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The evolution of tourism destinations: towards an evolutionary and relational economic geography approach

Abstract

Analytical approaches from emergent paradigms in Economic Geography –namely, Evolutionary Economic Geography and Relational Economic Geography – can help to advance and integrate extant research in tourism geography on destinations’ dynamics and organisation. Taking into account concepts such as human agency, contextuality and path dependence, the paper discusses the advantages in building an integrated evolutionary and relational economic geography approach to conceptualise Local Tourism Destinations’ evolution as a complex, path- and place-dependent process that is determined by the action and interaction of stakeholders and their ability to adapt or create new paths, as well as to survive in response to local and global changes. Hence, it discusses the bidirectional effects between stakeholder practices and Local Tourism Destinations’ evolutionary performance, as well as increasing the understanding of how and why destinations change over time, which is a valuable for policy formation and to improve Local Tourism Destinations’ competitiveness and sustainability. All in all, the paper presents theoretical insights from EEG and REG to facilitate understanding of the mechanisms underpinning the evolution of destinations. This presents an opportunity to integrate the geographical analysis of tourism destinations into mainstream thinking on Economic Geography.

Keywords: Evolutionary Economic Geography; Relational Economic Geography; Local Tourism Destinations; path dependence; human agency; contextuality; Tourism Area Life Cycle; industrial districts; clusters; Tourism Geography

Introduction

During the last decade, research in Economic Geography has revealed new perspectives for analysing the evolution and organisation of productive places in industrial contexts, particularly in terms of Evolutionary Economic Geography (EEG) (Boschma & Frenken, 2006), and Relational Economic Geography (REG) (Bathelt & Glückler, 2003).

Bearing in mind that a number of studies explicitly state the weaknesses of conventional models in Tourism Geography as explanatory tools to interpret the evolutionary and relational performance of destinations, this paper proposes the integration of the geographical analysis of tourism destination evolution into the Economic Geography mainstream, by exploring how EEG and REG might add value to tourism studies (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013a; Williams, 2013). This should bring new insights for understanding how – and particularly, why – Local Tourism Destinations change over time, while shedding light on questions such as why some destinations experience a sudden growth and others undergo a more progressive path of development? Or why some tourist places manage to rejuvenate and enhance their competitiveness while others cannot adapt themselves to the constant changes of the global tourism market? Besides, closer theoretical connections between the two fields would contribute to minimising the peripheral position of Tourism Geography within Economic Geography (Agarwal, Ball, Shaw, & Williams, 2000; Britton, 1991; Ioannides, 1995).

The paper is structured as follows: section two illustrates the origins, aims and scope of EEG and REG, as well as their main points of convergence. In section three, the previous literature on the evolution and organisation of tourism destinations is reviewed briefly. Section four presents the new perspectives on studying the evolution and organisation of Local Tourism Destinations from an EEG-REG integrated approach. In the concluding section, the paper summarises the potential contributions of the evolutionary-relational approach proposed and identifies some challenges for future research arising from the adoption of this novel approach in the tourism domain.

Emergent Paradigms in Economic Geography

Since the 1980s, but especially in recent years, many economic geographers have claimed the need to renew and consolidate the epistemological and methodological foundations of Economic Geography in order to respond to the new realities induced by contemporary capitalism and globalisation (Benner et al., 2011). Additionally, there has been a controversial debate about whether Economic Geography should be more interdisciplinary and take ideas from social, political and cultural studies (Amin & Thrift, 2000) or lean more towards conventional neoclassical models of economics (Krugman, 1991). In this context, a trend towards evolutionary and relational approaches has gained increasing influence during the last decade, to the extent that its major contributors consider Evolutionary Economic

Geography (Boschma & Frenken, 2006; Boschma & Martin, 2007) and Relational Economic Geography (Bathelt & Glückler, 2003) as two potential new paradigms.

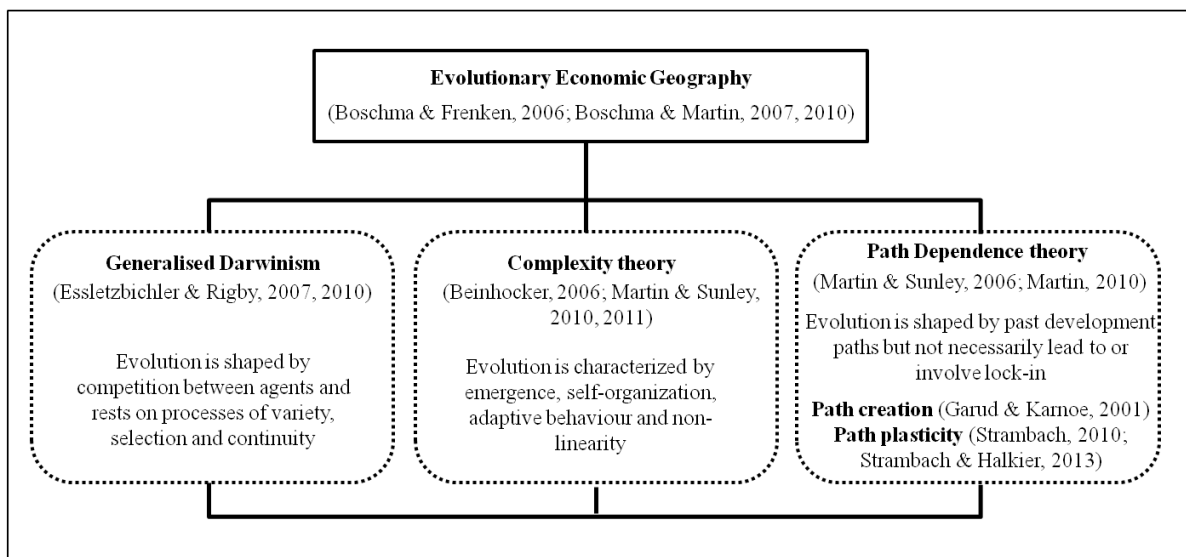
The origins, aims and scope of Evolutionary Economic Geography

In the early 2000s some European scholars identified a coverage gap in Economic Geography: the analysis of economic landscapes from a historical perspective (Boschma & Frenken, 2006). These authors – profoundly influenced by Nelson & Winter’s (1982) Theory of the Firm – explored the adoption of ideas from the ‘evolutionary turn’ in economics (Witt, 2003), as well as evolutionary ideas in a more global sense, and began to build EEG as a potential-distinctive agenda.

EEG’s basic concern is to help interpret and explain how and why the economic landscape is transformed over time (Boschma & Martin, 2010). In other words, EEG aims to improve the understanding of the forces behind economic change, adaptation and novelty in the spatial organisation of economic production, distribution and consumption, and the effects of the spatial structures themselves on the forces driving economic evolution (Boschma & Martin, 2007). Thus, EEG scholars, in contrast to previous work, see economic space as socially-constructed and influenced by path and place-dependent processes.

There are three major approaches – with some overlaps and hybridations – considered worth investigating in building up EEG’s theoretical framework: Generalised Darwinism, Complexity theory and Path Dependence theory (Boschma & Martin, 2007, 2010) (Figure 1).

Figure 1. EEG approaches. *Source:* authors’ design, inspired by Boschma & Martin, 2010.



The first and the most frequently invoked contribution is based on the translation of ideas from modern evolutionary biology (Essletzbichler & Rigby, 2010). Generalised Darwinism argues that the evolution of regions –as *selection environments* – is shaped by competition between agents and rests on the principles of variety, novelty, selection and continuity (Boschma & Martin, 2010). Thus, it is focused on analysing the evolution of population on

inter- and intra-regional level. Some authors doubt the applicability of these analogies to socio-economic contexts due to the relegation of institutions, social agency and power relations (MacKinnon, Cumbers, Pike, Birch, & McMaster, 2009). Others such as Hodgson (2009) admit that some of the Darwinian analogies could require additional explanations but demonstrate that Darwinism ‘implies, rather than denies, institutions’ (p.170), so is an approach worthy of exploration.

Turning to Complexity Theory, first developed in non-equilibrium thermodynamics and years later applied in economics (Beinhocker, 2006), this approach has received less attention compared to the others, but researchers are increasingly taking it as a reference point (Martin & Sunley, 2010, 2011). Complexity thinking considers that the economic landscape has common features with complex adaptive systems and, therefore, their evolution is not only far-from-equilibrium but could also be explained by processes of emergence, self-organisation and adaptation. Nowadays this approach is considered to be a valuable contribution to philosophical conceptualisations of EEG but some reservations have been expressed over the tendency to use mathematical modelling (Boschma & Martin, 2010).

Finally, the third approach takes the notion of Path Dependence (Arthur, 1988; David, 1985) – associated with place dependence – as a fundamental principle in explaining the evolution of the economic landscape (Martin & Sunley, 2006). In this case, scholars argue that ‘history matters’ in shaping development paths but does not necessarily lead to or involve lock-in (Hassink, 2005), so path dependence can have both positive and negative effects (Martin, 2010). Related to this notion, many authors have suggested concepts such as path creation (Garud & Karnoe, 2001) and path plasticity (Strambach, 2010; Strambach & Halkier, 2013) to stress ongoing change – radical and incremental, respectively – emphasising the role of human agency in recombining existing configurations as resources for the adaptation of the economic landscape.

Given the embryonic stage of development of this pluralist potential paradigm, there is much debate on the conceptual and empirical challenges that engender the translation of evolutionary notions into the analysis of economic landscapes (see Grabher, 2009, for an overview of the debate). Nevertheless, research carried out to date shows evidence that an evolutionary perspective could offer new insights to explain the emergence of agglomerations and regional growth differences. Therefore, it is worth evaluating the contributions and limitations of the different theoretical frameworks, the due care of appropriate ontological transfers (Essletzbichler, 2009) and the emergent links with notions such as ‘resilience’ (Martin & Sunley, 2013) in articulating such a promising field.

The origins, aims and scope of Relational Economic Geography

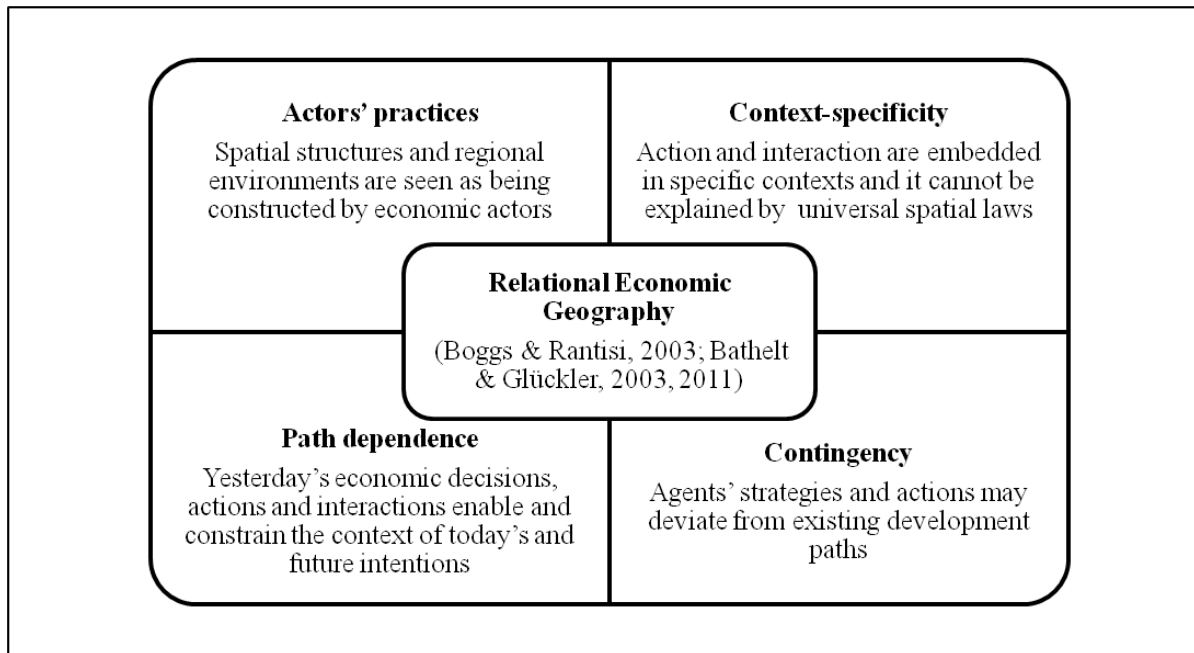
Research that aims to understand the role of social interaction between economic actors in shaping the geographies of production has increased in recent decades (Boggs & Rantisi, 2003). This has been in parallel to the growth in evolutionary thinking and also coincides with organisational changes of economic activity in late capitalism – characterised by the restructuring and globalisation of productive processes and the consequent emergence of new forms of coordination among increasingly specialised firms.

Contributions to this relational thinking come from different but related bodies of research within Economic Geography, such as the relational construction of spatial identity (Amin & Thrift, 2000; Massey, 1984), the works of the Californian school in relation to the ‘windows of locational opportunity’ and ‘untraded interdependencies’ (Scott, 1988; Storper & Walker, 1989). Further contributions have come from economic sociology, such as the notions of embeddedness and trust-based relations (Granovetter, 1985). All of these contributions have in common a strong opposition to neoclassical models, the aim of including the ‘social’ in economic analysis, plus a critique of the conception of space as a real actor with an explanatory role in location decisions (Boggs & Rantisi, 2003).

Although these contributions could be interpreted as a relational turn in Economic Geography, Bathelt and Glückler (2003) considered that they did not establish a well-defined theoretical framework, so they developed conceptualisation as such, taking Storper’s work (1997) as a point of departure. According to them, REG’s goal is to analyse how production systems are organised and why does this organisation vary in different locations. More specifically, REG is concerned about the social and spatial division and integration of labour (organisation); the positive and negative impact of historical structures, processes and events on today’s decisions (evolution); processes of knowledge creation and dissemination and the effects of technological change (innovation); and, last but not least, the interactions between economic agents and the formal and informal institutions that stimulate and restrict them (interaction) (Bathelt & Glückler, 2003, 2011).

This approach (Figure 2) considers space a socially-constructed entity and, as such, the intentions, strategies and practices of economic actors and ensembles of actors are a central object of interest. Secondly, this framework claims the context-specificity of human action; thus context is viewed as both creator and constrainer of opportunities for economic action and interaction. Along the same lines of scholars in EEG, REG also regards past decisions, actions and interactions – path dependence – as explanatory variables for understanding the present and future characteristics of economic landscapes. Finally, REG introduces the concept of contingency into its epistemological foundations, so it recognises that economic decisions are neither predetermined nor predictable (Bathelt & Glückler, 2003).

Figure 2. Pillars of REG perspective. *Source:* authors' design, inspired by Bathelt and Glückler, 2003, and Boggs and Rantisi, 2003.



The aim to constitute REG as a genuine new prospect for future research in Economic Geography has been subject to scrutiny (Jones, 2013). Some critiques are: the lack of specificity and extreme abstraction (Sunley, 2008); the under-theorisation of power relations (Yeung, 2005); the focus on firms rather than individuals in micro-level analysis (Ettliger, 2003); and, finally, the lesser emphasis on non-local relations and flows (Yeung, 2005). Notwithstanding, recent developments towards a more practice-oriented research (Jones & Murphy, 2011) show that REG could become a powerful perspective for understanding the role of local and global interactions among economic and non-economic actors and for explaining why some places prosper and others can not (Bathelt & Glückler, 2011).

Some authors have compared EEG and REG in order to determine whether these approaches could be considered as competing or complementary as mutually formative shifts (Hassink & Klaerding, 2009). From this comparison emerges that, although some points of divergence exist, both approaches highlight the influence of path (and place) dependence in shaping the long-term dynamics of economic landscapes. Furthermore, these approaches share the conception of knowledge as a source of competitive advantage and of space as essentially socially-constructed. This raises arguments to affirm that, in response to Jones and Murphy's (2011) encouragement for developing 'mid-range theories' within the discipline of Economic Geography, there is room for a fruitful exchange between these two approaches. Indeed, as some recent publications illustrate (Li & Bathelt, 2011; Li, Bathelt, & Wang, 2012), while EEG approaches could serve as a good point of departure to identify and analyse the processes of change that have positive and negative effects in economic landscapes' evolution (e.g. survival, variety, institutions, adaptation or path dependence, among others), the added value of REG approaches could be inherent in emphasising the

role of social relations and actors' practices as drivers of distinctive evolutionary paths among regions with the same initial conditions.

Evolutionary and Relational Thinking in Tourism Geography

In the context of Geography, tourism has been increasingly seen as an activity that, despite being thoroughly imbricated with its setting and environmental conditions, creates socially-constructed productive spaces which evolve over time (Saarinen, 2004). In this vein, many scholars have analysed destinations from an evolutionary perspective, while others have stressed the role of networks and agglomeration economies as drivers of local tourism production systems.

Theorising long-term destination dynamics: the evolutionary models

There is a long tradition of researchers having attempted to explain the changes resulting from the development of tourism in a destination, both from theoretical and empirical perspectives. The so-called evolutionary models seek to generalise the behaviour and the transformations of destinations while identifying and explaining the stages of the process of change and establishing a framework for comparison and forecasting. The first models were mainly focused on analysing tourism development from a spatial perspective and the role of demand as the main driver of destination transformations (Christaller, 1964; Gilbert, 1939) and even decline (Plog, 1973). Some models (see Miossec, 1977; Stansfield, 1978) noted the lack of adaptation to demand preferences and habits as the primary cause of declining paths, so they considered rejuvenation possible – as long as the destination emphasised its unique locational advantages.

In 1980, Butler published his seminal concept of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) drawing inspiration on previous literature on destination development (especially Christaller, 1964) and the concept of the Product Life Cycle (Cox, 1967; Vernon, 1966). Since then, a considerable amount of work has been done to validate or refute the model as a descriptive tool for analysing tourism development in a variety of places (Lagiewski, 2006) and even to make it operational for planning (Cooper, 1992; Getz, 1992). In parallel, as a result of thorough conceptual and empirical debates about the assumptions of the model regarding the later stages of evolution, some scholars have made important contributions to modify and extend the TALC (Agarwal, 1994, 2002; Baum, 1998; Haywood, 1986, 2006a; Hovinen, 1981; Priestley & Mundet, 1998).

Although the TALC has generated the most relevant research stream (Gordon & Goodall, 1992), other frameworks have also been proposed. Chadeffaud (1987) explored the relationship between dominant and dominated classes' mental representations as drivers of tourism product evolution. The spatio-temporal model of Gormsen (1997) looked for responses on the stages of the spatial development of tourism in seaside resorts. For his part, the main contribution of Smith's (1992) work was the conception of tourism development in contemporary beach resorts as an urbanisation process. Finally, the multidimensional model of Prideaux (2004) – the Resort Development Spectrum (RDS) – applied in the Gold Coast,

increased understanding of the demand-side response to the market operating in a given resort.

One of the major interests of the evolutionary models is how to define, manage and overcome the stagnation phase, if possible (Bianchi, 1994; Choy, 1992). Authors such as Agarwal (1994), adopting the restructuring thesis, and even Butler (2011) in a more recent paper, defend the idea that total decline is unlikely to occur, because stakeholders will do anything to maintain tourism activity. Moreover, there are well known cases of mature destinations that have been able to rejuvenate and avoid the consolidation of declining paths (see Faulkner, 2002). Lessons from specific destinations show that success in the rejuvenation processes is essentially based on the existence of a shared strategic vision and the deep involvement of key stakeholders in the construction of an atmosphere of political, entrepreneurial and social consensus and enthusiasm (Anton Clavé, 2012b). In consequence, as some historical models (Miossec, 1977; Stansfield, 1978) noted but did not analyse in depth, research on destination evolution has to pay more attention to the impact of stakeholders' adaptability in response to either external or internal influences (Cooper & Jackson, 1989; Gibson, Lynch & Morrison, 2005; Haywood, 1986, 2006a; Ioannides, 1992).

According to other scholars, contemporary analysis of destination dynamics may also require further development regarding the local and global contextual forces inducing change at the destination level (Agarwal, 2005; Butler, 2004; Haywood, 2006b; Dodds, 2007) even including the development of destinations as complex places with other residential, productive and social functions and activities that also change in parallel to the evolution of tourism (Equipe MIT, 2002). Otherwise, misunderstandings could emerge when drawing conclusions on evolution, change and future viability of tourism destinations - as is the case in Knowles and Curtis (1999). In particular, demand flows are one of the primary forces with which destinations have to deal with if they aim to remain attractive and competitive and as such, the transformations driven by the changing evolution of markets deserve a more in-depth analysis (Ivars, Rodríguez, & Vera, 2013).

Stakeholder interaction and destination organisation: Clusters and Tourism Local Systems
Parallel to the analyses of the evolution of destinations, several scholars have used different but related spatial models of industrial economics as a point of departure to analyse agglomerations of actors specialised in tourism activities. Cluster theory (Porter, 1990) and Industrial District theory (based on Marshall, 1920; and popularised by Becattini, 1979) have been the most commonly used in this regard.

Since Porter (1998) stated the conceptual foundations of Cluster theory, a stream of research aiming to analyse the clustering phenomenon in tourism was started (Jackson, 2006; Jackson & Murphy, 2006; Michael, 2007). Many researchers take as a reference Social Network Analysis methods to study the structural properties of local destination networks as to understand their organisation and performance (Scott, Cooper, & Baggio, 2008). Others underline the importance of links between local and global networks in order to attain and maintain the competitiveness of destinations (Erkus-Örtürk, 2009; Erkus- Örtürk & Eraydin, 2010). Finally, others view networks as sources of knowledge generation and dissemination

and, thus, as drivers of innovation (Guia, Prats, & Comas, 2006; Halkier, James, Dahlström, & Manniche, 2012; Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006).

Complementarily, Hjalager (1999) presented an initial theoretical attempt to apply Industrial District theory in the tourism field and some researchers translated the model to the empirical analysis of tourism districts (see the review of Capone, 2006). Additionally, linking the Industrial District background to the French model of 'milieux' as regional innovative systems (Aydalot, 1986), authors such as Lazzeretti and Capone (2006) and Maulet (2006) suggest different but related models for identifying and interpreting destinations – naming them Tourism Local Systems (TLS).

Even though differences exist and there is a division in the literature between supporters of Cluster theory and those who defend the adequacy of Industrial District theory, both see destinations as the result of a specialisation process of a local community in the production and commercialisation of a specific product and give relevance to the interrelations between the productive sector and the local community (Jackson & Murphy, 2006). Some scholars, however, identify difficulties in applying these models to the tourism context and argue that there is a need to adapt traditional notions of 'cluster' and 'district' (Baggio, 2008; Jackson & Murphy, 2006; Judd, 1995), as well as a need to specify how to translate clustering and districtualisation from theory to practice (Weidenfeld, Butler, & Williams, 2009).

In any case, research based on Cluster or Industrial District theories is discontinuous and heterogeneous from the methodological point of view. Moreover, these approaches do not explicitly recognise the complex adaptive nature of tourism systems, as has been stated in the literature since the late 1990s (Baggio & Sainaghi, 2011; Faulkner & Russell, 1997; McDonald, 2009; Russell & Faulkner, 2004). Finally, although recently some authors have explored the evolution of tourism clusters and districts (Baggio, 2008; Solé, 2012), most relational studies have dealt with destinations from a static approach. This has occurred even though evolutionary approaches do exist in the industrial clusters and districts literature (Martin & Sunley, 2011; Beccattini, 2003).

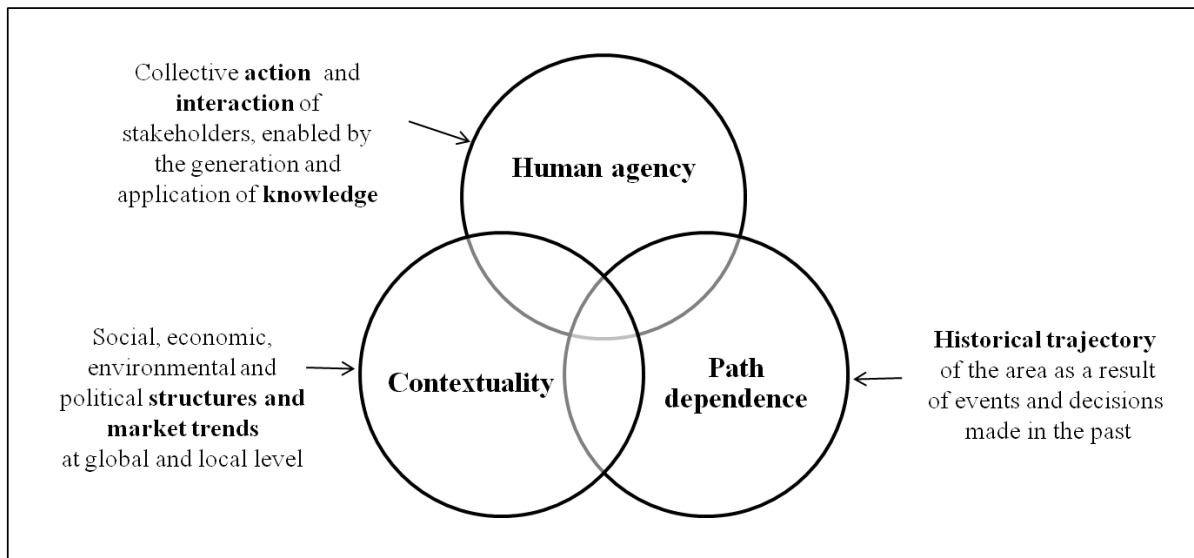
In summary, various arguments present evidence that there is room for an integrated perspective that could elucidate the mechanisms underpinning destination dynamics (Agarwal, 1994). This advance could be achieved by exploring and integrating EEG and REG approaches. In the case of EEG, some emergent seminal theoretical reflections, initial case study research and pioneering articles and conference papers highlight its empirical and theoretical adequacy (Brouder, 2013). Regarding REG, tourism geographers have not directed their attention to this approach explicitly (Debbage & Ioannides, 2011), so its building blocks still remain uncovered in the literature.

Towards a New Approach to the Evolution of Local Tourism Destinations

In this section, an integrated approach drawing inspiration on EEG, REG and recent advances in tourism research is proposed. Initially, three fundamental pillars as forces that

influence and, at the same time, singularise the evolutionary performance of Local Tourism Destinations (LTD) are identified (Figure 3). These are: human agency, contextuality and path dependence. The potential synergies of this approach in helping advance extant research on LTD evolution are discussed and illustrated below.

Figure 3. Triggers of LTD evolution from an integrated EEG-REG approach. *Source:* authors' design.



Human agency. LTD are essentially socially-constructed systems (Lazzeretti & Capone, 2006). As such, agency – as the mechanism that creates, reproduces and/or restructures economic space in intended and even unintended ways – has a great impact on the contingent and unpredictable nature of LTD evolution (Jones & Murphy, 2011). Bramwell and Cox’s (2009) evaluation of a partnership in a British National Park focused on stakeholders, interpreted here as firms, public administrations and residents. They argue that stakeholders that are involved in governance structures based on long-term trust and strong social and economic relations can not only reinforce the competitiveness of the sector (Porter, 1990), but also deliberately and mindfully shift away evolutionary paths from their inertia (Li & Bathelt, 2011). For this reason, the analysis of LTD evolution requires the identification of the main actors involved directly or indirectly in tourism development over time; their perceptions and objectives, the roles they play, as well as the dynamics of cooperation and competition within the formal and informal networks that emerge – both spontaneous and planned.

Stakeholder action, which is sometimes formalised through planning and strategic policies at local, regional and/or national level, drives tourism development in a specific area over time. Indeed, although short-term interests and geographic localism may affect stakeholders’ decisions and actions negatively (Halkier, 2013), strategic political intervention in fact might be the key to the success in renewing mature destinations (Anton-Clavé & Wilson, 2013). This may also be the reason why some LTD – even those influenced by homogeneous contextual environments – evolve in different directions. Above all, the effectiveness of both public policies and private innovation-oriented initiatives in enabling LTD adaptability and long-run competitiveness is greatly determined by the tacit and explicit knowledge available

over time (Becattini, 2003). Thus, it is essential to identify the public and private organisations that contribute to the generation and dissemination of knowledge, as well as the level of expertise of local stakeholders and the local forms of production and innovation resulting from actors' experience (Bathelt & Glückler, 2011). These are key issues in enabling tourism firms and LTD survival, in response to the power imposed by institutional structures and forces of change emergent in a local and global context (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013b, Dulupçu, Demirel, & Sungur, 2010).

Contextuality. Social, economic and political structures – institutions – operating at different levels are embedded in minds, places, and times and as such, they shape the ability of stakeholders to innovate (Farole, Rodríguez-Pose, & Storper, 2010). However, this does not mean that institutions affect stakeholder behaviour in a deterministic way. Instead, they act as elements that enable or constrain the strategic choices made by stakeholders in a given situation (Li & Bathelt, 2011). In this vein, for instance, empirical studies in the tourism literature show that the ability to generate new development paths in some LTD has been favoured by the presence of a systemic consciousness, shared values and sense of belonging (Anton-Clavé & Wilson, 2013; Maulet, 2006), in line with the “industrial atmosphere” studied by Becattini (1979), the presence of a local productive culture based on entrepreneurship (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013b), or the presence of a variety of related or unrelated resources to be enhanced and promoted through tourism activity (Ma, 2013).

By contrast, the persistence of inefficient institutions (Bathelt & Glückler, 2013) such as political regulations, as highlighted by Halkier (2013), could act as a barrier for local stakeholders' ability to promote improvements to the visitor economy. Institutions, however, simultaneously shape and are shaped by ways of doing and interacting (Bathelt & Glückler, 2013), so the adoption of novelties in stakeholder practices can enable institutional change (Boschma & Frenken, 2009). This is the case in North Jutland, where stakeholders have been able to reconfigure existing institutions and create new opportunities for stagnating coastal destinations (Halkier & Therkelsen, 2013).

Besides the local context, global political regulations and external environment factors – for instance, economic recessions or political conflicts (Ma & Hassink, 2013) – can have also a great impact on the evolutionary performance of LTD. Moreover, slightly different to that which occurs in industrial sectors, global markets play a decisive role in explaining LTD dynamics. First, because demand is at the same time a consumer and ‘co-producer’ of tourism places (Debbage & Ioannides, 2011). Second, because the continuously changing nature of demand flows affects the attractiveness of places in an increasingly globalised and competitive world. Along these lines, going beyond traditional conceptions of demand as a negative and exogenous factor, experiences from mature LTD (Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2014) show that the attraction of new markets could be also regarded as a proactive survival action of local stakeholders – strategically coupled with global intermediaries – aiming to avoid stagnation and lock-in.

Path dependence. From an overall perspective, all events, circumstances and decisions made in the past – even the most random and unintended – can have long-term consequences (Martin & Sunley, 2006) on LTD evolution. Therefore, the analysis of the historical

trajectory of LTD could give useful explanations to understand why LTD are today as they are and, why not, as well as giving some clues about their future as living communities. Ma and Hassink (2013) and Ma (2013), for instance, noted that the emergence and consolidation of tourism in the Australian Gold Coast and in Guilin, China, was either stimulated by pre-existing conditions (cultural and natural resources and basic infrastructure) and by the initiatives of entrepreneurs and the strategies of local governments respectively. On the contrary, institutional rigidity (related to product obsolescence) was found to be one of the main causes of negative lock-in (Hassink, 2005) in both destinations. Indeed, Anton-Clavé (2012b) shows how product diversification and upgrading – among other strategies – can contribute to renew mature destinations.

So the evolutionary paths of LTD have to be seen as essentially contingent – i.e. as open-ended and non-deterministic (Li & Bathelt, 2011). What is more, LTD trajectories are emergent and continually transforming (Martin & Sunley, 2011) because LTD generally try to renew and reposition themselves (Agarwal, 2012). This phenomena is illustrated by Gill and Williams (2011) and Gill (2013), who affirm that in the case of Whistler, British Columbia, lock-out was achieved by adopting a radical global environmental strategy aimed at increasing the resort's sustainability. Alternatively, Halkier and Therkelsen (2013) conclude that the adoption of incremental shifts enabled the readjustment of coastal destinations in North Jutland to cope with a stagnant demand and the global economic crisis. In any case, both path creation (Garud & Karnoe, 2001) and path plasticity (Strambach & Halkier, 2013) are powerful explanations for the survival ability of mature LTD.

All in all, the approach presented here takes the notions of human agency, contextuality and path dependence as triggers of change, and conceptualises LTD evolution as a complex, path- and place-dependent process that is determined by the action and interaction of stakeholders and their ability to adapt or create new paths, as well as to survive in response to local and global changes. Thus, in contrast to previous evolutionary research, LTD evolution is not regarded as a linear trajectory from a *less developed* to a *more consolidated* state (leading to stagnation and even decline), but as an ongoing process shaped by multiple forces. This process is seen, in turn, as producing distinctive evolutionary pathways as a result of the peculiarities of each LTD and the specific interplay between these forces in terms of human agency, contextuality and path dependence.

Conclusion

Tourism destinations are dynamic systems and as such, they need to be managed in order to maintain their competitiveness. As a consequence, it is of the utmost interest for tourism geographers not only to identify the changes occurring at the destination level over time, but also to disentangle the mechanisms underlying these changes. This paper maintains that this issue can be powerfully addressed by adopting and integrating the EEG and REG notions of human agency, contextuality and path dependence as triggers of LTD evolution.

Although the approach presented here doubtless has its own limitations, the arguments provided demonstrate that the EEG-REG approach could compensate for some of the weaknesses identified in existing evolutionary models of destinations for a number of reasons. Firstly, the EEG-REG approach sheds light upon the analysis of the complex interrelations between LTD organisation and evolution; two issues addressed so far in the tourism literature from separate perspectives but, as recognised by many scholars, necessarily linked (Haywood, 2006b). Secondly, while giving many precise insights as to the effects derived from stakeholder agency in the past and present configuration of LTD, the approach elucidates a much positive, open-ended and non-deterministic perspective that improves explanations given thus far as to the huge capability of LTD to remain attractive and avoid decline (Agarwal, 2012). Thirdly, the approach is focused on the dynamics of place in a global sense and not only on the evolution of tourism activity indicators. Effectively, in contrast to previous research, the approach acknowledges the role of coexisting productive activities (including innovative and creative ones) in shaping opportunities for LTD and the potential emergence of new forms of accumulation (Anton-Clavé, 2012a; Russell & Faulkner, 2004). Fourthly, it aims to go beyond empirical-based research and descriptive outputs by contributing to an overall reflection on the theoretical foundation of the field of destination evolution. Last but not least, this evolutionary-relational perspective represents an attempt to contribute by building bridges between Tourism Geography and Economic Geography that many authors claim a need for (Debbage & Ioannides, 2011). Likewise, as Brouder and Eriksson (2013a) pointed out for the case of EEG, tourism geographers can not only benefit from the translation of notions and concepts from Economic Geography to Tourism Geography but can also contribute to validating them in the service sector and in tourism places, while enriching the whole discussion around evolution of places and regions in Economic Geography.

All in all, the approach presented here involves two main challenges which will have to be resolved in further research. First and foremost, there is a need to find a proper translation of EEG and REG notions and concepts for the geographical analysis of tourism destination evolution; a question that can generate problematic issues – even more so when EEG and REG are still in development. On the other hand, it would be necessary to find appropriate and effective methods of conducting empirical analyses, in order to understand how and to what extent human agency, contextuality and path dependence influence the evolving paths of LTD.

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