, however, commenced with the second round of applications in 1991/92, when a combined £3,483,268 was awarded towards the construction of the New Pavilion Theatre and Underground Car Park, and the pedestrianisation of High
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>development and structural adjustment of regions whose economies are lagging behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>conversion of regions (or parts thereof) seriously affected by industrial decline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5(b)</td>
<td>development of economic activities in rural areas, which create jobs that provide an alternative to working in agriculture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 8.1: Description of those regions that qualify for European Regional Development Fund assistance, under objectives 1, 2 and 5(b) (Davidson and Maitland, 1997: p.130)*

Street (T&AC~19(39)~76; F&MC~19(562)~N/A). This was just as well for neither of these two new-build projects would have gone ahead had it not been for the ERDF, given the cut in RBC’s capital allocation (excluding expenditure on housing) from £1,408,000, in 1983/84, to £756,000, in 1988/89. Indeed, the theatre’s ‘last hope’ prior to the ERDF ‘lifeline’ – a plan to reduce the capital costs accruing to the council (now estimated at £3,450,000) by persuading private developers to construct a five floor, one-hundred-and-two bedroom, three star hotel on an adjacent site (benefiting from a prime seafront location, a nominal rent for the first five years, and integrated bathing and conference ‘facilities’) – came to nothing (F&MC~15(625-31)~1207), and the car park had been on the policy agenda for years, only to be thwarted by a lack of: (i) finance; (ii) a private developer to go into partnership with, and; (iii) planning consent from the county council (in the days when they had the final say with respect to development planning and control).

By now, the floodgates for ERDF grant aid were well and truly open, apparently to the concern of the Welsh Office, which decreed that RBC could not apply for more than £312,000 in ‘Objective 2’ funding for 1992/93 (F&MC~19(564)~N/A). This caused some consternation within the council’s inner chambers, coming a year after the European Commission considered withdrawing Rhyl’s assisted area status, yet – for reasons not revealed in the
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capital Project (description)</th>
<th>Grant Awarded</th>
<th>Financial Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Town Hall (redevelopment)</td>
<td>£210,000</td>
<td>1990/91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morley Road Car Park (landscaping and environmental works)</td>
<td>£52,000</td>
<td>1990/91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sky Tower, West Promenade (purchase and erection)</td>
<td>£371,250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Pavilion Theatre, East Promenade (construction)</td>
<td>£1,683,365</td>
<td>1991/92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underground Car Park, West Promenade (construction)</td>
<td>£1,642,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Street (pedestrianisation)</td>
<td>£157,403</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Village, West Promenade – Phase I (construction)</td>
<td>£1,427,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist Direction Signs (purchase and erection)</td>
<td>£8,550</td>
<td>1992/93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Events Arena, Central Promenade (construction)</td>
<td>£485,721</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foryd Harbour Redevelopment (preparatory works)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railway Station – ‘Gateway Project’ (redevelopment)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Village, West Promenade – Phase II (construction)</td>
<td>£1,326,086</td>
<td>1993/94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.2: Schedule of tourism-related capital projects in Rhyl awarded ERDF grant aid between 1990/91 and 1993/94 (Rhuddlan Borough Council)

minutes – it failed to prevent a further round of successful applications, this time for £1,921,271 towards the construction of the Children’s Village (or, more precisely, the first phase thereof) and Events Arena, and the erection of ‘white on brown’ tourist information signs at various points in and around the resort (T&AC~20(505)~827). The first of these schemes, a 7½ acre leisure/retail development built on top of the Underground Car Park and connected to the East Promenade via an elevated walkway, was designed as a special place for families with younger children (T&AC~17(559)~1048). Accordingly, its architecture alluded to the ‘gingerbread’ houses of ‘Hansel and Gretel’ fame (see Section 8.2.1), and the various leases were restricted to retailers and caterers specialising in goods and services for the under-tens (the one exception being Rhyl’s new Tourist Information Centre, which opened in 1995) (T&AC~22(572/3)~940; T&AC~22(799/800)~1280). The second necessitated the
demolition of the life expired ‘Ocean World and Butterfly Jungle’ (the composite name given to the former Open Air Swimming Pool and Royal Floral Hall, which had been returned to the council’s possession in 1991), and was a deliberately low-level feature that permitted views of, and access to, the beach and sea from the town, in contrast to the more intensively developed stretches of promenade to the west and east (T&AC-19(788/9)-1407). In addition to these two new attractions, an unspecified amount of aid was awarded – in the same financial year – for the refurbishment/reconstruction of the resort’s railway station and its concourse (dubbed the ‘Gateway Project’ and undertaken in partnership with British Rail), and preparatory works in connection with the redevelopment of Foryd Harbour as a new ‘maritime quarter’ for Rhyl, incorporating all of the facilities that it needed in order to recapture its status as a mass market, long holiday destination – namely a funfair, a budget hotel/hostel, a marina, a museum/heritage centre and a car/coach park, in addition to a mix of ‘prestige’ flats, town houses, shops, restaurants and licensed bars (Figure 8.2) (T&AC-20(505)-827).

ERDF support for capital projects in Rhyl ceased at the end of December 1993 (just over two weeks after the European Commission approved a grant of £1,326,086 for the second phase of the Children’s Village – T&AC-21(484)-822), a decision that was predicated on the unemployment rate for the Shotton-Flint-Rhyl ‘Travel to Work’ area, which had fallen below the threshold necessary to qualify for ‘Objective 2’ assistance (F&MC-20(673/4)-1108). This threatened to bring to a close something of a ‘spending spree’ on the part of RBC, although the Welsh Development Agency were on hand to provide limited support for further redevelopment initiatives along the seafront, and in the town itself, including £450,000 of landscaping works on the Central Promenade (T&AC-19-(787/8)-1405) and the resurfacing/lighting of the East Parade Car Park (T&AC-22(74)-134). The WDA also
Figure 8.2: Illustrative scheme for Foryd Harbour/Marine Lake Redevelopment (Tibbalds-Colbourne-Karski-Williams Limited, 1990)
bankrolled two consultant’s reports, namely the ‘West Rhyl Regeneration and Development Study’ (published in November 1990) and the ‘Rhyl Market Appraisal and Development Opportunity Assessment’ (July 1994). The yet to be implemented redevelopment of Foryd Harbour (see above) featured heavily in both, as did proposals for new and improved roads in the area, with the latter staking most of its recommendations upon the construction of the West Rhyl by-pass (not to be confused with the Rhuddlan by-pass to the south of the resort, which opened in 1996). In addition, the first report dealt with the protection of the resort’s dwindling stock of serviced accommodation and the shoddy appearance of several seafront establishments in what was (and still is) the most deprived ward in Wales, by proposing that the area fronting West Parade be declared both a ‘Guest House and Hotel Priority Zone’ and an ‘Improvement Zone’, thus complementing policies ‘TM9’ (which presumed against the conversion of existing hotels and guest houses to other uses) and ‘C3’ (which required that development proposals respect the setting, form, scale, mass, materials and colour of the original building) of the Rhuddlan Borough Local Plan (adopted in September 1993). It is interesting to note that the enforcement area for ‘TM9’ was subsequently reduced in size, and the policy altered to allow for a change of use where: (i) “the planning history of the premises makes it unreasonable to do otherwise”; (ii) “the physical layout and other constraints...make it unsuitable for use as serviced accommodation”, and; (iii) “the property cannot be made commercially viable as a hotel or guesthouse even after taking advantage of grant aid for improvements and upgrading” (T&AC-22(648)-1062) – the reasoning for which was simple, namely that, in the absence of sufficient demand for serviced accommodation from the resort’s visitors, many buildings were left vacant as a result of being denied an alternative use. Meanwhile, the second report came up with a detailed action plan comprising eight ‘themes’ (see Table 8.3) for establishing Rhyl as “the principal sub-regional centre for tourism, commerce and industry on the A55 corridor in North Wales” (F&MC-22(345)-N/A). This
foster partnerships between local government, public agencies and the private sector, for the purposes of encouraging 'creative and appropriate' tourism development). Targeted at a total of nine projects in Rhyl and Prestatyn (including the construction of the New Pavilion...
Theatre and Children’s Village, and improvements to the façade along West Parade), this was the outcome of what the WTB described as “by far the most imaginative and professional of the 44 bids [for LEAD funding] received by the board”, on the occasion of its 1989 Awards Ceremony (at which RBC won a Gold Medal for Services to Tourism – \( T\&AC\sim 17(775)\sim N/A \)). Unfortunately, the council could not make as powerful a case for financial assistance, in a subsequent application to LEAD’s successor, the ‘Tourism 2000’ programme, although their case was not helped by the fact that money had already been earmarked for areas of ‘special need’, notably West Wales, South Gwynedd and the South Wales Valleys (\( T\&AC\sim 22(799)\sim 1277; T\&AC\sim 23(72/3)\sim 122 \)).

The success of any local authority ‘pump-priming’ strategy lies, first and foremost, with the amount of private sector investment that it manages to lever into the locality in question, rather than any publicly-funded physical or human resource improvements that it brings about (however welcome). Accordingly, a ‘leverage ratio’ of 1:4 was envisaged by the WTB when considering applications for its LEAD programme, and this provides a useful yardstick for assessing the success or otherwise of the various capital works undertaken in Rhyl, which received grant aid from the above-named sources. Bearing this in mind, it is alarming to note that, over the course of this epoch, only three significant privately-financed developments of a leisure/tourism nature were constructed in the resort, namely the Knights’ Caverns (1991), the Sea Life Centre (1992) and the Apollo ‘5’ Cinema (1995). Not much is known of the circumstances pertaining to the first (there is no mention of it in the minutes), save for the fact that it was instigated by HB Leisure, an ‘international’ amusement company based in nearby Llandudno. Thankfully, the council’s records are more forthcoming with regards to the second, an initial approach having been made by Sea Life Centres Limited to construct the attraction on a 1½ acre site east of the Children’s Village in 1990/91 (\( T\&AC\sim 18(272/3)\sim 533 \)).
RBC’s enthusiasm in securing their investment was such that it relocated the tenant of the Gaiety Theatre, which stood in the way of the proposed development, to the Coliseum Theatre on the West Promenade (T&AC-368/9-304), and wasted little time in demolishing the former, despite considerable local opposition. It also applied to the Crown, at a cost, for the release of restrictive covenants governing the site (T&AC-19(672/3)-N/A), and granted a generous ninety-nine year lease to the company (T&AC-18(273)-534). Finally, the third came about as a result of the council’s desire to see a multiplex cinema built on the promenade (so that it might double up as a wet-weather facility for visitors to the resort), as opposed to an extensive out-of-town site of the sort favoured by developers. To this end, it entered into discussions with Apollo Leisure for the construction and operation of a five screen cinema within the second phase of the Children’s Village development, on the basis of a public/private partnership (with ERDF funding used to finance its share of the development – T&AC-22(571/2)-989). These proceeded smoothly and the cinema was constructed in a mere seven months, towards the ‘back end’ of 1995 (T&AC-23(432/3)-651), making it one of the very last amenities to be opened in Rhyl, prior to the end of RBC’s twenty-two year tenure on 31st March, 1996.

Even without knowing how much these three attractions cost their respective developers, it is clear that they (along with any other minor enterprises attracted to Rhyl during this epoch) were not part of a £60 million infusion of private sector capital into the resort or, indeed, the Borough as a whole (assuming a ‘leverage ratio’ of 1:4). Worse still, it seems likely that the volume of investment attributable to private enterprise, over the period 1988 to 1996 (and beyond), failed to reach the amount awarded to RBC in grant aid alone – a somewhat miserable return for a strategy hailed as an example of best practice, by trade and academia alike. To this must be added the legacy inherited by Denbighshire County Council, upon local
authority reorganisation in April 1996, which included: (i) a debt of £7 million – comprising £4 million of unauthorised borrowing during RBC’s final year in office (i.e. money not covered by grant aid, credit approvals or other receipts), £2.5 million in unpaid bills and £0.5 million to meet legal expenses and compensation claims; (ii) several unprofitable, and patently under-utilised, municipally-owned amenities (such as the New Pavilion Theatre, the operating losses of which forced the council into conceding that the practice of putting on loss-making productions as a means of attracting holidaymakers to the area was not working, and that its non-statutory provision and future subsidies should instead be justified in the context of an arts policy for the town and its surrounding hinterland – T&AC(S)-20(511/2)-5); (iii) a number of unfinished projects (notably the Ffrith Beach Festival Gardens, located between Rhyl and Prestatyn, and the ‘Yellow Brick Road’ that was to run the length of the promenade, thereby integrating its disparate attractions), and; (iv) resentment amongst the local community with regards to the various ‘white elephants’ located in and around the resort (especially the Children’s Village, which was criticised for not providing access to the beach, ostensibly because it was designed to prevent sand from drifting onto West Parade – T&AC-20(414/5)-673).

Of course, not all of the blame for the above may be laid at the feet of RBC, given the sluggish response of the private sector to the council’s ‘pump-priming’ (which may be attributed, in part, to the economic recession of the early 1990s) and the British public’s enduring appetite for overseas package holidays, both of which, undoubtedly, frustrated it in its mission to regenerate Rhyl as a long-holiday destination (although one must question whether this was at all possible, given the circumstances described in Sections 2.3, 5.2, 6.2, 7.2 and 8.2). That said, RBC’s rigorous pursuit of policy in its dealings with the private sector, as exemplified by its refusal to let now-empty units in the Children’s Village to major
retailers (T&AC-22(572/3)-940) and its insistence upon including only municipal attractions on tourist direction signs throughout the Borough (even to the point of turning down match-funding for their erection, from corporate operators such as First Leisure – T&AC-15(610/1)-1175), clearly did not help matters, although this is less of a criticism of the council itself, and more of an observation as to whether the local state, with all its attendant bureaucracy, is best placed to bring about the regeneration of the British seaside resort (a theme that will be revisited in Section 9.4).

8.3.2 So much for ‘Sunny Rhyl’

Earlier in this thesis, it was suggested that local authority reorganisation, in April 1974, compromised the identity of many a seaside resort, as was the case with the creation of RBC (an amalgamation of Rhyl and Prestatyn Urban District Councils and St. Asaph Rural District Council), which spelt the end of the well-recognised (though disputable) epithet ‘Sunny Rhyl’, and a concerted attempt to promote the somewhat obscure and, for many an English visitor, unpronounceable ‘Borough of Rhuddlan’. That said, RBC’s promotional efforts continued to centre upon Rhyl as the principal destination in the Borough, and so one could conclude that such developments were more prejudicial to the identities of smaller resorts such as Prestatyn (which had its own municipal brochure, prior to 1976). Subsequently, the promotion of the four principal holiday destinations of North Wales (i.e. Rhyl, Prestatyn, Colwyn Bay and Llandudno) under the ‘Premier Resorts’ banner (see Section 7.3.3), further obscured Rhyl’s identity – a trend that continued into this epoch with the formation of twelve ‘marketing areas’ in Wales (the resort becoming part of ‘Area 2’), and the greater emphasis afforded to rural attractions within the Borough.
The first of these two developments was initiated by the WTB who, in 1994, produced a consultation paper entitled ‘Promotional Literature – Towards a More Rational Approach’, for circulation amongst district councils in Wales, with the aim of defining appropriate areas within the Principality to which visitors could more readily relate (T&AC-22(66/7)-117). The research undertaken in support of these proposals revealed that the perceptions of holidaymakers differed strongly from those of local authorities who, as a result, were encouraged to review their current marketing strategies. Charged with finding a brand name for ‘Denbighshire’, RBC canvassed local businesses for suggestions, the most popular being ‘North Wales Premier Resorts and the Vale of Clwyd’ with 48 per cent of the vote (T&AC-22(414-6)-702). In the event, however, the soon-to-be-revived Welsh county was split into two, with the coastal belt going by the WTB’s preferred name of ‘North Wales Coastal Resorts’ and the rural hinterland being subsumed into the ‘North Wales Borderlands’ (the second and third of the Board’s twelve areas). Brochures were produced for each of these areas, incorporating content from the relevant authority’s own promotional literature, although RBC decided that the WTB’s £2.5 million advertising campaign for 1996 – in which the new holiday areas were to be promoted – was not sufficient to justify dropping the above-mentioned ‘Premier Resorts’ initiative, nor the existing resort holiday guides (including the ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ municipal brochure – T&AC-22(793/4)-1270; T&AC-23(524)-791). This policy was maintained by its successor, Denbighshire County Council, and other unitary authorities across Wales (who were reluctant to concede their autonomy in promoting their respective areas), thereby flooding the marketplace with overlapping publications and, in turn, undermining the very rationale behind the proposals. Some years on, it is still unclear as to whether this reactionary stance was to the betterment, or detriment, of individual resort identities, although the confusion that it generated amongst consumers (not to mention
advertisers) cannot, it would seem, have helped either the WTB or the likes of RBC, in their shared mission of encouraging holidaymakers to Wales and its constituent regions.

The second development arose from a councillor’s comments, whilst debating the content of the 1995 ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ Holiday Guide, regarding the lack of exposure given to rural attractions in previous editions (T&AC~22(67)~118). In the absence of the necessary finance for the insertion of extra pages into the existing guide, a partial solution to this imbalance was found by repositioning the area as the ‘Vale of Clwyd’ (see the discussion accompanying Plate 3.3, in Section 3.5), and giving greater coverage to places such as Rhuddlan, St. Asaph and Llangollen (the last of which was not even in the Borough) within the 1996 guide (largely at the expense of Prestatyn – T&AC~23(524)~791). In this respect, one could argue that RBC had not learnt the lessons of twenty-one years ago, when it attempted to promote the resorts of Rhyl and Prestatyn with images of rolling hills and ancient castles, thus misrepresenting the actual place ‘product’. However, in fairness, the content given over to rural North Wales was held back until the last few pages of the brochure’s editorial, which had not been the case in 1976 when the front cover and first page of the municipal brochure were completely devoid of seaside imagery.

8.4 The official guide to ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ (1988 to 1996) – connotation comes of age

The municipal brochures of the 1990s were an altogether slicker proposition than their counterparts of the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s – a symptom of the widespread availability of cost-effective and user-friendly information technology, and an increased awareness of various connotation procedures (derived from the sharing of best practice within the trade and
the growing number of publications devoted to the art of place promotion). Significantly, an attempt was made to establish a consistent identity for the municipal brochure, during this epoch, by creating a logo for the resorts of Rhyl and Prestatyn (which was printed on the front cover and every other page therein) and standardising the typeface and arrangement of photographs throughout. In addition, the brochure’s repeated use of non-indigenous imagery (especially in relation to the attractions of the Sea Life Centre and New Pavilion Theatre), its preference for collages of images accompanied by short captions (over written descriptions of Rhyl’s many attributes), and the importance attached to showcasing the various new developments in and around the resort, together distinguished the editions of this epoch from those that went before them, thus meriting inclusion in the following discussion.

8.4.1 Concept marketing

In 1982, the Torbay Tourist Board decided to re-brand the resorts of Torquay, Paignton and Brixham as the ‘English Riviera’, accompanied by a stylish logo of a palm tree set against a representation of sand, sea and sky (incorporating the TTB’s corporate colours of white, yellow, jade and blue – see Plate 3.2). Since that time, various incarnations of this logo have been used on the cover of the resorts’ joint brochure, in addition to posters and directional signs (amongst other media), thus lending an air of ‘popular fashionability’ to the area and, in turn, addressing “a downward slide in its resort fortunes and tone” (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999: p.136). This highly successful attempt at selling an emotional concept, rather than a material product (p.137), became the yardstick by which other resorts’ place promotional endeavours were measured. Indeed, several years and countless plaudits later, RBC tried something similar in relation to Rhyl and Prestatyn, thus joining the growing band of resorts that had copied this winning formula (imitation is, after all, the sincerest form of flattery).
Accordingly, the council adopted a ‘house style’ for the cover and contents of the municipal brochure (and other advertising material) consisting of a new ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ logo picked out in the colours of the rainbow and placed atop a white background. This commenced with the 1989 edition, which embraced the notion of ‘mood marketing’ via a composite image on its front cover, depicting several activities associated with the area (this was inspired by earlier photographs of the indoor surfing pool at the Sun Centre, the rides at the Ocean Beach Fun Fair and the Harness Racing facility at nearby Towyn – see Plate 8.4.1).

In a direct reference to the ‘English Riviera’ advertising campaign, the brochure in question also included a photograph (without an accompanying caption) of a palm tree on its inside cover, one of the many visual clichés used throughout the post-war era (see Section 6.4.1). However, the resorts’ new identity lacked the simplicity and sophistication of the TTB’s famous creation, and the council quickly reverted to images of the built environment and the activities that took place therein, from the 1990 edition onwards (albeit with the retention of the colourful logo). Even after this abrupt reversal of policy, attempts were still made to connote the ideal ‘holiday mood’ through the choice of photograph(s) for the municipal brochure’s front cover. The most effective examples of this practice were restricted to a single image, as with the 1991 and 1995 editions of the ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ holiday guide (Plates 8.4.2 and 3.3), which featured the Skytower (a somewhat ‘phallic’ symbol, very much like Blackpool Tower) and a superimposed display of fireworks over West Parade (thus invoking the spirit of carnival), respectively.

8.4.2 Imported imagery

Although scenes native to Rhyl and its surrounding area made something of a comeback in the municipal brochures of this epoch (see Section 8.4.4), there was also a counter-tendency
Plate 8.4: Front cover of the (1) 1989 and (2) 1991 ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ Holiday Guide (Rhuddlan Borough Council)
of featuring ‘stock’ imagery, especially in relation to ‘corporate’ attractions such as the Superbowl and Sea Life Centre, and ‘one night only’ performances at the New Pavilion Theatre. By ‘stock’, one is referring to images committed to film elsewhere, and then passed off as having being taken in the resort, as with photographs of fish tanks at what we believe to be Rhyl Sea Life Centre (the fact that identical shots appeared in promotional literature for the corporation’s other aquaria, suggests that they were not captured locally – as implied by the written copy that accompanied them). Of course, this was hardly a deception on a massive scale, for all of the Sea Life Centres were similar in layout and internal appearance, hence visitors were unlikely to be able to distinguish image from reality, nor care that much if they did detect minor variations between the two (see Section 7.2.3 on ‘standardisation’).

The New Pavilion Theatre was the only municipal, as opposed to corporate, attraction to be promoted using ‘stock’ imagery, this time in relation to some of the better-known entertainers to have played there. Apart from the obligatory photograph of the auditorium, that portion of the brochure’s editorial given over to the theatre tended to be populated by publicity shots of the relevant performers, ranging from the ‘sublime’ (e.g. the Moscow City Ballet) to the ‘ridiculous’ (e.g. the annual Christmas Pantomime). Through the aforementioned process of ‘indexical transference’, this lent a little ‘star quality’ to the resort, thus enhancing its reputation as a centre for entertainment and the arts – the importance of which was acknowledged by the fact that the most recognisable celebrities and touring productions retained their place in the municipal brochure from one year to the next, including those that had not performed in Rhyl for some years! Tellingly, ‘stock’ imagery was not used in the brochures of the early 1960s, when popular stage and television personalities headed the ‘Summer Startime’ bill at the (Old) Pavilion Theatre.
On the whole, the presence of ‘stock’ imagery in the municipal brochures of the 1990s was a product of the socio-economic circumstances of the day, particularly with regards to the fierce competition between all urban areas of sufficient magnitude, for (increasingly mobile) inward investment and staying visitors. In this case, by drawing a relatively high profile visitor attraction or (in)famous celebrity to Rhyl, the relevant ‘movers and shakers’ helped put the resort ‘on the map’, and elevate it above those rivals overlooked by the corporation or theatrical agent in question.

8.4.3 **Collage over copy**

If one had to pick a single characteristic of the municipal brochure that distinguished earlier (i.e. 1950s) from later (i.e. 1990s) editions, then it would surely be the word count, which steadily declined from beginning to end (see Section 6.4.3). This had much to do with the discovery and application of ever more sophisticated techniques for instilling connotative properties in an otherwise denotative photograph, for it enhanced the communicative power of the image and, in turn, lessened the need for lengthy descriptions of both the resort and the tourist practices associated with it (one of the many features of the ‘postmodern condition’). These techniques included, amongst other things, the six ‘connotation procedures’ identified by Barthes (1982), namely: (i) ‘trick effects’; (ii) ‘pose’; (iii) ‘objects’; (iv) ‘photogenia’; (v) ‘aestheticism’, and; (vi) ‘syntax’ (see also Uzzell, 1984, and Dann, 1996a); which were apparent throughout the brochures of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s in respect of, for example, the doctoring of outdoor scenes to create the effect of cloudless skies (as in the case of Plate 4.2), the use of props (and people) to bestow a given quality upon the resort by means of ‘indexical transference’ (see Section 7.4.2) and the inclusion of deliberately overexposed photographs taken of moving objects (e.g. fairground rides, cars) after dark, so as to impart a
certain dynamic (and, thus, give the impression of a ‘twenty four [hours a day] seven [days a week]’ holiday culture). Under ‘syntax’, Barthes discusses the juxtaposition of several images, one after another, in order to ‘tell a story’ (in a similar fashion to a cartoon strip in a newspaper). What he fails to mention, however, is that when the images in question: (i) bear no historical relationship to one another (i.e. they do not form a narrative sequence), and; (ii) are accompanied by a passage of descriptive text (the presence of which makes the process of interpretation a little less ambiguous); they form what is known as a ‘collage’, which Gold (1994: p.22) describes as “perhaps the most distinctive feature of place promotional advertising”.

The collage was, arguably, the single most popular means of portraying the attractions of Rhyl and Prestatyn in the municipal brochures of the Rhuddlan Borough Council era. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, its use was largely restricted to the brochure’s contents but, by the 1990s, it had made its way onto the front cover itself, albeit unsupported by written copy or captions (as in the case of the 1993 and 1996 editions – Plate 8.5). Each collage was a carefully crafted balance between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ aspects of the Rhyl ‘experience’, designed to foster an overall impression of the resort as one that catered for all tastes. For instance, the wrap around cover of the 1996 edition struck a compromise between timeless scenes of rural North Wales (e.g. Rhuddlan Castle, Bodrhyddan Hall and the market town of Ruthin) and the more up-to-date attractions of Rhyl and Prestatyn (e.g. the Radio One Roadshow, a ride up the Skytower and cocktails at the Sun Centre). Meanwhile, the brochure’s editorial contained a series of portraits and (increasingly) landscapes (see Section 8.4.4), grouped by theme (e.g. ‘Award Winning Beaches’, ‘Fun Filled Days and Nights’ and ‘That’s Entertainment’) and reinforced by no more than a short paragraph or two of written copy. These were ‘mere’ highlights of Rhyl and the Borough of Rhuddlan, as with stills from
Plate 8.5: Front cover of the (1) 1993 and (2) 1996 'Rhyl and Prestatyn' Holiday Guide (Rhuddlan Borough Council)
a movie trailer that seek to tempt the observer into viewing the entire article. Indeed, this analogy is an appropriate one – just as the out-takes and inferior sequences recorded in the process of making a motion picture end up on the cutting room floor, so the same fate befell those scenes and objects that failed to project the desired image of the resort(s).

8.4.4 Visitor attractions make a comeback

By comparing this epoch (1988 to 1996) with the last (1974 to 1988), it is obvious that the number of contrived attractions (that is, of the ‘bricks and mortar’ variety) pictured in the municipal brochure, was proportionate to the level of (dis)investment in the resort itself. Indeed, the first of the brochures to be published during this epoch brought forward the trend (described in Section 7.4.1) of featuring (portraits of) the tourists themselves, rather than (landscapes of) the things that they had come to see. However, this was the year that RBC announced its strategy for regenerating Rhyl’s core visitor areas, and the brochures that followed responded in kind with images of each new attraction to be opened to the public (starting with the Skytower, and continuing with the Sea Life Centre, Children’s Village and Events Arena), and a more upbeat tone littered with forward-thinking allusions to ‘the future of seaside entertainment’ and the like (in blissful ignorance of the mess that the resort was to find itself in, at the start of the third millennium).

The extent of RBC’s Capital Works Programme for this epoch (see Section 8.3.1) was such that, by the 1996 edition of the municipal brochure (the last to be analysed for the purposes of this thesis), some 40 per cent of the editorial content devoted to Rhyl featured attractions built during this epoch. Interestingly, the emphasis was very much upon ‘work in progress’ (cf. “Rhyl promenade is being entirely transformed into a magical wonderland for the twenty first
century’, RBC, 1994: p.4; emphasis added), even though all of the above-named developments had been completed by the time this particular brochure was published (the promise of ‘more to come’ perhaps acted as an incentive for the would-be repeat visitor).

It is fitting that one should conclude this analysis by considering the re-emergence of visitor attractions within the Rhyl (and Prestatyn) municipal brochure, for this means that we have travelled ‘full circle’ from the heady days of the 1950s, when resort products ‘ruled the day’, and not intangibles such as ‘efficient municipal administration’ and ‘a warm Welsh welcome’. Of course, the cycle goes on and, some five years later, Rhyl’s promoters once again face the prospect of selling ‘half a resort’ (much of West Parade is now sadly run down, and not a great advertisement for an allegedly popular holiday destination). That, however, is a matter for a future research project (see Section 10.3)!
9 Summary

9.1 Introduction

In choosing to present the substantive findings of this thesis chronologically, starting with the first of the study’s ‘epochs’ (1951 to 1960), and continuing with the second (1960 to 1974), the third (1974 to 1988) and the fourth (1988 to 1996), a number of ‘loose ends’ have emerged that require ‘tidying up’ before the author can claim to have accomplished the research objectives stipulated in Section 1.2. Furthermore, consideration has yet to be given to the study’s fourth, and final, objective (for which completion of the first three was a necessary prerequisite). Correspondingly, this chapter serves four very important purposes, namely: (i) to remind the reader of the study’s aim and objectives, and the analytical methods that were used to substantiate them; (ii) to identify those themes of particular relevance and significance to objectives one, two and three, which cut across more than one of the above-mentioned epochs; (iii) to develop a model on the lines of that indicated under objective four, and; (iv) to demonstrate how the approach adopted by this study was consistent with the ontology and epistemology of critical realism (see Section 3.3).

9.2 Associating late twentieth century cultural change with those material/symbolic transformations consistent with the decline and attempted rejuvenation of Rhyl as a long holiday destination (as mediated by the local state)

This study is founded upon a relatively straightforward premise – that the passage from modernity to postmodernity, over the course of the late twentieth century, impacted upon the
demand for, and supply of, those tourism resources that comprised the seaside resort of Rhyl, in such a way as to diminish its status as a mass market, long holiday destination. In the literature review underpinning the research reported in this thesis, this transition from one historical, or sociological, configuration to another, was seen to have ramifications for all aspects of (Western) society, that is, the economic, the political and the cultural (see Section 2.3), and it must be stressed that the study has been unequivocal and unwavering in its focus upon the third, and last, of these social realms, whilst acknowledging their interdependence. Correspondingly, although its concern has been with cultural change and, specifically, the emergence of postmodernism as the dominant cultural experience of the day, it has not shirked from discussing, where relevant, the economic and political transformations associated with this paradigm shift. As for Rhyl, the study has further postulated that postmodernism, in addition to having a bearing upon the actions and associated material outcomes of its producers and consumers, was symbolically echoed in the resort’s place-promotional literature, especially its annual ‘municipal brochure’ – the foremost medium through which images of the self-proclaimed ‘Holiday Playground of North Wales’ were transmitted to would-be visitors.

At an early stage, the decision was taken to investigate the relationship between the above-mentioned ‘cultural turn’ and the production (not consumption) of Rhyl’s tourism resources and place images, as mediated by the resort’s local political and entrepreneurial structures. Considerable emphasis was placed upon the public sector and, specifically, the role of local government, since the municipal capacity for instigating and managing change in most small to medium sized seaside resorts has, by and large, exceeded that of the private or (for that matter) voluntary sectors (see Section 2.4), and Rhyl was no exception to this rule. The temporal parameters of this investigation more or less defined themselves, to wit, the concept
of ‘late twentieth century cultural change’ implied a historical period not before 1950 and not after 2000. However, one or two years were ‘shaved off’ the beginning and the end to allow for the availability of archive material and the need for closure, eventually resulting in a period of analysis commencing in 1951 and concluding in (March) 1996.

Finally, the author was inspired by Urry (1994: pp.233, 237-238) to employ the methodological approach of ‘textual analysis’, in order to operationalise the aim of this study (as justified in Section 3.2), although this somewhat imprecise term encompasses a multitude of analytical techniques, of which only three (iconography, semiotics and tracking) were selected to substantiate the study’s objectives (excluding the fourth and last, which was theoretical, as opposed to empirical, in nature). Both the research objectives, and the specific analytical techniques used to achieve them, are restated in Sections 9.3 to 9.5, along with a summary of those findings that were relevant to each objective.

9.3 Establishing the relationship between the emergence of postmodernism and the production and representation of tourist space within Rhyl (objective 1)

The challenge here was to find and employ a suitable method(s) for analysing the link between cultural change (the cause) and variations in the material and symbolic status of Rhyl as a tourist destination (the effect), as articulated via the actions of the resort’s producers (and consumers) (note that issues of consumption lay outside the remit of this study, hence the brackets, although they are implicated in the production and representation of space within the resort, and are no less important). The range of available techniques was already constrained by the aforementioned preference for a textual or interpretative approach, of which content and discourse analysis were excluded on the grounds that the author was neither interested in
the frequency with which particular elements occurred within the texts in question, nor the sense in which they betrayed instances of the unequal distribution of power within society.

All that remained, after this process of elimination, was the highly appropriate analytical technique of semiotics (“the study...or ‘science’...of signs and signification” – Barker, 2000: p.391) with its concern for the ‘poetics’ of meaning. This technique was applied to two texts chosen for their saliency in communicating the association between culture per se and the practices of both tourists and those that cater for their needs, namely Rhyl’s townscape (under the guise of iconography, a geographic variant of semiotics as applied to material landscapes) and municipal brochure. Furthermore, these were analysed longitudinally (i.e. over the period 1951 to 1996) with a view to unearthing symptoms of the causal relationship outlined in the opening sentence of this paragraph (see Sections 3.2, 3.4 and 3.5 for a detailed explanation as to how and why this was conducted).

This process of textual interpretation, combined with prior knowledge (derived from the academic literature) of the respective cultural formations of modernism and postmodernism, yielded some interesting evidence in support of the hypothesis that Rhyl, as a truly modern tourist destination, was severely (some might say terminally) affected by the postmodern condition. By ‘modern tourist destination’, the author is referring to the seaside’s erstwhile status as a place contrived for, and targeted at, the predominantly working class (or ‘blue-collar’) British population at large, in which the ‘extraordinary’ (at least by ‘everyday’ standards) physical attributes of the coastal environment (i.e. the beach, the sea, the surrounding topography, the indigenous flora and fauna) were complemented by a succession of high-capacity, formulaic and (for their time) ‘cutting-edge’ man-made amenities (e.g. piers, promenades, fairgrounds, theatres, gardens, ballrooms, and the like), to create a spectacular setting conducive to active and passive forms of ‘rational recreation’ that promoted physical
and mental invigoration (thus addressing the deleterious effects of life ‘back home’), whilst affording some scope for inverting accepted or normal codes of conduct. With regards to the ‘postmodern condition’, here the emphasis is upon a cultural experience that is thought to have originated in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as both a reaction to, and a chronic form of, various proclivities of modernism (see Sections 5.2.1 to 5.2.4, and 6.2.1, on ‘volume and homogeneity’, ‘spatial specialisation’, ‘habitus and distinction’, ‘rationalism and bureaucracy’ and ‘restlessness’). In Sections 6.2.2, 6.2.3, 7.2.1 to 7.2.3 and 8.2.1 to 8.2.4, nine interrelated tendencies of postmodernism were identified as having profound consequences for the production and representation of space within post 1950’s Rhyl (not to mention the consumption, or non-consumption, of that space), namely: (i) ‘flexibility’ (i.e. resistance to mass produced and homogenised products); (ii) ‘privatisation and enclosure’ (i.e. a rejection of the public space of the exterior, and a marked preference for individual or small group activities within enclosed surroundings); (iii) ‘simulation and hyperreality’ (i.e. the use of artifice to replicate real environments, often to such a standard that the copy takes on an authenticity of its own, thus presenting a serious challenge to phenomena that thrive upon their uniqueness or extraordinariness but are now open to reproduction); (iv) ‘nostalgia’ (i.e. a yearning for lost, or threatened, relics of past ways of life); (v) ‘globalisation and placelessness’ (i.e. the reshaping of a given locality to conform to idealised notions of universal cultural space, at the expense of its own indigenous ‘sense of place’); (vi) ‘aestheticisation’ (i.e. the contemporary preoccupation with surface appearance as opposed to what lies beneath); (vii) ‘de-differentiation’ (i.e. the blurring of the boundaries between previously separate social institutions, most notably commerce and culture, and the dissolution of value systems within them); (viii) ‘acceleration and obsolescence’ (i.e. an apparent quickening of the pace at which one negotiates space and time, and the correspondent heightening of one’s awareness of concurrent, yet spatially remote, events,
places and opportunities), and; (ix) ‘contingency and risk’ (i.e. a growing recognition of the role played by chance factors in shaping one’s life which, in turn, is responsible for an increased sensitivity to risk that outweighs the probabilities involves). Quite apart from a decline in visitor trips, nights and expenditure (although, unfortunately, there is scant statistical evidence to quantify this), the legacy of the above for Rhyl included the emergence of a new generation of postmodern attractions, from the 1980s onwards, to replace those lost to modernisation, with a disposition for recreating exotic, historical or mythical places indoors (e.g. the Sun Centre, the Rhyl Library, Museum and Arts Centre and the Knights Caverns), the substantial loss of serviced bedspaces within the resort (and a commensurate increase in self-catering accommodation at its margins), fragmented patterns of land usage in previously ‘uniform’ spaces (e.g. West Parade), considerable investment in beautifying Rhyl without due consideration as to what lay behind the façade (very little in the case of the Children’s Village), the conservation of buildings in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. the Town Hall) that were, arguably, less spectacular or historically significant than several demolished in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. the Sussex Street Baths, the Pavilion Theatre), the globalisation of retail space within the resort (e.g. pedestrianisation, corporate shop frontages and indoor shopping malls), and the overt presence of various means of reassurance against contingencies such as infection from sea water bathing and crime against the person (e.g. the flying of the ‘Seaside Award’ flag to denote beach safety, and the monitoring of Rhyl’s streets via CCTV).

As the resources that comprised the Rhyl product were remade, with one or two exceptions, in the image of postmodernism, so too were the messages conveyed by its municipal brochure. References to rational, or purposeful, forms of recreation and their intended outcomes became few and far between, the interior spaces of the resort received greater coverage, as did its ‘non-attractors’ (e.g. the White Rose Shopping Centre), and a more flexible holiday
experience was promoted in place of the strict itineraries of the past (e.g. the notion of arriving at one’s guest house late on a Saturday afternoon, having taken the train that morning, and systematically combining sunbathing with sightseeing over the course of the next seven days – as perpetuated in the brochures of the 1950s – was severely challenged by later remarks espousing Rhyl as an ideal centre for touring North Wales by road, advertisements for self-catering accommodation, and a move away from overtly ‘heliocentric’ imagery). Compared to the resort’s townscape, however, the passage from modernism to postmodernism was less pronounced in its municipal brochure, on account of the inherent conservatism of its publishers, the local authority, and its adherence to a policy of promoting Rhyl as a traditional ‘bucket and spade’ destination throughout the late twentieth century.

Together, these surface transformations (and the deeper generative mechanisms that gave rise to them) marked the conclusion of Rhyl’s *purpose-built* existence as a recognised *long-holiday* (i.e. four or more nights) destination, and the start of a new era as a place to visit on a short break, day trip or night out (not to mention diversification into retailing, light industry and welfare provision for the elderly, homeless and unemployed). However, it must be remembered that late twentieth century socio-cultural change also had implications for other places engaged in an interdependent relationship with Rhyl, namely the towns and cities from which its visitors were drawn, and those destinations (both at home and abroad) that competed with the resort for the tourist pound (although, for reasons of expediency, these were not considered in this thesis).

In conclusion, the passage from modernism to postmodernism was, by no means, an uncontested one, and some still dispute the timing and, indeed, the existence of this paradigm shift. Even if we take a pragmatic line, and agree with the consensus that there *has* been a
fundamental change in our ‘way of living’, there remains one question to be answered, namely to what extent – over the course of the late twentieth century – did the transformation of Rhyl mirror that of culture more generally? Clearly, postmodernism did have a profound effect upon the resort, as has been articulated above. However, it cannot be stressed enough that each place responds in a subtly different way to broader developments within culture and society, in accordance with its own indigenous political and entrepreneurial structures. In addition to embracing change, these structures are capable of resisting it, which might explain why certain (albeit fewer) aspects of contemporary Rhyl are consistent with modernism, rather than postmodernism (e.g. the more than generous, albeit under-utilised, capacity of the 1992-built Events Arena which, at 8,000 people, harks back to the days of mass tourism). As a result, it is technically possible to propose an alternative reading of Rhyl, at the end of the twentieth century, that emphasises these residual traces of modernism, although this is guilty of, at best, suggesting that the transformation of the resort ran counter to wider developments within society and, at worst, denying the existence of cultural (and social) change, altogether!

The second position is more contentious than the first, although neither are true for, quite apart from anything else, they ignore the mediating presence of those with a commercial or municipal interest in Rhyl. Indeed, it is to those very municipal interests that we now turn.

9.4 Evaluating the interventions of successive local authorities in the post-war provision and promotion of the Rhyl ‘product’ (objective 2)

As mentioned earlier, a ‘loose’ form of textual analysis known as ‘tracking’ was used to scrutinise the committee minutes of Rhyl Urban District Council (1894 to 1974) and Rhuddlan Borough Council (1974 to 1996), between the years of 1951/52 and 1995/96 (inclusive). Quite simply, this involved the identification of specific passages within the
minutes that were pertinent to decisions made by the local state, which had some bearing upon the post-war provision and promotion of the Rhyl ‘product’. Naturally, space permits only a brief synopsis of the most notable themes to emerge from this analysis, which are outlined below.

Firstly, although it would appear that the 1960s and early 1970s was, on the surface, the most destructive period in Rhyl’s post-war history (given the combination of a stagnating market for domestic long holidays and the loss of several key attractions), the seeds of decline were sown as far back as the 1950s, in respect of: (i) the failure of RUDC to secure funds from central government for promenade improvements (despite its best efforts); (ii) its struggle to contain the spread of amusement arcades, caravan parks and other ‘down market’ amenities in and around the resort, largely at the expense of its stock of serviced accommodation; (iii) its policy of leasing only the smaller municipal amenities to private enterprise, and then on short-term contracts that did little to encourage innovation and forward planning, and; (iv) its hesitancy over updating the resort’s entertainments for a modern-day audience (as demonstrated by its continued willingness to subsidise the loss-making Rhyl Silver Band, even in the face of consumer apathy). In fact, behind the façade of a contracting ‘product mix’, RUDC was surprisingly proactive during the 1960s, especially in relation to its coordinating role in an experiment to provide inclusive holidays in the resort, its belated recognition of the need for a summer season (with prominent stage and television personalities) at the Pavilion Theatre and, above all, the commissioning of designs for an indoor swimming pool and conference facilities on the promenade (which, although failing to make it off the ‘drawing board’, provided the blueprint for the combined Sun Centre and New Pavilion Theatre, opened in 1980 and 1991, respectively).
Secondly, the 1973/74 reorganisation of local authorities in England and Wales had a profound, and largely negative, impact upon the development and promotion of Rhyl as a tourist destination. For instance, plans to redevelop the Victoria Pier and Pavilion Theatre fell foul of a ‘policy vacuum’ in the months leading up to April 1974, with the result that both were demolished at the ‘eleventh hour’ as RUDC sought to put its outstanding affairs in order before handing over to RBC. Under the new regime, Rhyl’s interests had to compete alongside those of the predominantly rural Borough of Rhuddlan, whose residents (not to mention councillors) were somewhat antagonistic towards tourism (and its ‘parasitic’ qualities of ‘drunkenness’, ‘drug-taking’ and ‘disorder’) and all-too-ready to cry ‘foul’ when the resort appeared to dominate the policy agenda. Rhyl’s identity and image suffered, too, as RBC elected to produce one municipal brochure for the whole Borough, replete with imagery that contradicted the resort’s reputation as a ‘sun and fun’ destination (e.g. Rhuddlan Castle, Dyserth Waterfalls, and so on). However, there were positive legacies to emerge from local authority reorganisation per se, which “created a frenetic round of spending as surplus capital was channelled by both outgoing and incoming authorities into schemes designed on the one hand as ‘legacies’ and on the other as ‘statements of ambition’” (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999: p.53). Correspondingly, the transition from RUDC to RBC saw the former bequeath the princely sum of £120,000 from its rate fund balances to the latter who, in turn, injected some much needed creative thinking and financial expertise into the process of replacing those amenities lost during the 1960s and early 1970s, leading to the commissioning of the Sun Centre a mere two years after reorganisation.

Thirdly, in the years following local authority reorganisation, RBC proved to be highly innovative with regards to obtaining the necessary finance for major improvements to the Rhyl ‘product’. This commenced with the opening of the Sun Centre, in 1980, the first visitor
attraction in the country, if not beyond, to be awarded a (maximum) 30 per cent grant from the European Regional Development Fund. The blaze of publicity that surrounded ‘Rhyl’s Tropical Island’ somewhat overshadowed the council’s achievements over the next ten years, during which time it prudently repackaged those amenities that it inherited from RUDC (e.g. the Open Air Swimming Pool, which became Rhyl Fishing Village), at a minimal cost to the taxpayer and without further ERDF assistance. However, in spite of ever tighter restrictions imposed upon local authority borrowing and expenditure by central government, the 1990s witnessed a marked departure from this policy of ‘make do and mend’, when the council submitted a series of successful applications for funding to the European Community, the Welsh Development Agency and the Wales Tourist Board. Yet, as if to emphasise the futility of spending money on resurrecting outmoded forms of tourism (i.e. the ‘long holiday’, in Rhyl’s case), the ensuing grant aid (which totalled some £15 million), and the infrastructural and environmental improvements that it paid for (e.g. the construction of the Skytower, New Pavilion Theatre, Underground Car Park, Children’s Village and Events Arena on the promenade, plus the refurbishment of the Town Hall and the Railway Station), neither rekindled the interest of the holidaymaker, nor delivered the anticipated multi-million pound response from the private sector, with the result that RBC left office, in April 1996, accused of financial mismanagement and attempting to compete with its own ratepayers in respect of those smaller facilities (e.g. the replacement for the Sports Café at the Wales Crown Green Bowling Centre) that were built with financial assistance from the above sources (although its commitment to regenerating Rhyl was never questioned). Furthermore, a scheme to redevelop the Foryd Harbour as Rhyl’s ‘Maritime Quarter’ was subsequently abandoned, as the resort’s prospects of securing further grant aid dwindled rapidly. Consequently, it missed out on one of “two types of leisure orientated schemes which have proved very successful in revitalising
British resorts...[namely]...marina developments for yachts and small sailing craft, and high-quality indoor retailing complexes or shopping malls” (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999: pp.173-174).

Finally, of all the media used to promote Rhyl to potential holidaymakers (i.e. railway posters, illustrated folders, radio and television advertisements, exhibitions, ‘free’ publicity and, more recently, the Internet), the annual municipal brochure continued to be the preferred choice of the resort’s publicists (usually in tandem with one or more of the above), throughout the late twentieth century (a summary of the themes pertinent to its content may be found in Section 9.5, below). It even survived: (i) severe cutbacks in British Rail’s resort advertising programme; (ii) a three-year hiatus in which Rhyl’s appointed publicity agents downgraded the publication to little more than a ‘glorified’ list of accommodation in the town, and; (iii) a WTB recommendation to cease production of all local authority holiday guides, in favour of its own brochures for the twelve ‘marketing areas’ of Wales! One should also remember that the municipal brochure was a useful means of monitoring the effectiveness of RUDC’s and RBC’s advertising campaigns, in terms of the number of requests for the publication attributable to advertisements placed in various newspapers. All in all, these themes demonstrate that the council’s approach to promoting Rhyl as a holiday destination, from the 1950s to the 1990s, exhibited a degree of consistency not matched by any other policy agenda, as corroborated by Morgan and Pritchard (1999):

At the end of the twentieth century it is difficult to identify any major areas of advertising activity or techniques which were not in use at its beginning...The basic organisation of British resorts’ marketing departments remains largely unchanged...and they still concentrate the bulk of their efforts on brochure production, press and poster advertising and public relations activities.

(pp.140-141)
9.5 Identifying and explaining any discrepancies that existed between ‘sign’ and ‘referent’ with regards to representations of Rhyl in those editions of its municipal brochure published between 1951 and 1996 (objective 3)

It was hypothesised that, over the course of the late twentieth century, the imagery used to promote Rhyl to would-be holidaymakers bore less and less of a resemblance to the tourism resources that it purported to represent (i.e. there was thought to be an increasing disparity between what semioticians refer to as the ‘sign’ and the ‘referent’ – see Section 3.5). In order to prove or disprove this theory, a semiotic analysis of those municipal brochures published during the period 1951 to 1996 was conducted on the lines of that undertaken in support of the study’s first objective (see Section 9.3), although this time the emphasis lay with the brochure’s ‘signifiers’ (i.e. its format), as opposed to its ‘signified concepts’ (i.e. its content). Furthermore, the results of this exercise were ‘triangulated’ with the aforementioned iconographic analysis of Rhyl’s townscape, to determine whether and, more to the point, how changes ‘on the ground’ were reflected in the written and visual content of the ‘Sunny Rhyl’ and ‘Rhyl and Prestatyn’ Holiday Guides. For example, the demolition of the Pavilion Theatre in February 1974 (one of Rhyl’s ‘unique selling points’ by virtue of its distinctive architecture) was seen to have profound ramifications for the manner in which the resort was sold to potential holidaymakers through the municipal brochure (e.g. greater emphasis was placed, in subsequent editions, upon intangibles such as ‘value for money’, rather than the built environment – see Section 7.4.1). On the whole, it is possible to conclude that – thanks to inroads made into the Rhyl ‘product’ during the 1960s and early 1970s, and increasingly sophisticated techniques for ‘manipulating’ otherwise denotative photographs so as to connote the desired meaning(s) – the relatively minor gap that existed, back in the 1950s, between Rhyl’s place image(s) and tourism resource(s), had widened considerably by the mid 1990s.
Upon closer scrutiny, however, it appears that this discrepancy tended to fluctuate to the rhythm of successive rounds of capital investment and dis-investment (e.g. it was observed that material attractions accounted for a higher than average proportion of those brochures published in the early 1990s, largely on account of RBC’s concurrent programme of large-scale capital improvements within the resort’s core visitor areas – see Section 9.4). Accordingly, the theory advanced above corresponds to the ‘overall picture’, and not every given localised variation.

Several interesting ‘sub-themes’ emerged in the course of substantiating this objective, including the four summarised below. Firstly, the brochures of the 1950s were incredibly formal, as reflected in their precise tone and regimented layout, not to mention their barely disguised ambitions of ‘educating’ the reader (and prospective visitor). Secondly, the word count steadily declined with each successive edition, as the emphasis switched from ‘informing’ to ‘persuading’ (thus necessitating written copy that was short and to the point, not to mention occasionally ambiguous). This was complemented, from the early 1960s onwards, by a disposition for visual clichés that required few words of explanation (e.g. blue skies and palm trees), instead of ‘rambling’ descriptions of the resort’s many attributes. Thirdly, it is noticeable how the municipal brochure mimicked the accepted way of ‘doing business’, as at the time of its publication, by adopting a ‘product orientation’ in the 1950s (reflected in the large number of photographs given over to the resort’s material attractions), a ‘sales orientation’ in the 1960s (in the form of over-confident and persistently repetitive accounts of the benefits to be derived from taking a holiday in ‘Sunny Rhyl’, and liberal use of the ‘first person imperative’) and a ‘market(ing) orientation’ from the 1970s onwards (accompanied by an emphasis upon ‘push’ rather than ‘pull’ factors – as with images of tourists at rest or play – and written reassurances of ‘customer satisfaction’). Finally, Rhyl’s
place image became less distinctive, over the years, as it passed through a succession of ‘identity crises’ (namely the ‘shrinking product’ syndrome alluded to earlier, an accelerated drift ‘down-market’ and incorporation into the rural Borough of Rhuddlan), which manifested themselves via indeterminate images of ‘shopping malls’, ‘scantily-clad women’ and ‘scenic countryside’ that bore little relation to the resort’s unique sense of place.

9.6 Modelling the link between the transition from modernism to postmodernism and the transformation of Rhyl’s tourism resource(s) and place image(s) by its producers and consumers, after Dietvorst and Ashworth (1995) (objective 4)

In Section 2.6, various attempts at modelling tourism destination development were reviewed, whereupon it was decided that no one model adequately described the late twentieth century transformation of traditional cold-water seaside resorts such as Rhyl, taking into account cultural change and, specifically, the transition from modernism to postmodernism. With no ‘off the shelf’ solution to turn to, the author decided to devise a model that satisfactorily integrated the three major themes of this thesis (i.e. cultural change, the role of the local state, and the subjectivity of place promotional literature), and make this exercise the fourth, and final, research objective. Though specific to Rhyl, and to this particular study, the intention was to come up with a design whose key principles were applicable to other seaside resorts in Britain. The end-product (Figure 9.1), in addition to fulfilling objective four of this research project, functions as a device for summarising the findings applicable to objectives one, two and three (one of the declared purposes of this chapter).

As can be seen from Figure 9.1, the author’s model consists of two distinct, yet interconnected, components – a model of late twentieth century cultural change (denoted by
Figure 9.1: Model of late twentieth century cultural/tourism transformations in Rhyl
the letter ‘A’), and a simplified version of Dietvorst and Ashworth’s (1995) ‘Model of Tourism Transformations’ (‘B’). These ‘background’ and ‘foreground’ models are explained below, first as separate entities, and then in respect of the interaction(s) between them. This section will then conclude with an attempt to illustrate the relevance of the model to the study’s objectives (one to three) and methods.

9.6.1 Model ‘A’

For each of the three domains in which the passage from modernism to postmodernism has been observed (i.e. as cultural experiences, as artistic and architectural styles, and as philosophical or epistemological positions), specific turning points have been put forward to commemorate the movement from one to another. For instance, Harvey (1989) attributes the origins of post-Fordism, which has close ties with postmodernism as a cultural experience (the latter is thought, by some, to be the cultural echo of the former, although this argument is guilty of economic reductionism), to the oil crisis of 1972 (fuelled [sic] by turbulence in the Middle East – Boyd, 1998), and the subsequent recession experienced by Western economies, this having exposed the weaknesses of Fordism and encouraged producers to adopt new forms of production that were more specialised, flexible and responsive to the demands of the marketplace. With regards to architecture, Jencks (1984) proposes that postmodernism was ‘born’ at 3.32pm on the 15th July, 1972, when the Pruitt-Igoe housing complex in St. Louis, a prize-winning design of the modernist architect Le Corbusier, was demolished as unfit for human habitation. Finally, the break with the ‘Enlightenment Project’, which marked the epistemological transition from modernism to postmodernism, was grounded in the student protests that brought France so close to revolution in May 1968. This rebellion against the French educational establishment, the ‘home’ of cultural studies, was the catalyst for the
widespread questioning of its teachings (by the likes of Derrida, 1976), which were premised upon 'structuralism' and 'logocentrism' (see Section 3.5).

Together, these events suggest that the roots of postmodernism were embedded in economic, political and intellectual developments of the late 1960s and early 1970s, thus implying that the transformation was relatively sudden. In contrast, model 'A' refutes the notion of an 'overnight' revolution by depicting the shift from modernism to postmodernism, over the period 1951 to 1996, as a gradual one (reflected in the subtle transition from white to black, as one moves down the page). This is especially true of tourism, some aspects of which were characteristically 'postmodern' before postmodernism was ever 'invented', whilst others having survived to this day in spite of being resolutely 'modern', as described by Urry (1990):

Much tourist activity has been thoroughly anti-auratic. It has been based on mechanical and electronic reproduction (beginning with 'What the butler saw' machines, through spectacular illuminations, to son et lumière and laser shows); it has been thoroughly based on popular pleasures, on an anti-elitism with little separation of art from social life; it has typically involved not contemplation but high levels of audience participation; and there has been much emphasis on pastiche, or what others might call kitsch...Yet there is an important sense in which much tourism has also been minimally modernist...[as]...revealed through the term mass tourism which is how much tourist activity has been structured since the late nineteenth century.

(pp.86-87, emphasis his)

Similarly, the cultural 'sub-formations' attributed to the four epochs mentioned in Section 9.1, namely '(high) modernism', '(late) modernism', 'postmodernism (as emergent)', and 'postmodernism (as dominant)', bear witness to the prolonged displacement of modernism by postmodernism, in respect of the late twentieth century transformation of Rhyl as a seaside resort. Significantly, parallels may be drawn between these formations and the latter stages of Butler’s (1980) ‘Tourist Area Life Cycle’, as applied to Rhyl (see Table 9.1, which also makes the link with the historical and sociological configurations identified by Rojek, 1995).
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<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>1951-1960</td>
<td>(High) Modernism</td>
<td>Modernity 1</td>
<td>Consolidation</td>
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<td>2nd</td>
<td>1960-1974</td>
<td>(Late) Modernism</td>
<td>Modernity 2</td>
<td>Stagnation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>1974-1988</td>
<td>Postmodernism (Emergent)</td>
<td>Postmodernity</td>
<td>Decline</td>
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<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>1988-1996</td>
<td>Postmodernism (Dominant)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rejuvenation (?)</td>
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Table 9.1: Linking the four epochs to Rojek’s (1995) periodizing concepts and the latter stages of Butler’s (1980) Tourist Area Life Cycle

The other principal feature of model ‘A’ is the identification of several opposed tendencies of modernism and postmodernism, which are listed above and below model ‘B’, respectively (e.g. ‘public/private’; ‘mass/niche’; ‘reality/simulation’, and so on). This approach was inspired by Harvey (1989: pp.338-342), from whom a number of dichotomies were picked for incorporation in the model. He notes that “the juxtaposition of diverse and seemingly incongruous elements can be fun and occasionally instructive” (emphasis added), and reminds us that such dichotomies are never absolute, nor are they proof of ‘historical causation’, no matter how ‘plausible’ they might appear to be (correspondingly, one could construe this exercise as yet another example of postmodern writing, with its penchant for language games over metanarratives). However, these oppositions are designed to render modernism and postmodernism intelligible, within the confines of the model, not to mimic them. Furthermore, given their number, it would be fruitless to justify each one in turn, since this would necessitate a much longer chapter (which would cease to function as a summary of the thesis’s findings) and, in any case, a glossary of terms might prevent the reader from coming up with other, equally valid, interpretations. Suffice to say, they have all featured, whether explicitly or implicitly, at some point in this thesis (principally Sections 2.3, 5.2, 6.2, 7.2 and
8.2) and, with the odd exception, have been discussed at length in the academic literature (see the various references in Section 2.3, for guidance).

9.6.2 Model ‘B’

Dietvorst and Ashworth’s (1995) ‘Tourism Transformations Model’ (TTM) was introduced in Section 2.6 as the ‘best fit’, out of all the attempts to conceptualise change in tourism destinations that were reviewed by the author, for this particular study. To recap, they envisaged a two by two matrix comprising four ‘transformations’ (defined as “the changing of the shape, appearance, quality or nature of something”, p.2) of relevance to a given tourism resource, namely: (i) material transformations by producers; (ii) symbolic transformations by producers; (iii) symbolic transformations by consumers, and; (iv) material transformations by consumers. The model’s principal limitation, as originally conceived, was that it “focuses upon the spatially visible tracks of the transformations, but neglects the explanatory mechanisms” (p.8), which Dietvorst and Ashworth attempted to put right by adding an outer layer to the model, to denote a postmodern setting (with references to re-localisation, globalisation, flexibility and sustainability – see Figure 2.8). In integrating their theories with his own, the author jettisoned this ‘addition’ (which was, arguably, the weakest and least obvious aspect of the TTM), in favour of model ‘A’ (the reasons for this are explained in Section 9.6.3, below). The result was a much simpler model of tourism transformations (model ‘B’), that was akin to the original (see Dietvorst, 1992). Three significant amendments may be noted, however, namely: (i) the labelling of the model’s four key components (i.e. ‘producer’, ‘consumer’, ‘assemblage’, and ‘tourism-recreation resource’), which was modified so as to be specific to Rhyl (in addition, the third category was relabelled ‘place image(s)’, and the word ‘recreation’ was dropped from the fourth); (ii) the removal of
'internal' subcategories (e.g. producer: 'state', 'market', 'organization', 'community'; consumer: 'tourist/recreationist', 'other') from the illustrated model, and; (iii) the identification of a 'gap' between the destination's material resource(s) and symbolic image(s).

Having established what modifications were made, the next step is to describe the components of model 'B', and the interrelationships between them. Into the category of 'Rhyl's Producers' may be placed the local authority (i.e. Rhyl Urban District Council, Rhuddlan Borough Council), private enterprise (e.g. hotel landladies, amusement arcade owners), voluntary and trade organisations (e.g. the Rhyl Hotel and Guest House Association, the Friends of the New Pavilion Theatre), and the resort's residential population. Also, one might include agents that promoted travel to the resort (e.g. British Railways), and (quasi)governmental departments/agencies (e.g. the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, the European Union [DGXVI], the Wales Tourist Board, and the Welsh Development Agency), although their links with Rhyl are, understandably, more tenuous.

Under 'Rhyl's Consumers' one finds tourists (i.e. those staying in Rhyl for a long holiday or a short break), excursionists (i.e. day trippers or visitors staying outside of the resort), and others (e.g. conference delegates, shoppers and local residents). 'Rhyl's Tourism Resource(s)', some of which are shared with other industries, may be split (after Dietvorst and Ashworth, 1995: p.5) into 'physical resources' (e.g. bathing water, flora and fauna), 'human resources' (e.g. entertainers, housekeepers, chefs, taxi drivers), 'capital goods' (e.g. souvenirs, postcards) and 'sociocultural resources' (e.g. architecture, theatre and, in this particular instance, 'Welshness'). Finally, although the term 'encoding' implies that symbolic transformations by the resort's producers are deliberate, 'Place-image(s) of Rhyl' may be 'organic' or 'experiential', as well as 'induced' (as defined in Section 2.5). Moving on, explanations of the transformations (numbered '1' to '4' on the model), are provided overleaf:
1. **Material transformations by Rhyl’s producers.** The most significant transformations to fall into this category were, with one or two exceptions, *instigated* by the local state (e.g. the demolition of the Victoria Pier and the development of the Children’s Village). Rhyl Urban District Council, and then Rhuddlan Borough Council, also *co-ordinated* such transformations (whether public or private in origin), with both authorities responsible for development control, and the latter undertaking the additional duty of drawing up planning policy. The influence of ‘outside’ institutions, such as the Welsh Development Agency and the European Union, was seen to grow in later years, principally as a source of funding for capital projects (e.g. the architectural restoration of properties within West Rhyl and the construction of the Sun Centre).

2. **Symbolic transformations by Rhyl’s producers.** Again, the local state led the way in this respect, with the publication of the annual holiday guide (or municipal brochure), and the generation of ‘good’ publicity for the resort. In addition, a number of private businesses published their own promotional literature (e.g. flyers), and the rail and bus companies played a part in encoding images of Rhyl, initially as partners in joint advertising schemes, and later through their own marketing initiatives, aimed at promoting traffic to the resort. Understandably, the conduct of those providing services to tourists in the resort (from the hotelier to the deckchair attendant) played a huge part in the formation of experiential images of Rhyl.

3. **Symbolic transformations by Rhyl’s consumers.** Under this category, we may include individuals who never visited Rhyl, but were exposed to organic or induced images of the resort. Those who did have first-hand experience of Rhyl, be it for business or pleasure, symbolically transformed the resort, whether for better or worse, by relating that experience to others (i.e. testimony), as with the letters from satisfied holidaymakers that
were published in the municipal brochures of the 1960s, or the disparaging remarks made of Rhyl in a recent edition of the Rough Guide to Wales.

4. Material transformations by Rhyl's consumers. The act of visiting and staying in the resort reaped all kinds of consequences, some positive, some negative (see Matheson and Wall, 1982, on the impacts of tourism). By way of example, the overcrowding experienced on Rhyl's beaches, prior to concerns over bathing standards that emerged during the 1980s, and the various outbreaks of mob violence amongst visitors (e.g. the fights between rival gangs that marred many a summer during the late 1960s and 1970s), are two of the less welcome transformations that have been forced upon Rhyl by its consumers. These transformations were, by their very nature, highly transitory (being seasonal and 'one-off' occurrences), unlike those of Rhyl's producers which often resulted in a permanent and irreversible modification to the tourism resource.

9.6.3 The interactions between model 'A' and model 'B'

Although models 'A' and 'B' are essentially individual devices for conceptualising late twentieth century cultural change and tourism transformations in Rhyl, respectively, together they provide an explanation for what happened in the resort, between the years of 1951 and 1996, which moves beyond surface observations to the deeper levels of 'reality', and the shift from modernism to postmodernism as the underlying generative mechanism. This is articulated in respect of the two points of contact between the models. Firstly, the foreground model ('B') not only sits on top of the background model ('A'), it also moves down it, thus reflecting the passage of time in and around Rhyl (as measured by the vertical axis of model 'A') over the course of the period 1951 to 1996 (the arrow beneath model 'B' is designed to suggest this). Secondly, the (deep) influence of late twentieth century cultural change upon
the (surface) actions and decisions of Rhyl’s producers and consumers (which materially and symbolically transformed the resort’s tourism resources and place images), is represented by the arrows that lie immediately to the left and right of the supply and demand side components of model ‘B’, thus exposing its inner workings to the changes hypothesised in model ‘A’. When animated, these arrows (in conjunction with model ‘A’) grow a darker shade of grey, so indicating that, towards the end of the twentieth century, postmodernism (as a cultural formation) had a greater bearing upon what Rhyl’s producers and consumers did, than its predecessor modernism. Finally, the model reflects the assertion that the gap between Rhyl’s accumulated tourism resources and assembled images (or referent and sign) expanded as the years went by (as denoted by the symbol ‘Z’), in line with the (British seaside) resort’s post-1960s ‘identity crisis’, which saw a sharp decline in visitor trips, nights and expenditure (although, in the case of Rhyl, there are no statistics available to confirm this fall in visitation, only anecdotal evidence).

9.6.4 Locating the study’s objectives and methods within the combined model of late twentieth century cultural/tourism transformations in Rhyl

As mentioned earlier, the author’s model of late twentieth century cultural and tourism transformations in Rhyl was not only the response to a research objective, but a means of integrating and summarising the key themes of this thesis. Accordingly, it illustrates the relationship between cultural change (notably the passage from modernism to postmodernism) and the material and symbolic transformation of Rhyl as a tourist destination, over the period 1951 to 1996 (objective one), the twin roles of the local state (as the chief ‘producer’) in attracting tourists to Rhyl and catering for their needs (objective two), and the (seemingly widening) disparity between the resources that comprised the Rhyl ‘product’ and
the images used to promote them to would-be visitors (objective three). The relevance of the model’s components to these three research objectives is highlighted in Figure 9.2, which also locates the methods that were used to substantiate them (i.e. iconography, tracking, and semiotics), and the texts to which they were applied (i.e. Rhyl’s townscape, the committee minutes of its local authority and the resort’s municipal brochure). It should be remembered that each of these texts is but one expression of Rhyl’s tourism resources, the decisions and actions of those that ‘produced’ them, and the place images associated with the resort, although they were chosen for their saliency in communicating these features (i.e. Rhyl’s townscape – along with the physical geography of the resort and its people – was a fundamental element of the tourism resource, the council minutes of Rhyl Urban District Council and Rhuddlan Borough Council were one of the few means of identifying the key decisions that affected Rhyl’s development as a seaside resort, over the forty-five year period of analysis, and the municipal brochure was the primary medium through which images of Rhyl were communicated to potential visitors). In addition, Figure 9.2 reveals the study’s one principal limitation, namely its failure to interrogate issues of consumption and their relevance to Rhyl (i.e. how did visitors and readers of the annual municipal brochure decode images of the resort, and how did their behaviour affect the tourism resource?), as implied by the fact that the component labelled ‘Rhyl’s consumers’, and the material and symbolic transformations associated with it, are the only features of the model not to be highlighted.

9.7 What does a critical realist study of tourism look like?

Earlier in this thesis, critical realism (a ‘school of thought’ within the natural and social sciences that is most closely associated with the work of the philosopher, Roy Bhaskar) was put forward as the study’s ontological and epistemological reference point (Section 3.3). To
Figure 9.2: Components of model relevant to (1) research objectives and (2) methods/texts
recap, it holds that reality is not a construct of individuals or science, but of ‘deep structures’, which are hidden from the superficial gaze of the ‘casual observer’, yet may be accessed via scientific enquiry. Correspondingly, it challenges the dominant epistemologies of positivism and hermeneutics by defending the power of (social) science to explain, as well as observe and interpret. Furthermore, whereas hermeneutics is chiefly concerned with experiences, and positivism with the events that give rise to them, critical realism searches for the generative mechanisms that underpin such ‘cause and effect’ relationships.

This study’s critical realist credentials may be illustrated with reference to any one (municipally-owned) visitor attraction in Rhyl, which was constructed, modified or demolished during the period 1951 to 1996 (Figure 9.3). Take, for example, the Pavilion Theatre, opened in July 1908 and demolished in February 1974. According to the history books, the discovery of serious structural defects in what was, by the early 1970s, a loss-making amenity (the cause) brought about its demise (the effect) – an eminently logical argument that one might accept at ‘face value’. However, therein lies what might be termed the ‘empirical fallacy’, for some mechanism must have been present for the said defects to necessitate the theatre’s demolition, and not its retention. That mechanism was a resolution sanctioning (“with considerable reluctance and regret”) the demolition of the Pavilion Theatre on the grounds cited above, which was passed at a special meeting of Rhyl Urban District Council on the 11th of September 1973 (RUDC(S)~24(212)~2). Had a proposed amendment to this resolution been carried, to the effect that a decision on the theatre be deferred whilst all possible alternatives to demolition were investigated, the structure may just have survived long enough to become the responsibility of Rhuddlan Borough Council (which took over in April 1974), with the possibility that the new authority might have taken a very different view to that of its predecessor (especially in light of its ‘track record’ in securing the necessary
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<th>Attraction</th>
<th>1st Epoch</th>
<th>2nd Epoch</th>
<th>3rd Epoch</th>
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<tr>
<td>Queen's Theatre and Ballroom</td>
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<td>Ballroom closed</td>
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<td>Royal Floral Hall (Butterfly Jungle)</td>
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<td>Regal Cinema</td>
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<td>Victoria Pier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marine Lake Funfair</td>
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<td>Re-christened as Marine Lake Leisure Park (without Funfair)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Old) Pavilion Theatre</td>
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<td>Closed</td>
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<td>Open Air Swimming Pool (Fishing Village)</td>
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<td>Sun Centre</td>
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<td>White Rose Shopping Centre</td>
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<td>Rhyl Library, Museum and Arts Centre</td>
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<td>Superbowl</td>
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<td>Gailey Theatre (Amphitheatre)</td>
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<td>New Pavilion Theatre</td>
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<td>Children's Cycling Track (Cyclorama)</td>
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<td>Roller Skating Rink (Skateworld)</td>
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<td>Sea Life Centre</td>
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<td>Knights Cavems</td>
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<td>Events Area</td>
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<td>Coliseum Theatre</td>
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<td>Children's Village</td>
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<td>Apollo '5' Multiplex Cinema</td>
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<td>Ocean Beach Funfair</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crown Green Bowling Centre</td>
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*Figure 9.3: Gantt chart of selected attractions in Rhyl, 1951 to 1996*
finance for major improvements to the Rhyl ‘product’). In the event, this amendment was lost and the theatre’s fate was sealed.

This is an example of what Bhaskar (1978) terms ‘horizontal explanation’, whereby a given cause and effect relationship is explained in terms of the mechanism(s) that (co)determined it. However, the ‘real’ [sic] power of critical realism, in respect of its potential to emancipate social science from ‘enslaving appearances’, lies with ‘vertical explanation’, whereby one mechanism is shown to be the product of another, more basic, mechanism, and so on ad infinitum. This, too, may be put to use in order to explain why, apart from the ‘obvious’ reasons cited earlier, RUDC chose to demolish the Pavilion Theatre. Indeed, it is here that the study’s brief to investigate the role of late twentieth century cultural change in bringing about the decline of Rhyl as a long holiday destination, comes into its own, for it was suggested (in Section 6.2.1) that those attractions wilfully destroyed by the council in the 1960s and early 1970s, were all of a particular vintage (viz. Victorian and Edwardian), and that their removal was predicated on an emerging distaste for (or, at least, apathy towards) tourism plant and practices (not to mention the socio-cultural legacies) of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Alternatively, an explanation for the council’s decision might lie with political, rather than cultural, change (i.e. the ‘indecent haste’ with which RUDC ‘put its house in order’, before handing over to RBC). In practice, however, the decision to demolish the theatre would have emanated from a ‘conjunction’ of these and, most likely, other mechanisms (after all, society is an ‘open’, not ‘closed’, system).

It is possible to replicate Bhaskar’s (1978: pp.168-169) schema for the deepening of scientific understanding (as reproduced in Section 3.3), by combining both horizontal and vertical explanations for the demolition of the Pavilion Theatre into one ‘narrative’ (see Table 9.2).
Table 9.2: A 'stratified' explanation for the demolition of the Pavilion Theatre, Rhyl

This knits together observations that were made, earlier in the thesis, in the name of the study's first and second objectives, and shows how wider processes such as cultural (not to mention economic and political) change can lead to some very distinctive outcomes at the level of a given locality, once they have interacted with the structures indigenous to the place in question (in this case, the local state). Suffice to say, this exercise could be repeated for any one of the visitor attractions referred to in Figure 9.3, albeit in relation to different mechanisms (at least with regards to those occupying the higher 'explanatory strata') and cause/effect relationships, naturally.
10 Conclusions

10.1 Introduction

Had the author produced a single ‘summary and conclusions’ chapter for this thesis, it is possible that too much time would have been spent upon regurgitating the study’s findings, at the expense of weighing up its contribution (Phillips and Pugh, 1994: p.60). In the event, such a scenario has been avoided, and the task of evaluating the thesis’s contents now rests with this final chapter (which also offers some tentative suggestions in respect of those research questions, raised by the study, that require further investigation).

10.2 Contribution

Botterill and Haven’s (2000) survey of PhD degrees in tourism, awarded by universities in the United Kingdom between 1990 and 1999, provides the basis by which we might evaluate the contribution of this particular study. Using keywords such as ‘tourism’ and ‘tourists’, they searched through the on-line ‘Index to Theses’ for relevant abstracts (yielding a sample of 101), which were then coded by: (i) university and year of acceptance; (ii) subject category; (iii) method, and; (iv) location of fieldwork. The resultant frequencies highlighted the ‘gaps’ (and, in certain instances, ‘chasms’) that existed within tourism studies at PhD level (as of April 2000, when the final search was made – thus predating the submission of the last few abstracts for 1999). Significantly, several subject areas, methods and fieldwork locations that had been ‘neglected’ by the doctoral candidates in question, corresponded to those that featured in this thesis. For instance, the most popular subject categories were ‘tourism
development and impacts’ (33 abstracts), ‘tourist/visitor behaviour’ (15), ‘tourism management at the level of the industry/firm’ (14) and ‘tourism planning and policy’ (14), of which only the last is of any relevance to what has been attempted here. Meanwhile, those categories that are salient to the study received comparatively little representation, namely ‘tourism imagery’ (6), ‘tourism history’ (2) and ‘destinations’ (1). A similar pattern was detected in relation to methods, to wit, the dominance of ‘questionnaires’ (32) and ‘interviews’ (17) (thus confirming the influence of the positivist and hermeneutic traditions upon tourism studies), and the poor showing of ‘conceptual model building’ (6), ‘historical document analysis’ (3) and ‘semiotics’ (1), although ‘case studies’ (36) did make up a reasonable proportion of the sample. Finally, the ‘United Kingdom’ (18) received comparatively few citations for a country in whose universities the ‘stock of knowledge’ under review was constructed, with ‘Europe’ (15) and the ‘Far East’ (12) running a close second and third. Appallingly, ‘Wales’ (1) hardly featured at all as a subcategory, although the higher frequencies for the ‘South/South West’ (6) and ‘North West’ (3) suggest that the seaside came off a little better (given its long-standing association with these areas).

Naturally, it is important to qualify, as well as quantify, the study’s contribution. Firstly, by using Urry’s (1990) theories on late twentieth century cultural change and the restructuring of tourism as a means of entry into that incredibly fertile and rapidly expanding body of works concerned with (the socio-cultural implications of) ‘postmodernity’ and ‘postmodernism’, and then applying this new found knowledge to an explanation of the decline (and attempted rejuvenation) of Rhyl as a (typical) mass market, long holiday destination, the author has not only ‘side-stepped’ the tendency of rationalising the seaside’s ‘fall and [would-be] rise’ in the most superficial of terms, but also delivered a study that exhibits interdisciplinary traits (in respect of human geography, critical sociology and cultural theory) of the type that will, one
day, see tourism studies ‘break free’ of its contemporary preoccupation with business management and forge a new future as a discipline in its own right. Secondly, the study has demonstrated a due degree of originality and innovation in respect of its methods, as well as its subject matter, by responding to Urry’s (1994) call for tourism researchers to engage with so-called ‘grey’ information sources (e.g. diaries, archive photographs, maps, brochures and ‘official’ records), and analyse them as ‘texts’, that is, treat each and every one of them as written documents (regardless of whether ‘writing’, as we understand it, is present). Such a plea is consistent with Botterill’s (2000) ongoing intellectual project, which promotes analytical ‘underlabouring’ within tourism studies, a term first used by the philosopher John Locke to describe a process that seeks “to remove the idols, obstacles or ideologies that stand in the way of, or distort the understanding of, new knowledge to be produced by the sciences” (Collier, 1994: p.19). Correspondingly (and if the findings of Botterill and Haven, 2000, are to be believed), this study is one of the few to consider the suitability of its methods (i.e. iconography, semiotics and tracking) within the context of developments in the social sciences per se (in particular, the emergence of critical realism, alongside constructivism, as an alternative to the dominant ontological and epistemological positions of positivism and hermeneutics). Finally, many fall into the trap of reading ‘English’ for ‘British’, when it comes to studying the decline of the traditional cold-water resort, thus overlooking the possibility that the ‘Welsh’ experience (or, for that matter, the ‘Scottish’) might be different. Indeed, Morgan (1998) suggests that resorts in Wales are ‘bucking’ the trend for the United Kingdom as a whole, and retaining their market share, whilst many of the smaller seaside destinations in England are in an advanced state of decline (although, on this criteria, Rhyl would appear to be more ‘Anglo’ than ‘Celtic’, which might explain why the Wales Tourist Board, 1992: p.17; consider it to be the Principality’s only resort of ‘national’ standing). What is clear is that, regardless of any differences between resorts on opposite sides of Offa’s Dyke,
the seaside in Wales has received considerably less attention than its English counterpart (Morgan and Pritchard, 1999: p.4), an imbalance that has been partially addressed through the choice of case study for this particular venture.

10.3 Limitations and recommendations for further research

No one study (especially in the social sciences) can claim to be perfect, and any thesis that fails to acknowledge the assumptions and limitations of the research reported therein deserves to be treated with caution, if not suspicion. As regards this study, since many of its limitations double as opportunities for future research projects, it seems prudent to combine the two concerns in one section, which also allows for a more constructive appraisal of its 'shortcomings'.

Firstly, in a tightly defined study such as this, there are bound to be significant omissions and, in accordance with the brief set out in Section 1.2 (and revisited in Section 9.2), issues pertaining to the consumption of Rhyl’s tourism resource(s) and place image(s) were not considered (unless implicated in their production). Similarly, with regards to the association between late twentieth century cultural change and the material and symbolic transformation of Rhyl as a tourist destination, although the ‘mediating’ influence of the resort’s indigenous political and entrepreneurial structures was acknowledged, the former received considerably more attention than the latter (i.e. in the form of an entire research objective). Secondly, by suggesting that Rhyl’s post-war history as a tourist destination was made up of ‘epochs’ in which either modernism or postmodernism was the dominant cultural formation, the author could be said to have opened a ‘can of worms’, given the difficulties experienced in establishing a consensus as to when (and, indeed, whether) the alleged ‘cultural turn’
occurred. Accordingly, some would argue that it is fallacious to submit changes within a given locality as evidence of the transition from modernity to postmodernity, for example:

Rather than looking at modernity and post-modernity as epochs, it would be far more useful to view them as alternative perspectives to be brought to bear on the analysis of changing social phenomena.

(Ritzer and Liska, 1997: p.96)

Such a position would certainly explain why some aspects of contemporary Rhyl may be identified as ‘modern’ and not ‘postmodern’. However, it is a little too convenient to suggest that modernity and postmodernity are, to use an analogy, simply two sides of a coin that may be ‘flipped’ every time an explanation for a given set of social phenomena is required. It is also quite wrong, for the prefix ‘post’ was first conceived to describe the profound and patently obvious changes to the ‘way of life’ within Western societies, which became apparent from the late 1960s onwards. In any case, the study’s significance relates to the efficacy with which it summarised these respective cultural formations (and their association with various material and symbolic transformations within Rhyl, over the course of the late twentieth century), and not the manner in which their ‘coming and going’ was rationalised (although it does, somewhat sensibly, conceive this as a ‘gradual’, rather than ‘overnight’, revolution). Nevertheless, given the uncertainty described above, the study’s conception of the above-mentioned ‘cultural turn’ might be construed to be problematic, and so is recorded here as a ‘limitation’. Thirdly, although the author has made clear his ambition to consider the implications of broader socio-cultural change for the British seaside resort per se, the findings of this research are, for all intents and purposes, limited to Rhyl alone. Correspondingly, it would be interesting to replicate this study in relation to another resort, which would undoubtedly show a similar, yet unique, set of responses (and associated outcomes) to the ‘generative mechanisms’ identified in this thesis (in accordance with its own political and entrepreneurial structures). Finally, although this study does not claim to be
prescriptive, the author is acutely aware of how little there is in this thesis, by way of solutions (or at least recommendations) that address the various problems facing Rhyl (as a tourist destination) at present. Naturally, this is not the kind of thesis that would go down well with the resort’s Chamber of Commerce, but it is, nonetheless, a valid contribution to the bodies of knowledge that are implicated therein!
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xviii
Appendix A

List of abbreviations used in Sections 3.6, 5.3, 6.3, 7.3, 8.3 and 9.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RUDC(M)</td>
<td>Monthly Meeting of the Full Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RUDC(S)</td>
<td>Special Meeting of the Full Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E&amp;PC</td>
<td>Entertainments and Parks Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>Entertainments Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>Finance Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPC(RUDC)</td>
<td>General Purposes Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPC(SP)</td>
<td>(Special) Motor Parking Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P&amp;GC</td>
<td>Parks and Gardens Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Publicity Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC</td>
<td>Road Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBC(M)</td>
<td>Monthly Meeting of the Full Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RBC(S)</td>
<td>Special Meeting of the Full Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A&amp;RC</td>
<td>Amenities and Recreation Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENVC</td>
<td>Environment Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F&amp;MC</td>
<td>Finance and Management Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPC(RBC)</td>
<td>General Purposes Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P&amp;DC</td>
<td>Planning and Development Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T&amp;AC</td>
<td>Tourism and Amenities Committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RHYL URBAN DISTRICT COUNCIL
Relevant committees (1951 to 1974)
Volumes 2 to 24
Ref. Nos. UDD/E/1/2 - UDD/E/1/24
(Denbighshire Records Office)

RHUDDLAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
Relevant committees (1973 to 1996)
Volumes 1 to 23
Ref. Nos. DA/E/1/1 to DA/E/1/23
(Denbighshire Records Office)

The suffixes ‘(S)’ and ‘(J)’ are used to denote a sub-committee and a joint committee, respectively, when used in relation to any one of the above-named ‘committees’ (not ‘meetings’). Committees not relevant to tourism in Rhyl are excluded. References ending in ‘N/A’ refer to those entries where minute numbers were not available.
Appendix B

References to brochures

RUDC (1950) Sunny Rhyl, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1951) Positive Proof of Happier Holidays: Sunny Rhyl, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1952) Sunny Rhyl Will Charm You, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1953) Come to Sunny Rhyl, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1954) Sunny Rhyl: The Family Resort, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1955) Sunny Rhyl for Happier Holidays, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1956) Join Me in Sunny Rhyl: The Holiday Playground of North Wales, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1957) Sunny Rhyl, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1958) Sunny Rhyl: The Family Resort, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1959) Sunny Rhyl, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1960) Sunny Rhyl for 'Glorious' Holidays, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1961) Sunny Rhyl: Best in the World, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1962) Sunny Rhyl Leads Again, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1963) Sunny Rhyl for 'Magical' Holidays, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1964) Hello! Follow me to...Sunny Rhyl, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1965) You'll Like it at Sunny Rhyl: Sand...Sea...Smiles...and Songs, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1966) Mr & Mrs Happy Family En Route to Sunny Rhyl, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1967) Sunny Rhyl: The Seaside Playground of North Wales, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1968) Hello, this is Rhyl, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1972) Sunny Rhyl: For Happy Carefree Holidays on the North Wales Coast, Rhyl: RUDC
RUDC (1973) It's Gorgeous at Sunny Rhyl, Rhyl: RUDC
RBC (1975) Rhyl and Prestatyn: For Everything Under the Sun, Prestatyn: RBC
RBC (1976) Rhyl & Prestatyn: For a Good Time, All the Time!, Prestatyn: RBC
RBC (1977) Rhyl & Prestatyn: The Perfect Recipe for Holiday Happiness in North Wales, Prestatyn: RBC
RBC (1978) Rhyl & Prestatyn: The Fun Spots of the North Wales Coast, Prestatyn: RBC
RBC (1979) Rhyl & Prestatyn: The Lively Resorts, Prestatyn: RBC
RBC (1981) Rhyl & Prestatyn: The Sun Centre of the North Wales Coast, Prestatyn: RBC
RBC (1982) Rhyl & Prestatyn: The Sun Centre of the North Wales Coast, Prestatyn: RBC
RBC (1983) Rhyl & Prestatyn, Prestatyn: RBC
RBC (1987) Rhyl & Prestatyn, Prestatyn: RBC
RBC (1989) Rhyl and Prestatyn: North Wales at its Very Best, Prestatyn: RBC

Abbreviations:
RUDC (Rhyl Urban District Council); RBC (Rhuddlan Borough Council); DCC (Denbighshire County Council)