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## CHAPTER FIVE

### Moments as Catalysts for Change in Tourism Destinations' Evolutionary Paths

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#### Extended abstract

This chapter identifies and explores the notion of *moments* as a possible lens through which to understand more clearly the processes underlying destinations' evolutionary change. This notion – which allows the building of an exploratory conceptual framework – relates to the different ways in which local destinations evolve according to the occurrence of specific inflection points at which a given evolutionary trajectory of a destination shifts in direction. Furthermore, this *moments* lens permits analysis of the evolution of tourism destinations *as places*, rather than focusing on the evolution of tourism *in* destinations, going beyond the domain of traditional lifecycle-based models.

This framework derives from the *path metaphor* in evolutionary economic geography – particularly in relation to the ideas of path dependence, path creation and path plasticity – and is linked to recent developments in urban social geography such as the cultural political economy approach. The various possible dimensions of moments in which destinations' paths are forced to shift in another direction – i.e. pre-moment scapes, triggers, impacts and post-

moment scapes – are examined, as are the possible discourses that might surround these shifts in real-world tourism evolution situations.

To illustrate the scope and potential of the moments conceptual framework for tourism evolutionary destination studies, we apply it to a well-documented case study of a major Mediterranean coastal theme park development – PortAventura – situated on Catalonia's Costa Daurada. This case suggests that a focus on selective moments is useful in understanding how change is produced instead of only evaluating the end results of path dependence, path creation or path plasticity.

In conclusion, the moments conceptual framework is proposed in this chapter as an opportunity to examine the trajectory of a tourism destination at any scale and at any point in time, as well as the evolutionary changes that might take place in other types of productive spaces. As a consequence, the direction in which this idea shifts the debate on tourism destination evolution will be of interest within both evolutionary economic geography and tourism geography.

*Keywords:* Evolutionary economic geography, tourism destination evolution, moments, policy, tourism geography, path dependence, path plasticity, path creation.

## **Introduction**

Studies on the evolution of destinations are well established (e.g., Butler 2006a, 2006b, 2014), although research focused on analysing how and why destinations change over time as well as the long-term effects of leading policies and agency of the processes of change are arguably more scarce (Saarinen 2004). Even less researched are the specific moments at which destinations' economic paths are forced to shift direction, be this through the creation

of new paths or the appearance of a more subtle incremental change over time. Indeed, as Gale and Botterill (2005: 159) argue in a critique of traditional lifecycle approaches, ‘the critical incidents that mark the transition from one stage to the next [in destination evolution] are poorly defined and often difficult to substantiate empirically’. This chapter focuses on the potential for *moments* as a conceptual framework in examining how destinations evolve over time and as a viable alternative to traditional lifecycle-based models.

Interpretation of this field of research as representing a *path metaphor* may hold some answers in this respect. Here we use the term *path metaphor* in a collective sense to refer to the range of concepts framed by the idea of economic paths, such as path dependence, path shaping, path creation or path plasticity. This metaphor has been increasingly employed by regional economists and economic geographers when analysing the long term dynamics of regions and industries (Boschma and Martin 2010) and, more recently, of tourism destinations (Brouder 2014; Sanz-Ibáñez and Anton Clavé 2014). Related to moments as key components of the evolutionary path of a destination, evolutionary approaches to tourism have mainly focused the attention on studying responses given by destination stakeholders to incidents along the lines of triggering events, critical events or shocks with a notable impact – either positive or negative – on destinations’ trajectories (e.g., Ritchie, Crofts, Zehrer, and Volsky 2013). Nevertheless, recent developments in urban social geography such as the cultural political economy approach (Ribera-Fumaz 2009; Sum and Jessop 2013) have started to examine the root causes of urban socio-economic change through a new lens including cultural aspects, policies, and agencies (Moulaert, Martinelli, Gonzalez, and Swyngedouw 2007), which should also be fruitful when analysing the dynamics of destinations. Drawing upon this work we define *moments* as path-shaping evolutionary inflection points that cause a destination’s path (trajectory) to shift in direction and focus.

This chapter examines the role and nature of such moments in the tourism evolution process, in terms of how paths are shaped by their occurrence(s). Focusing in the first instance on the context of moments in evolutionary economic geography via a review of previous research, the chapter then proposes a conceptual framework for understanding the moments as inflection points in path shaping via the main discourses associated with their effects on tourism destinations. In order to illustrate the framework's potential for understanding how destinations change over time, a key moment in the evolution of Catalonia's central Costa Daurada – the opening of the PortAventura theme park in the mid-1990s – is examined by applying the conceptual framework relating to moments in interpreting this key event. Finally, the chapter offers some useful directions for future research and draws some conclusions on the capacity and potential for the framework's application in tourism destination contexts.

### **The path metaphor in tourism evolutionary approaches**

In the context of tourism geography, a fledging yet promising line of research has recently begun to focus on the translation of recent economic geography approaches – hitherto used to analyse the evolution of industrial districts, clusters and other localized forms of specialization (Boschma and Frenken 2006; Boschma and Martin 2007, 2010) – to increase understanding of how and why tourism destinations evolve over time (Brouder 2014; Sanz-Ibáñez and Anton Clavé 2014).

The work published so far presents some seminal reflections and exploratory case studies that are generally sound in theoretical and empirical terms, while highlighting the potential of applying notions such as co-evolution (Brouder and Fullerton, 2014; Ma and Hassink 2013; Randelli, Romei, and Tortora 2014), resilience (Ioannides and Alebaki 2014;

Lew 2013; Mariotti and Zirulia 2014), survival (Brouder and Eriksson 2013), complexity (Meekes 2014), path dependence (Bramwell and Cox 2009; Ma and Hassink 2013, 2014; Williams 2013), path creation (Gill and Williams 2011, 2014) or path plasticity (Anton Clavé and Wilson 2013; Halkier and Therkelsen 2013).

The path metaphor – encompassing the path dependence concept, as well as the different notions therein that represent diverse alternative evolutionary trajectories such as path creation and path plasticity – has been the most recurrent within evolutionary economic geography (EEG). This established analogy between paths and evolutionary processes assumes that destinations are constantly in-the-making, permitting an approach which displays distinctive powerful forms of interpreting the nuanced, local-specific dynamics of tourist places over time. Indeed, the analogy emphasizes the significant role of both stakeholder agency and selective / spontaneous incidents in unlocking tourism places from stagnation and avoiding decline. This presents an opportunity with which to address these issues from a non-deterministic perspective – a common criticism of traditional lifecycle approaches –, which may help to focus on analysing the evolving qualities *of* tourist places (Equipe MIT, 2002) instead of the analysis of tourism *in* places (e.g. Butler 1980; Plog 1973; Prideaux 2004).

The domain of the path metaphor can be used to understand the unexpected ways in which destinations can depart from their historical legacies and structures in the same sense that Bramwell (2011) mentions the concept of path shaping. First, it includes the translation of the path dependence concept – directly associated with place dependence (Martin and Sunley 2006). This notion, following the work of Ma and Hassink (2013, 2014) in the tourism context, emphasizes the role of history – that is, pre-existing conditions, as well as the past events and decisions – and geography – understood as the contextual specificities of each destination in social, economic and environmental terms – in influencing development

paths. However, path dependence is not only a force constraining destination dynamics that leads to political, cognitive or functional lock-in processes (see, for instance, the extensive debate on this issue in Bathelt and Glückler 2003; Grabher 2005; Hassink 2005; Martin 2010). Nor is it a force that generates inevitable downgrading or down-scaling effects or even path destruction in tourism places, which would suppose the complete abandonment of the tourism activity. Instead, breaking with existing dependent paths can enable the definition of new pathways of development by transforming the current model of tourism, improving destination competitiveness and sustainability and/or enhancing the performance of firms, which might ultimately be associated with growth and upgrading or up-scaling processes (Gereffi 1999).

Along these lines, and without underestimating the central role of path dependence as a useful mechanism to explain change and the configuration of evolutionary trajectories (Strambach and Halkier 2013), there are other powerful notions that might elucidate the well-documented emergent, continually transforming and essentially contingent nature of destinations' evolutionary trajectories (Agarwal 2012). For instance, Gill and Williams (2011, 2014) took the notion of path creation (Garud and Karnøe 2001) as an explanatory framework for both the deliberated and agency-driven processes adopted in the case of Whistler, British Columbia, to increase the sustainability of the resort while adopting a highly responsive global strategy. Alternatively, Halkier and Therkelsen (2013), from a path plasticity perspective (Strambach and Halkier 2013; Strambach 2010), emphasized the possibility of incremental innovations within established institutional settings as sources of readjustment enabling destinations to remain dynamic in the long run.

Complementarily, other tourism geographers studying the long-term dynamics of mature destinations labelled such effects with diverse terminologies that might also be taken into account in building up the path metaphor. This is the case of Agarwal (2002) when

applying the concept of restructuring to destination change processes or Anton Clavé (2012), who categorized three different types of destinations according to the (re) development strategies implemented by decision-makers: the *reactives*, who adopted policies of renewal, differentiation, heritage preservation, image improvement and maintenance of tourism activity; the *creatives*, who made innovative use of potential attractions and value innovation processes generated by their own residents and visitors; and finally, the *transitives*, who intensified their residential functions by incorporating more permanent urban services and making a transition towards the urban condition (Harvey 1989) as fully-fledged urban places, having previously evolved only as tourism resorts (see also Anton Clavé and Wilson 2012).

In parallel, similar proposals emphasizing the role of (pro)active policy intervention and institutions as a tool to favour regional resilience and develop new growth and development pathways have emerged recently within the field of EEG that could be applied to tourism places. Asheim, Bugge, Coenen, and Herstad (2013), for example, introduced the notions of *path renewal* as a process characterized by regional branching into new technological trajectories – and *path extension* – associated with the strengthening of existing industries by incremental process innovations geared to securing higher productivity. Others have analysed processes of downgrading/downscaling of destinations or even the abandonment of tourism as an industrial activity (Baum 1998). In this vein, Clivaz *et al.* (2014) introduce the concept of *abyss* to describe the total collapse of the tourism sector in a place without any economic alternative. Using the concept of *tourist capital of resorts*, the latter authors also discuss how collective agency can even suppose a metamorphic dynamic in relation to the conversion of resorts into urban places (*op cit*). In addition, in a third dimension of their threefold typology (beyond the possible outcomes of abyss and metamorphosis), Clivaz *et al.* (2014) refer to *relay* as the capacity of a resort to keep its

touristic attractiveness. All in all, based on Martin and Sunley's (2006: 408) claims, we argue that the path metaphor might be regarded as a heuristic approach,

*wherein the process of economic evolution could be understood as an ongoing, never-ending interplay of path dependence, path creation, [path plasticity] and path destruction that occurs as actors in different arenas reproduce, mindfully deviate from, and transform existing socio-economic-technological structures, socio-economic practices and development paths.*

In the context of the research conducted under the umbrella of the *path metaphor*, the specific catalysts for change – i.e. the incidents, events or decisions with an impact on destinations' evolutionary trajectories – have generated a significant body of research using different but related terminologies. Baggio and Sainaghi (2011), employing a complex systems lens, pointed out the effects of natural or anthropogenic, external or internal triggering events in challenging existing structures and the current states of destinations and even move them to a new (non-permanent) order. Similarly, Ritchie *et al.* (2013) emphasized the spillover effects of crisis-related events – either crises, which they consider are caused by lack of management and anticipation, or disasters, which can only be responded to in retrospect – and demonstrated that such disaster events not only have negative outcomes, which may be the most salient but also positive ones such as incentives to innovate and anticipate future similar situations. In the same vein, Mariotti and Zirulia (2014) explored adaptive (or evolutionary) resilience as enacted by public and private strategies in a local tourism destination to respond to a negative shock. Hall (2010), dealing with the notion of crisis events also raises more pertinent insights into this issue.

However, above all, it seems the literature on specific catalysts for change is mostly oriented towards analysing critical, external and unexpected shocks or events – such as natural disasters or economic crises – while leaving an uncovered gap, which concerns those



moments beyond the natural environment and general economic trends, principally social and cultural ones. Such an issue is reflected increasingly in urban social geography (Bianchi 2012; Moulaert *et al* 2007; see in particular Sum and Jessop 2013; Ribera-Fumaz 2009, on cultural political economy), where there is a gradual engagement with the ideas of path dependence and path creation and concern for *inter alia* the analysis of selective moments in urban socio-economic change (Moulaert *et al.* 2007), policy intervention, institutional change and key agencies, causing initially-dependent economic paths to shift in a different direction. These new approaches are opening up new avenues in the tourism research agenda (Bramwell 2011; Mosedale 2011).

To address these issues, we put forward the notion of *moments*, conceived of as given points in time (and space) signalling shifts in the development pathways of tourism places. We argue that analysis of such moments over the course of destination evolution is a useful endeavour *in addition* to studying a given evolutionary trajectory, lifecycle or simply the end results of path plasticity/creation processes in action. This might be useful in answering more nuanced questions, for example the one raised by Randelli *et al.* (2014: 277) in a rural tourism context when asking: ‘...in an evolutionary scenario, who [is it that] drives the change?’. This is clearly an important question in EEG and we might add to this who/whom the question of *what* drives the change, and *when*, *where* and *how*. In encompassing this complex vision of triggers for change in evolution and their resultant impacts, the term *moments* is seen to be more holistic and multi-faceted than other, more traditional terminologies. The following section will unravel the thinking behind this new conceptual framework we propose.

### **Moments in path shaping trajectories**

The aim of this section is to debate how the concept of *moments* might be useful as a heuristic device in understanding how destinations evolve as places. The starting point for advancing

this concept was the question of whether more attention should be paid to what happens at (and between) the key points of change in the evolutionary trajectory of a destination. Synonymous with these key points in this sense, moments are proposed as path-shaping evolutionary inflection points that cause a particular path (trajectory) to shift in direction and focus, rather like a join-the-dots exercise. In this sense, the moments idea is conceived as a response to the tendency to only focus on the impact of one key moment (e.g., a shock) in destination evolution, when perhaps it would be pertinent to conceptualize and contextualize the various moments or path shifts of any given destination, considering the role and the components of the before, during and after each moment in their evolutionary trajectory. This will be discussed and illustrated later in the chapter when analysing the whole course of one of the key moments of the evolution of the two central Costa Daurada towns where the PortAventura theme park is located.

#### *Moments as evolutionary inflection points*

In differential calculus, an inflection point is a point on a curve at which the curvature or concavity changes sign from plus to minus or from minus to plus. In considering evolution as path shaping (Bramwell 2011; Jessop 2008), or even in terms of the impacts and shifts that might take place caused by the onset of a given moment, the inflection point analogy is a useful one.

The moments concept is, of course, imbued with multiple meanings and displays considerable complexity. Clearly, however, each moment is entirely unique in terms of its characteristics, in that there are a multitude of parameters that they might display and catalytic or transformative functions that they might perform. Their complex nature also depends on whether they constitute primarily a causative trigger or a consequential impact, suggesting that many moments might be binary in nature. Consider, for example, whether some moments are path-creating, while others are path-plastic in nature, according to their

eventual effects. In terms of their impacts (or outcomes), these effects might either be instantaneous like switching a light on or off (creation) or more gradual/incremental, like a huge ocean liner changing course slowly but surely and then regaining speed (plasticity), hereby suggesting that there are many dimensions to consider.

Attention will now be turned to the discourses surrounding the moment and the range of parameters and characteristics that such moments might display. Having established that moments are probably much more than snapshots of particular significant points in time, we argue that it is also possible to identify different types of moment depending on their characteristics, range, scale and orientation. For instance, they might be the result of a planned initiative or spontaneous, or driven by a top-down or bottom-up process, be regulatory or resource-based; endogenous or exogenous. Finally, they could engender different types of change in relation to “pre-lock-in” or “pre-moment” conditions – recuperation, abandonment, reinforcement, renewal, extension or transition, for example.

The intensity of the moment may also be important, as observed above, with some being path-creating (more radical) and others path-plastic (more incremental). What seems to remain clear is that the understanding and narrating of moments requires local context specificity to prevail. Moulaert *et al.* (2007: 196) observe (with reference to path dependence and cultural political economy approaches) a ‘...tendency to overlook the fact that development is deeply historical, place-specific and embedded within specific and concrete institutional settings’. They also advocate use of social innovation approaches which, they argue, give ‘...fuller consideration to the path-dependent and context-bounded nature of urban development strategies’ (197) (see also Sum and Jessop, 2013), providing further justification for a more in-depth, nuanced reading of evolutionary trajectories by zoning in on particular moments therein.

### *Discourses of the moments in the path metaphor*

Figure 5.1 provides a visualization of the kinds of discourses that might be associated with the path metaphor in relation to a given moment; it should be read and understood sequentially from left to right in a timeline manner. Starting on the far left, there is the PRE-MOMENT SCAPE (taking a conceptual cue from Williams 2013, on scapes and flows and Van der Duim's 2007, notion of tourism-scapes; see also Van der Duim, Ren, and Thór Jóhannesson 2012). This is the contextual domain in which everything that might have a bearing on the subsequent nature of the moment is considered; be they pre-conditioning factors and situations, prior economic, social, environmental, political and cultural conditions (and tendencies) and indeed, pre-cursor/prior moments (which might be termed secondary or peripheral moments). Also present are the underlying contextual “impetus” narratives (at different scales), which relate to the origins of a given moment and which shape the discourses associated with the subsequent shift in path. These narratives may be hegemonic or alternative in nature; top-down or more grassroots and the extent of their influence will ultimately depend on their degree of place-embeddedness in the local context.

Next, our conceptual framework anticipates that at some point within the space and time context of the pre-moment scape, there will be a TRIGGER incident of some kind. The second column from the left deals with these triggers and sets out what form they might take in relation to a given moment. Butler (2014: 218) terms them ‘key agents of change in a resort that affect the transition process from one stage of development to another’ and argues that these have not been dealt with to any real extent in tourism research. He also states that it would be of great value to destinations if it were possible to identify and anticipate situations and events which might act as triggers to such unrest and stage change in the life cycle (citing Gale and Botterill 2005).

For the purposes of our framework, the main dichotomy in relation to the nature of triggers is whether they are spontaneous or selective (taking a cue from Moulaert *et al.* 2007). As outlined above, most previous conceptualizations have only really dealt with the spontaneous kind, in terms of critical shock-type events, although such spontaneous triggers need not be so radical in nature. In terms of spontaneous triggers, these may relate to environmental, economic [fiscal], physical factors or even, to a lesser extent, unexpected and/or unpredictable outcomes of social, cultural or political processes. Spontaneous triggers may also be external or internal; endogenous or exogenous and occur at different scales (local/regional/national/international/global). They may be more structural or relate to agency and anthropogenic factors, while they may also be catalytic and stimulatory or incapacitating and debilitating in the first instance.

Selective triggers, by contrast, do not depend on a shock occurrence (although arguably they may emerge in response to a prior moment based on a spontaneous trigger). More likely to be based on decisions made, they may relate to structural factors or be agency-driven and more anthropogenic in nature. Furthermore, despite being selective (hence intentional) they might still take on an interventionist orientation or perhaps be more incidental or unintentional (albeit selective). The underlying stimuli for selective triggers might be regulatory and fiscal [investment]-driven or possibly resource-driven. In terms of policy-related selective moments, their impetus may be ad-hoc and responsive or more strategic, coming from endogenous or exogenous forces. In terms of originators, the moment may be triggered selectively on an institutional level or be individual and/or community-led, while triggers may also be embedded in the local context or have a more globalizing effect. Finally, selective triggers may be generated from consensus or having been imposed from the top down, while the kind of industrial diversification, or variety, they might trigger may be related or unrelated to the existing economic base (Frenken, Van Oort, and Verburg 2007).

The central column in Figure 5.1 relates to the characteristics and dimensions of the actual MOMENT in which the shift in path is caused. The elements that might come into play at this point in the process are mostly related to the specific characteristics of the inflection point; the moment in which the path shifts in direction in response to a given trigger or triggers. Among the most important characteristics are the durability, scale and speed of the moment in which the shift takes place – ranging from instantaneous/immediate to prolonged/longer-term; from macro to micro scale (global to local) and rapid, gradual or incipient (returning to the metaphor of the light switch and the ocean liner discussed above). By extension, the moment may represent a permanent or temporary catalyst for change (note that this refers to the nature of the actual point of change, rather than the permanence or otherwise of the subsequent effects that stem from it – which is discussed later). There is also the question of whether the moment sets a reversible or irreversible process in motion, as well as whether the scope of the moment is radical/incremental (and this latter point would determine whether a moment might be described as path creating or path plastic). Similarly, the relative intensity of the shift is also a necessary consideration, in terms of whether the moment represents a more subtle or more intense shift in direction.

The second column from the right deals with discourses surrounding the IMPACTS that the moment generates once it has happened. If we were to think about impacts as underlying narratives of moments in path evolution, we might talk about such impacts as consequential processes leading to path shaping effects and indeed, to new processes. In conceptualizing the narratives of these impacts as outcomes of a moment (or moments), again one might distinguish between a number of different characteristics and associated discourses of change. To begin with, there is the question of whether the resultant impacts have an overall stabilizing or destabilizing effect post-moment and also whether this results in the shaping of single path or multiple paths in parallel. Beyond this, there would appear to be a

dichotomy of impacts – those relating to upgrading/up-scaling effects and those relating to downgrading/downscaling effects.

Firstly, possible upgrading and upscaling discourses may centre on processes of renewal, the (selective or forced) recuperation of pre-lock-in economic activities, reinforcement of existing industrial bases, extension of successful elements, reversal of problematic elements, transition (which may involve a shift to either related or un-related variety of the economic base), and of course, innovation in its many possible manifestations. Conversely, downgrading and/or downscaling impact discourses may stem from processes of creative destruction (possibly in a ‘slash and burn’, more radical manner following a major shock), dissolution (a more incremental effect), complete abandonment of existing elements and finally, the (temporary) suspension of economic elements that have undergone stagnation. Finally, redevelopment, metamorphosis and restructuring could also represent new paths, not only for tourism in the destination but for the destination as a fully-fledged place in its own right (see Anton Clavé and Wilson 2012; Anton Clavé 2012; Clivaz *et al.* 2014).

**[FIGURE 5.1 ABOUT HERE - LANDSCAPE]**

The final column of the table (on far right hand side) is that of the POST-MOMENT SCAPE. This phase relates essentially to longer-term outcomes, which may represent a new context(s); new economic landscapes evidenced by a clearly identifiable shift in path. There may be subsequent ‘knock-on’ moments to come in the future and these will not only depend on the nature of the prior moment (or moments) which shaped them but also on the geographical and historical local specificity of the place in question. The future paths that permeate the post-moment scape may also be based on hegemonic narratives or alternative narratives. Just like in earlier phases, new processes may stem from top-down or grassroots initiatives or stimuli and the direction they take will depend on their degree of place-

embeddedness and whether the resultant variety of flows will be related or unrelated to earlier economic, political, social, cultural and environmental situations. In this sense, the post-moment scape effectively becomes the pre-moment scape of future moments.

Finally, running beneath the framework are the FLOWS, which pass through the entire process in a fluid manner, not necessarily in a linear sense, and which almost certainly will contribute to sending the path shaping process in one direction or another.

It is argued that these different phases as represented by the columns in the framework, as well as the underlying flows, amount to a more nuanced and complex manner of understanding the evolution of (tourism) places. Moreover, there is scope for this conceptual framework – developed in the context of tourism destinations – to be adapted and applied to other economic landscapes and contexts that have been theorized via the *path metaphor*, with the aim of understanding what happens in path shaping terms between two given points of an evolutionary trajectory. To illustrate the capacity of this framework to explain path shaping processes centred on a given moment, the moments framework will now be applied to a specific case – the opening of the PortAventura theme park in Catalonia, on the Western Mediterranean coast.

### **Exploring discourses of moments**

Anton Clavé (2010) states that since its opening in 1995, the PortAventura theme park has played a key role in the development of Costa Daurada tourism region, situated in Southern Catalonia. The two towns in which the Park is located (Salou and Vila-seca) form part of one of the most visited destinations in the Mediterranean. In 2013, between them they received more than 2.1 million visitors staying in regulated accommodation that generated more than 9.1 million overnights, as well as the capacity of almost 30,000 second homes. More than a half million people live in the surrounding area of the theme park, making it the second most



dynamic economic cluster in Catalonia after the metropolitan area of Barcelona. The area is home to prominent chemical industries, port operations, tourism and food industry corporations and activities, and two medium cities, Tarragona and Reus respectively. There are about 50,000 permanent residents in Salou and Vila-seca which, until the late 1980s, counted as the same municipality.

The PortAventura theme park was developed in collaboration with both Vila-seca and Salou, as well as regional public agents. Both towns considered PortAventura (currently receiving around 3.5 million visitors per year) as the ideal promoter of a new image for the combined destination and as a tool for the reorganization of the destination's urban structure (Anton Clavé 2005). The setting of the Park was planned in the 1980s and its development was afforded the benefits of a law as regards the concession of available land (more than 825 ha) and possibilities for its expansion.

In applying the moments idea to this case, a chronology of events and the tangible results of the strategies of management, cooperation and development, promoted both by the public and by the private sectors, will be explained briefly in order to illustrate how the opening of PortAventura might be understood as a key moment in the path shaping of the central Costa Daurada as a tourism destination.

Figure 5.2 illustrates that even though the Park actually opened in 1995, the pre-conditioning contextual domain in which the PortAventura inauguration takes place, the PRE-MOMENT SCAPE, can be traced back to the beginning of the 1980s. Studies clearly reveal a lock-in situation for tourism activity in the area during the 1980s (Anton Clavé 1997a). One of the main reasons was the loss of appeal and competitiveness of the destination faced with the emergence of other newer, alternative coastal resorts, as well as the new range of demand trends and tourism motivations seen in the 1980s. Other local problems exacerbating the lack of competitiveness for the tourism sector in the area included the

proximity of a large scale and intensive petrochemical industry located nearby and the extension of the industrial and commercial Port of Tarragona. Add to this the considerable pollution associated with the Port that affected the beach and the water supply problems for the whole area, which influenced negatively the quality of life of the local population as well as the day-to-day economic activities of the many industries located in the area.

Nevertheless, thanks to a collective envisioning of the conditions underlying these social, economic, cultural and environmental tendencies, several actions and strategies were undertaken, both to ensure the economic viability of the area (including a major water transfer from the nearby river Ebro, about 80 km south of the area) and, in the specific case of the tourism industry, to rejuvenate the tourism product in the area. During the 1980s, with healthier municipal public finances, a promising economic outlook and greater collaboration between private initiative and the municipal institution, initiatives were taken within the tourism sector with the aim of promoting new hotel developments and the creation of recreational facilities as means of renewing the destination's amenities (Ros Santasusana 2012). These initial actions were accompanied by urban restructuring and public infrastructural improvements. These might be understood as prior actions trying to generate some path plasticity to combat the rigidity of the existing pathway that was heading towards a lock-in situation. In fact, an increasing level of public involvement can be identified since the 1980s, years before PortAventura was even planned.

**[FIGURE 5.2 ABOUT HERE - PORTRAIT]**

The *moments* conceptual framework anticipates the existence of TRIGGER incidents that were spontaneous and/or selective - that is, not dependent on a shock occurrence but related to structural factors or agency-driven. Among the spontaneous factors in this case are Walt Disney World's plans to create a theme park in Catalonia during the 1980s before eventually deciding to locate their European park in Paris. Local and regional stakeholders

considered the area to be a serious candidate for the location of the European Disney park and the decision of the company to locate it in Paris stimulated the idea that having a top tourism attraction could be a catalyst for releasing the place from its lock-in. Secondly, it was the availability of enough well-located land ready for developing a new concept of recreational and tourist activity, which stemmed from a conflictive process of negotiating the new urban plan for the area during the 1980s. Due to this, the approval of the plan was delayed and the more than 825 ha area where the future Park would be located remained available without any specific development purpose designated. Finally, coinciding chronologically with the decision to situate the Park in the area, the separation of Salou, the richest and more tourism-oriented part of the former municipality of Vila-seca i Salou, and the 1989 creation of two new local administrations also represented a strong trigger. Although spontaneous, in the sense that these factors were not driven with a theme park development objective in mind, all of three were triggers that created the conditions, following a process of incidental intervention, both endogenous and exogenous in impetus, that left a specific environment ready for the creation of PortAventura (see also Campa and Veses 2012; Oliveras 2012; and Ros Santasusana 2012 for more detail).

In terms of selective triggers, there was the political will on the part of the Catalan Government and of the local municipal administrations of Vila-seca (and after the separation, Salou) to respond to the need to transform an outdated model of tourism and leisure that was hegemonic in Catalonia during the 1980s. This political will also led to the implementation of a novel legal framework for both Spain and Europe, which gave an incentive to develop and regulate a theme park in a manner that, at that time, was relatively groundbreaking (Anton Clavé 1997b). Besides the theme park, hotels, residences, shopping centres and golf and other sport areas were also envisaged, as well as the creation of the Vila-seca i Salou Tourism and Leisure Centre Consortium, an inter-administrative tool developed as a response to the

separation of Salou in order to manage and regulate the development of the Park and the complementary commercial, recreational, sporting, hotel and residential activities that were planned around it (Fuentes and Rodríguez 2012).

On 2nd May 1995, PortAventura in its present guise was officially opened to the general public. This event can be understood as a symbolic representation of the actual MOMENT in which the shift in path is caused for the central Costa Daurada. The characteristics and dimensions of the Park are the direct result of and the response to the spontaneous and selective triggers which had played a prior role. Additionally, we must mention the initial choice of the US company Anheuser Busch as the developer of the project in 1989, plus the several setbacks and challenges such as the separation of Salou, the negotiations with landowners and also the strategies of new players that entered as new developers between 1989 and 1995, such as the Grand Tibidabo Corporation, the utilities company FECSA, the Catalan savings bank (La Caixa), and the British group Pearson. Furthermore, there was the new legal framework enacted to determine the development course of the project. Since then, PortAventura has been undergoing a phase of expansion which is heading in the direction of transforming the initial Park into a larger tourism and leisure complex by developing new concepts and generating wider opportunities for the economy of the area, as well as conditioning the whole urban and spatial pattern of the local and regional area where the Park is located.

New players have since entered into the management of the project, most notably Universal Studios (between 1998 and 2004), the Italian group Bonomi (part of Invest Industrial and currently the main stakeholder) (in 2009) and the US investment fund KKR (in 2013). New attractions have been developed within the Park since 1998, including a new waterpark, four 500-room hotels, a Beach Club located on the sea front, three golf courses with 45 holes and a Convention Centre. The most important factors in the case of

PortAventura as a key moment in the recent path shaping of Salou and Vila-seca, as well as in Catalonia in general, are its durability (around a 20-year span of creating new conditions for tourism development activity), scale (both local and regional) and speed (a sustained and long term gradual process of creating innovations and adding new components to the tourism and leisure value chain generated in the area). This represents an ongoing catalyst for change that has set an irreversible incremental process in motion, which can be described as path plastic and whose impacts, as we will see in the next section, lead to the upgrading/upscaling of the whole destination and also foster the destinations' transformation into a fully-fledged urban places, rather than just resorts.

As Campa and Veses (2012) describe, the Costa Daurada (as well as both Vila-seca and Salou therein and indeed, the whole of Catalonia), has not been unaffected by the large influx of visitors to PortAventura over the past 20 years. The most relevant IMPACTS are of course related to the upgrading/upscaling in the tourism sector, including the reconfiguration of the dominant demand markets to the area and the increasing quality of supply markets and, as a consequence, the increasing profitability of the industry. Other than this, PortAventura has generated diverse and multiple paths in parallel, according to the characteristics and prior path dependency of each specific place which falls under the influence of the Park. In fact, differences can be observed and differential co-evolution processes are visible between the two different municipalities where the Park is located and also in comparison to other local destinations and surrounding places that fall under the Park's sphere of influence too. The two core municipalities are dependent on their respective public and private strategies held by institutions and stakeholders to take advantage of and respond to the opportunities created by the Park development and as such, their current situations are not the same, even if the path shaping moment for both of them was exactly the same. For example, it has been documented that Vila-seca constitutes an example of the implementation of a successful public-private

partnership, enabling the creation of a cluster of high quality hotels (Duro 2012). As a result, in 2013 Vila-seca had a RevPar (revenue per available room) of almost 80€ during the summer period, achieving sixth position in a ranking of the 53 more outstanding coastal tourism destinations in Spain, while Salou's RevPar was only 63.35€, achieving 23<sup>rd</sup> position in the same ranking.

More generally, the PortAventura project has clearly stimulated the economy of Southern Catalonia by boosting not only the creation of new hotels or new shopping centres and recreational activities in the area and shifting the demand profile towards a more affluent and family-oriented appeal, but it has also accelerated the development of major transport infrastructure (new dual-carriageways, a new terminal at Reus airport, the AVE high speed train link, among others), as well as the expansion of new unrelated activities and technical and knowledge services, plus new commodity suppliers, linked to the development of the Park . In the latter sense, the Park has also been committed to an initiative creating the University School of Tourism and Leisure at the Rovira i Virgili University (now the Faculty of Tourism and Geography) and the Tourism Observatory of the Costa Daurada, launched at the beginning of the 2000s. Interestingly, PortAventura has managed to achieve a level of brand and product visibility only attainable by very few projects and even some of its iconic rides, like Dragon Khan for example, have become a part of everyday parlance, part of the symbolic effects of theme parks as quality tags for specific places, as analysed by Zukin (1991).

More specifically, environmental concerns have been already taken into account by Park managers and the Park has been a champion of corporate environmental awareness. An Environmental Committee was set up from the outset and the good practices implemented have filtered through the rest of the company, the rest of the industry and even to other industrial sectors that realize the importance of a clean and unpolluted environment in order

the ensure the quality of life of the resident population and the wellbeing of visitors. Additionally, PortAventura has become a company that promotes actions related with its immediate social environment (see Campa and Veses 2012 for examples).

PortAventura is arguably a key component of the new economic landscape of Southern Catalonia in terms of shaping the POST-MOMENT SCAPE in the destination. Firstly, it should be emphasized that PortAventura has brought about a major change in the Costa Daurada's leisure and tourism model, and to a lesser extent (but equally noteworthy) in that of the rest of Catalonia and even that of Spain. Future paths of the area are visibly shaped by the characteristics and dimensions of the post-moment path shaped by PortAventura, which in turn is modelling the geographical and historical local specificity of the place. The *moments* conceptual framework maintains that future paths may be based on hegemonic narratives or alternative narratives and new processes both from the top-down or at grassroots levels with the aim of configuring new moments triggered themselves by the creation of PortAventura. In this sense, future achievements will depend (as with the configuration of PortAventura's current scape) on the dimensions, characteristics and scale of new events yet to occur and on the discussion and debate held by society directly or through their political representatives. The current shift towards an increasingly diversified economy, the intensification of the urban and residential function of the tourism destination, and the increasing awareness about future possible paths among residents are new components of the post-moment scape created directly by the opening of PortAventura. With regard to this, for instance, new social debate in the area is of utmost interest. In particular, the question of how and to what extent new entertainment developments proposed for the wider entertainment complex where PortAventura is located (which include casino-based gaming and other shopping and hotel developments) fit or not with the currently hegemonic narrative of the place as a tourist destination for family holidays, having adopted PortAventura as an iconic

symbol (see Anton Clavé and Baron Yelles 2014). Results will depend in this case (as will results related to other industrial sectors in the area) on the degree of place-embeddedness of the new projects and, as stated in earlier sections, on the resultant variety of flows and their relationships with earlier economic, political, social, cultural and environmental situations. In this sense, the post-moment scape created by PortAventura becomes the pre-moment scape of future moments.

Flows running beneath the entire process illustrate that evolution is not just based on the dimensions and characteristics of processes but, fundamentally, on the inherent policies, instruments, initiatives and programmes that both private and public stakeholders develop in the context of one specific moment. Flows include culture, knowledge, capital, labour, demand markets, global players, tactical approaches, social debates and political short and long termism. One fundamental issue here, thus, is that the transformation of destinations stems from responses by local systems to the needs brought about by global market changes, having many implications for the management of destinations as multi-sectorial regional and local spaces.

All in all, the case of PortAventura highlights the usefulness of analysing how flows materialize in specific contextual scapes, and the question of how moments are triggered (and become triggers themselves) is fundamental in helping to explain the development of moments whose impacts will shape the future of one specific destination. Depending on the nature of the place, the power of such flows and the dimension, characteristics, range and scale of the moment, they can have clear effects, due to their direct and indirect impacts, on the path shaping of the destination and even on the creation of a new unrelated (and perhaps more urban) variety, as Clivaz *et al* (2012) or Anton Clavé (2012) argue when affirming that resorts do not always necessarily remain as resorts forever.



## Conclusions

In this chapter we have presented a conceptual framework of *moments* that draws upon evolutionary economic geography approaches in order to aid understanding of how the trajectory of a given place (in this case, a destination) is shaped, within a geographical and historical conjuncture, via the specific events that affect their dynamics. The framework is intended as an heuristic device that focuses attention on moments as complex, context-bound processes that include several marked elements therein: pre- and post-scapes, triggers and impacts.

We argue that the moments concept has scope to go beyond the domain of other constructs such as, for example, the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC), which as Gale and Botterill (2005) note is a resort model and hence less applicable to urban industrial and rural areas that have turned to tourism for the purposes of economic (re)development or to restructured resorts. As it is derived in a non-deterministic vein and not limited to being a resort ‘model’ in any sense, the *moments* conceptual framework has the potential to address various shortcomings of the TALC by, for example, not defining the shape of a “global” evolutionary curve as applicable to all tourism places and instead, allowing analysis of individual places according to their own specific trajectories and key moments therein. Furthermore, the *moments* framework allows analysis of the evolution of tourism destinations *as places*, rather than focusing on the evolution of tourism *in* destinations, as the TALC does. Indeed, in principle the framework could be applied to any place and any industrial sector and so it is more flexible and transferable not only as a theoretical concept but also as a planning tool for understanding how and why places transform.

All in all, we have used the conceptual framework presented in this chapter to understand what might trigger key moments in the evolutionary path shaping of places, as well as the associated how, why, when and where of the idea. As a result, upgrading,

conversion and downgrading impacts have been identified, entrenching the moments idea within various conceptual notions. Some of these originally developed from outside the evolutionary economic geography domain, but nonetheless have considerable utility in understanding the trigger effects of a given evolutionary path, path dependence, contextuality and human agency (Sanz-Ibáñez and Anton Clavé 2014), in terms of tourism performance evolution but also in terms of the transformation of (tourism) places.

Furthermore, path shaping impacts can unfold as path creation or path plasticity, which in turn creates new conditions defining the post-moment scape that, in a long term approach, may become the new pre-moment scape when new triggers of change start to act and new decisions are taken by stakeholders in the place. The dimension, scope, range and characteristics of flows of capital, knowledge, culture, labour, tendencies and demand markets will determine the specific response, or the characteristic moment of a given destination to the triggers that emerge in any historically given scape. In this sense, geography matters – as the role of spatial scale, historical embeddedness and political advocacy are key – as well as the relationship to pre-lock-in conditions, that is, inertial movement such as recuperation, abandonment, reinforcement, corrective, compensatory and resilience-building responses play central a role (plus, future research on this topic might also bear in mind the possibility that path shaping moments in some circumstances may have the effect of actually reinforcing prior path dependence).

We have argued that triggers and impacts are grounded in contextual environments that we term pre and post condition scapes, which following Moulaert *et al.* (2007: 203), ‘challenge established governance, discourse and projects and the extent to which they can lead to further and wider alternative social action’. This is obviously affected by the specific historical and geographical context of any local destination at any given moment, according to the inertia effects of its own past and present conditions. In this sense, we highlight the key

role that a certain moment can have in the shaping of markedly (even if subtly) different paths for different destinations. This allows recognition of the co-evolutionary nature of long-term destination transformation change and how past decisions affect the capacity of response and influence for the future with regard to a specific key moment in the path shaping process.

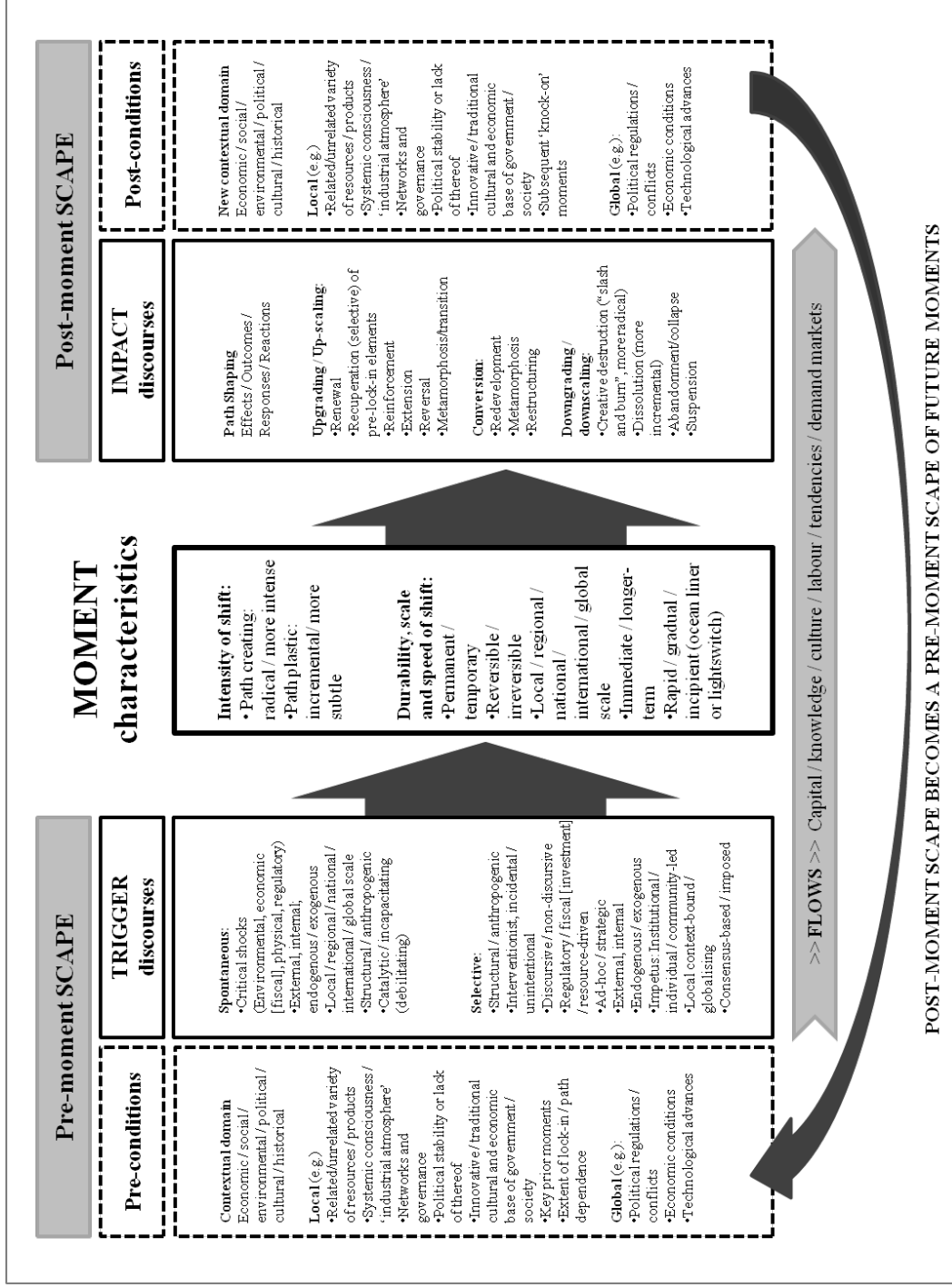
Additionally, the conceptual framework presented in this chapter allows the integration of several perspectives that are supported by an increasing body of both theoretical and empirical multi-disciplinary research on the evolution of destinations from the outside the core of evolutionary economic geography (and even including some conventional life cycle-related analysis). Moreover, the framework holds resonance with recent developments in urban social geography such as the cultural political economy approach (CPE) (Ribera-Fumaz 2009; Sum and Jessop 2013) to theorizing pathways in urban development. This is of utmost interest insofar as one of the very foundations of the *moments* framework is the recognition of the ‘urbanizing’ nature of many forms of tourism developments and destinations or, at least, the path towards a fledging urban condition of many tourism places (Anton Clavé 2012). In this vein, we support Clivaz *et al*’s (2014: 21) interpretation of the different resort trajectories as uneven and engaging differently constituted touristic capital as well as the conversion of this capital into other forms of capital seems an important step for a more thorough analysis and explanation of what happens to tourist resorts over a long period.

To demonstrate the utility of moments as an idea, we have drawn upon longitudinal empirical research undertaken on the effects of having situated the PortAventura theme park in a specific location on the central Costa Daurada destination and how this moment might be understood over the course of two whole decades of introducing innovations, development of changes and creation of unrelated paths in the planning and everyday reality of area, with a focus on the role of local and global stakeholders therein. This case demonstrates that a moments lens is appropriate and useful in understanding how change is produced instead of

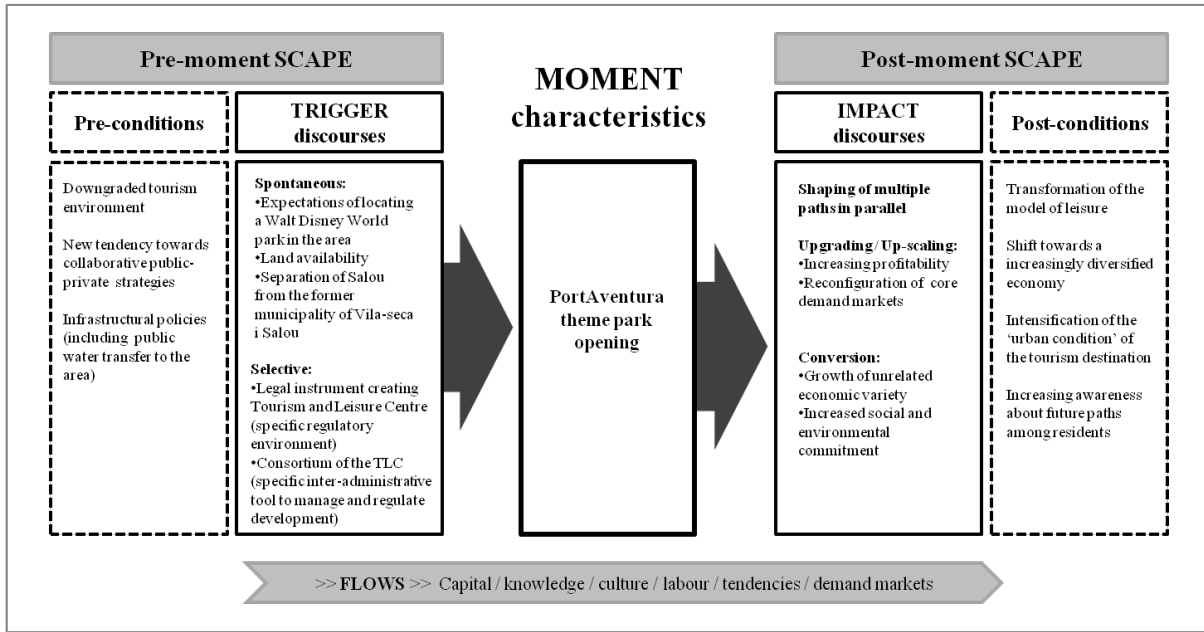
only evaluating the end results of path plasticity or path creation trajectories. It also demonstrates that a focus on positive moments as well as on negative, critical shocks may be applied.

In conclusion, beyond its specific application in this chapter, the *moments* conceptual framework is arguably broadly transferable, being adaptable to examine any aspect of tourism destination dynamics at any scale from the local to the global and at any period of time, allowing an integrated understanding of the succession of moments that can shape the trajectory of a destination. We maintain that the basic premises of the framework proposed here offer the opportunity to develop this idea according to the needs of other industrial and activity contexts, in terms of future research potential. The direction in which this idea shifts the debate on tourism evolution will be of interest within both evolutionary economic geography and tourism geographies.

**FIGURES**



**Figure 5.1 Discourses of the moments in tourism destination evolution. Source: Authors' design.**



**Figure 5.2** PortAventura as a *moment* in the evolution of the central Costa Daurada. *Source:* Authors' design.

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