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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Agency and coevolutionary path development in tourism destinations

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on recent debates in Evolutionary Economic Geography (EEG), this study relies on path development and coevolution theories to gain deep understanding of tourism destination trajectories over time. This framework allows, on the one hand, to implement a long-term perspective which goes beyond the analysis of isolated episodes of development, putting particular attention to the role of agency across path transformation. On the other hand, it also highlights the reciprocal causal relationships between actors, industries, institutions, and development paths, underscoring the socio-economic context and the integration of these relationships across various spatial scales. Empirical evidence derives from exploring the evolution of the Southern Coast of Jalisco region in Mexico as a tourism destination from the 1930s to the present. Employing a qualitative methodology that includes semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders and documentary analysis, findings obtained reveal the coevolution of distinctive tourism paths within the region and the interrelations between these paths, including positive synergies and actual conflicts with other productive, social and environmental dimensions of the place. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of tourism destinations' evolution from a Global South perspective and offers insights for policymakers aiming to foster resilient, adaptive, and inclusive regional development strategies.

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Introduction

Tourism has been often utilized in Global South countries as a strategy to improve population conditions of life and integrate them into the global capitalist market. This has led to significant tourism growth in these countries, which often possess attractive cultural and natural heritage even though it has frequently been poorly planned and developed, resulting in negative impacts linked to practices that contradict sustainability principles concerning traditional factors of production (i.e.

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land, labor, and capital). Anyway, even though it has been an acknowledged geographical area of study, there is still limited academic literature that explores in-depth the particularities of tourism development processes in Global South countries (Belay & Adu-Ampom, 2023) and evidence from those countries are not feeding common established approaches. This is the case, for instance, of recent destination evolutionary analysis. In the case of Latin America, only a few EEG based studies in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico have highlighted the importance of human agency in the construction of destinations in evolutionary processes, the key role of structural conditions, and the challenges to maintain and consolidate tourism projects (Beier et al., 2021; Chim-Miki et al., 2016; Domareski-Ruiz et al., 2014; Gauna & Oliveros-Ocampo, 2021; Oliveros-Ocampo et al., 2021; Soares et al., 2016).

This study aims to examine the role of agency dynamics within the context of structural conditions at various scales in coevolutionary path development. It does so by identifying the historical-geographical stages of the evolutionary dynamics of the Southern Coast of Jalisco's development as a destination, tracing the trajectory and resulting effects to understand the inter-path relations of the different tourism models arising over time - that is, conventional tourism initiatives promoted by governmental policies and investments starting from the 1950s, enclave tourism initiated by foreign investors in the 1970s, and a more recent turn since 2020s connected to the commercialization of second homes through digital platforms. The research conducted also analyzes the interactions of the tourism sector paths with the primary sector path, focusing particularly on key issues related to land use and ownership. The empirical analysis is based on a comprehensive review of documentary information, fieldwork and interviews with key stakeholders to gather insights regarding the topics under study.

This paper consists of six sections. In what follows, we review the relevant literature utilized, which is connected to recent debates about path development, coevolution and agency in the context of destination evolution studies adopting Evolutionary Economic Geography perspectives. Next, the paper presents the study area. Section three describes the methodology used for data collection and analysis. The following section presents the findings of the empirical study. The paper ends with a section that discusses the results in relation to the literature and its implications, as well as a final section that makes some concluding remarks about the value of the research presented and provides suggestions for future research directions.

Agency in destination path development

Evolutionary Economic Geography (EEG) theories applied to tourism destination analysis focus on how these places emerge, evolve, decline, or transform over time (Brouder et al., 2017; James et al., 2023). Current discussions in the field have moved beyond the canonical conceptualizations of *path dependence* - where historical choices and past developments shape industry and regional trajectories, often leading to self-reinforcing processes that limit future options - and *path creation* - which emphasizes the role of agency in promoting radical innovations and forging totally new economic activities and development pathways (Boschma & Frenken, 2018; Boschma & Martin, 2010). Instead, a more open 'path as process' perspective has emerged,

viewing path development as ‘a long term-sequence that includes episodes of path development interrupted by occasional episodes of transformation’ (Benner, 2023, p. 1).

As discussed by James et al. (2023), this approach accommodates a wide range of path development typologies, which might occur throughout the evolutionary trajectory of regional economies and present distinctive characteristics. Among them, James et al. (2023) refer to *path extension* as a continuity of practices within existing paths (‘business as usual’). *Path upgrading* involves significant intra-path changes such as new products, technologies or organizational shifts, aiming to enhance competitiveness in evolving markets. *Path branching* occurs when territories diversify into new sectors or product areas. Conversely, *path downgrading* or *contraction* can be marked by the gradual narrowing or decline in existing activities due to a re-orientation of the economic development or by lock-in. Other authors mention complementary path typologies (Benner, 2023). This paper argues that additional developmental paths can be identified to broaden the list. *Path advancement* could be understood as a progressive evolution of an industry or region through continuous improvement, without fundamentally breaking from its existing trajectory. *Path transfer* would be related to asset reallocation from existing economic activities in favour of other industries or regions. As noted by Henning (2019), though, this literature typically focuses on isolated or few development episodes, lacking deep understanding into long-term evolution. This evidences the need for longitudinal perspectives to fully understand the evolution of industries in specific locations (Benner, 2023) and particularly of tourism places (James et al., 2023).

In this context, the study of regional economic development has increasingly emphasized the pivotal role of human agency amidst both stable structures and transformative shifts (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2023). Agency refers to the capacity of actors - individuals, groups, or organizations - to take purposeful actions that shape their industry or region’s future, with both intended and unintended consequences (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2023). In this sense, understanding how agency evolves during critical junctures is essential for comprehending development dynamics (Bækkelund, 2021; James et al., 2025; Sotarauta et al., 2021), although there is still a need to shift the field’s tendency to overlook detailed investigations into micro-level agency processes towards a more nuanced approach (Grillitsch et al., 2021). This perspective challenges the traditional focus on structural factors like human capital, infrastructure, and institutions in regional development discourse (Grillitsch et al., 2021). Boschma (2017) also argues that a systematic consideration of agency is necessary in economic geography and regional studies. Hence, there is a need to move beyond structural determinism and incorporate agency as a fundamental driver of change and adaptation within regions, especially in the case of tourism destinations (Oliveros-Ocampo et al., 2021; Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2014, 2022).

Hassink et al. (2019) stress the importance of a multi-actor perspective that acknowledges the diverse roles played by various stakeholders, whether they belong to the public or private spheres. This is particularly crucial in the tourism context, where a myriad of stakeholders’ interests, synergies and interventions drive the industry (Roxas et al., 2020). Influential stakeholders can be public or private entities but also relevant individuals or entrepreneurs whose charisma, leadership qualities, interpersonal skills, power, influence, or commitment provides them real-time

influence and legitimacy to promote mindful deviation (Gill & Williams, 2014). The authors argue, in line with Ioannides and Brouder's claim (2017), that the conventional perspective on agency needs to be broadened to account for the roles of work and workers, provided that the tasks they carry out over time play a crucial role in influencing the evolutionary path of destinations. Additionally, Hassink et al. (2019) advocate for a multi-scalar view that recognizes the impact of non-local sources and actors on regional pathways, challenging traditional geographically bound analyses. In sectors such as tourism, and particularly in emerging countries or economies, the role of non-local actors like national or state governments, international organizations or tourism private companies may become pivotal in tourism development dynamics (Belay & Adu-Ampong, 2023; Roxas et al., 2020). They can steer development to align with local interests, building consensus, creating momentum, and inspiring collective agency that facilitates the upgrading of destinations (Gill & Williams, 2014; Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2016). However, these actors may also exert their power and influence promoting development paths that may provoke negative impacts on specific communities and locations (Bækkelund, 2021).

A nuanced approach to the individual or collective agency, whether exerted by local or non-local actors, allows us to discern various forms of agency and their roles in shaping (co)evolving industries and economies (Benner, 2022b) - see Table 1. According to Bækkelund (2021), change agency promotes radical innovations and initiatives that break development trajectories from entrenched patterns, aligning with categories of path development such as path creation, branching, upgrading, and transfer. In contrast, reproductive or maintenance agency involves incremental or decremental adjustments that often resist novel activities but sustain existing actions, contributing to change on a smaller scale (Bækkelund, 2021). This type of agency aligns with a subtler influence in shaping pathways, such as path extension, advancement, downgrading, or contraction.

Coevolutionary dynamics in destination path development

Besides highlighting the importance of micro-level mechanisms through which various economic and institutional actors exert influence over the trajectories of regional development paths from a multi-scalar perspective (Boschma, 2017; Brouder & Fullerton, 2015), EEG also recognizes the potential for branching development processes and the intricate complexities of inter-path relations and dependencies (Flood Chavez et al., 2023). This literature generally suggests that new economic paths tend to differ from existing regional activities in their structural characteristics and dynamics, although economic diversification often stems from latent potential of current activities (Bækkelund, 2021) and related variety (Boschma, 2017). However, there is still room to expand scientific understanding of factors driving evolution into areas unrelated to past or present local capabilities (Bathelt & Storper, 2023), as well as the consequences of such processes in the future operation of the new industry. This is particularly crucial when analyzing tourism development in Latin American destinations, where tourism often emerges in less developed economies reliant on the primary sector and lacking significant manufacturing (Gauna & Oliveros-Ocampo, 2021).

Table 1. Types of agency and selected forms of path development in destinations' coevolutionary path development processes.

Type of agency		Form of path development		Example
Change agency	Radical innovations that disrupt established development paths.	Path creation	Promote entirely new economic activities and development paths.	Introduction of tourism development in a formerly rural region.
		Path branching or diversification	Local economies diversify into new sectors or product areas.	Launch of novel and distinctive tourism initiatives beyond the region's existing offerings.
		Path upgrading	Major changes within existing paths to boost competitiveness through new products, technologies, or organizational shifts.	Promotion of eco-friendly tourism initiatives or high-end luxury accommodation offerings.
		Path transfer	Redirects resources from current activities to support other industries or regions.	Land sales driving second-home and short-term rental growth through online platforms.
Reproductive or maintenance agency	Gradual changes that maintain current practices while enabling small-scale progress.	Path extension	Maintains existing paths through continued practices.	Investments and initiatives that support continuation of a specific tourism development model.
		Path advancement	Gradual advancement of an industry or region through ongoing improvement within its current trajectory.	Infrastructure investments to improve connectivity and economic exchanges with other regions.
		Path downgrading	Slow decline of existing activities driven by economic reorientation or lock-in effects.	Decline in accommodation appeal and competitiveness due to underinvestment and failure to meet evolving market expectations.

Source: Author's elaboration.

Tourism pathways are complex and can either be affected by, or influence, other economic sectors (Brouder & Fullerton, 2015; Stihl, 2022). For this reason, the study of destination evolution benefits from empirical studies that go beyond the analysis of a single new path (Benner, 2023; Breul et al., 2021; Flood Chavez et al., 2023). Grasping path interdependencies is key to understanding the regional development that results from creating new pathways and coevolving existing ones (Benner, 2023). As Breul et al. (2021, p. 214) state: 'new paths may generate opportunities for existing paths and form synergetic relationships; likewise, new paths may be the source of inequality through competitive relationships with existing economic activities in the region'. The fact is, though, that while the literature is mostly discussing the inter-path relations existing between tourism and other economic activities, there is room to expand our comprehension on the role of agency and related or unrelated variety

in coevolving multiple paths of the same industry, which may be heterogeneous in nature and even contested (Boschma, 2017; Brouder & Fullerton, 2015).

Tourism destinations are complex places with economic, urban and residential functions, where paths emerge interacting in a complex environment at different spatial scales (Brouder et al., 2017). These places are composed of multiple highly interconnected and interdependent social, environmental, and technical elements coevolving at various spatial scales that generate global, non-linear, open, and permanent transformations (Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2022). In this sense, it is key for destination evolution studies to disentangle the agency triggering factors—internal and external—challenging the existing structural characteristics of a destination that can move it along new dynamic paths (James et al., 2023), and the reciprocal causal relationships among all the elements therein (Hassink & Ma, 2017; Ma & Hassink, 2013). From an EEG perspective, structural conditions - also known as context - have been identified as one of the catalysts that play a role in defining the nuanced characteristics of a destination's evolutionary trajectory, in close connection with agency and path dependence (Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2022). Context can include a broad array of elements that not only serve as a backdrop, but rather shape and influence - in a positive or negative manner - the environment in which agency operates, make strategic choices, and define policy directions. These elements encompass formal and informal institutions - laws, regulations, and cultural practices - which establish the rules of engagement within a given territory (Gong & Hassink, 2019). Moreover, social, economic, environmental, and political changes at various scales - e.g. demographic shifts, economic recessions, meteorological hazards, or political instability - play a crucial role in shaping the landscape in which decisions of individuals and organizations are made (Belay & Adu-Ampong, 2023; Gauna & Oliveros-Ocampo, 2021). Last but not least, market and industry trends such as shifts in consumer behavior and preferences, technological advancements, and competitive pressures, also define the operational context of destination actors and the potential of strategies and innovations to consolidate (Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2016). Taking into consideration these contextual elements is therefore essential for effectively understanding the complex interplay of agency forces that shape the nature and relations of coevolving pathways in any given destination.

All in all, the coevolutionary perspective 'highlights the heterodox nature of the tourism economy' (Brouder & Fullerton, 2015, p. 157) and helps advance the understanding of the role of agency in complex destination path development processes by incorporating the key role of context and institutional change, the multi-scalarity of development, and the multiplicity of pathways that can coexist in a destination (Benner, 2022b). Coevolution also acknowledges dynamics like place sustainability, social innovation or social equality, which are key for regional sustainable development (Gong & Hassink, 2019). The reality is, though, that studies adopting the coevolution concept to study destination trajectories have been mostly developed from a theoretical perspective (Brouder and Fullerton, 2015; Brouder & Ioannides, 2014), and efforts are needed to operationalize empirical analysis (this is also noted by Benner, 2022b, in relation to other economic sectors).

Area of study

The Southern Coast of Jalisco, encompassing the coastal areas of the municipalities of Cihuatlán, La Huerta, and the southern part of Tomatlán in the state of Jalisco, spans 100 kilometers along the Pacific Ocean in western Mexico (Figure 1) and covers a surface of 750 square kilometers. Its productive characteristics since the 1930s are agricultural activities and it includes natural spaces of enormous environmental fragility (Cano Castellanos & Lazos, 2017). The area, with a population of about 100,000, has a relatively recent settlement history, with main population centers forming in the 1930s with inhabitants from rural central-western Mexico (Gauna, 2019). This settlement has shifted from the primary sector - mainly agriculture but also fishing activities - towards tourism in line with the global growth of this activity and taking advantage of its enormous scenic beauty and its favorable climate for most of the year (Gauna, 2019). The area offers 193 hotels, with 4,284 bedplaces, and hosts over 750,000 tourists annually in registered accommodation, with 90% being national visitors. In recent years, a growing number of visitors staying in second homes has been added, a trend that is not yet reflected in the official statistics. To the north, 100 kilometers of undeveloped coastline create a buffer between the Southern Coast of Jalisco and the Metropolitan Area of Puerto Vallarta in the Bahía de Banderas, the second most populated area in the states of Jalisco and Nayarit and one of Mexico's major sun and beach destinations, which hosts over six million tourists annually.

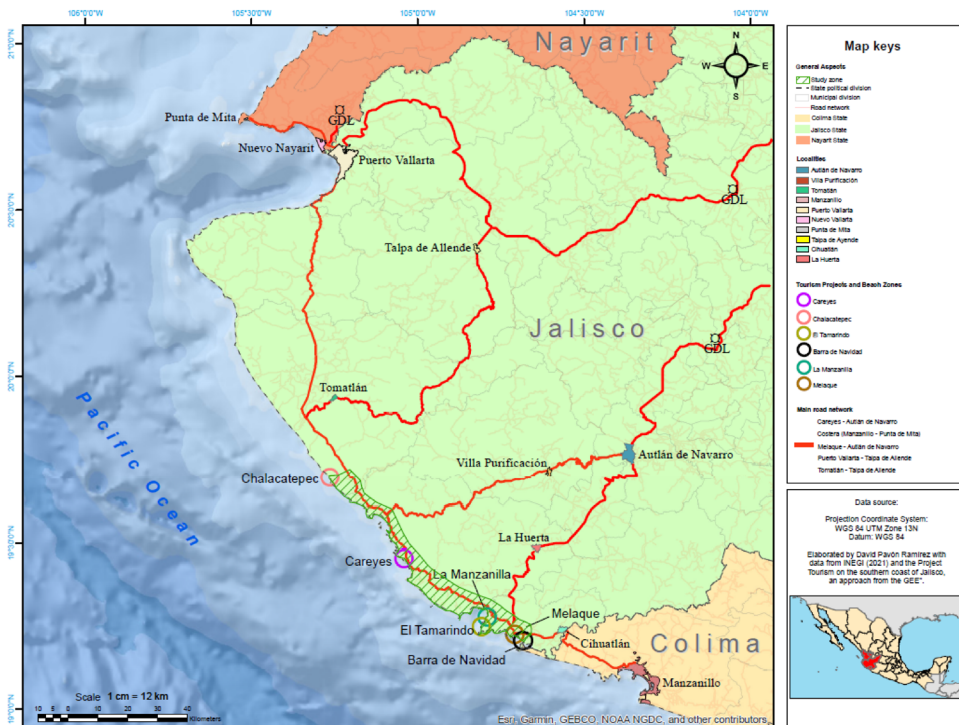


Figure 1. Location of the Southern Coast of Jalisco in Mexico. Source: Author's elaboration based on information extracted from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI).



Figure 2. Location of the main conventional and enclave tourism projects in the Southern Coast of Jalisco. Source: Author's elaboration based on information extracted from the Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI).

The analysis of the Southern Coast of Jalisco shows that tourism has experienced three path branching processes. The first is associated with the creation of government-promoted tourism starting in the 1950s. This low-qualification, seasonal activity attracts national tourists from central Mexico for short stays. It also draws some international retirees from the United States and Canada with average incomes who visit the area between November and May, with longer stays. The second path branching process, starting in the 1970s, involves high-value enclave tourism on private properties, restricting access for other tourists and limiting local interactions (Gauna & Virgen Aguilar, 2021). The projects and activities associated with these two differentiated paths are situated along the coast, in distinct yet often adjacent areas, and produce differentiated intra-path dynamics (Figure 2). Since 2020, tourism has branched into second-home construction and commercialization *via* digital platforms, following global trends. The spatial development of this latter tourism model is starting to spread throughout the territory in a dispersed fashion, rather than being concentrated in specific areas.

Methodology

The empirical analysis draws from primary and secondary sources, which helped identify and trace the role of agency in the different phases and inflection points of the destination's evolution from the 1930s to the present (Sanz-Ibáñez et al., 2017; Sotarauta & Grillitsch, 2023). A total of 25 face-to-face semi-structured

interviews were conducted between October 2023 and March 2024. The objective was to obtain insights into the region's evolution by gathering narratives reflecting the perceptions, intentions, and strategies for change of key actors (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). The selection of interviewees was made using a snowball and reputation sampling method, which involved identifying key regional leaders through initial contacts and expanding the network based on their recommendations for other potential interviewees. Once a significant level of saturation was observed in the collected information - cross-verified with existing documentary sources and the predefined analytical categories - the decision was made to conclude the interview process. The final list of participants included stakeholders from the public, private, academic, early settlers, and civil society spheres, ensuring to contact knowledgeable and significant representatives related to major tourist towns, as well as major enclave tourism and conventional tourism developments in the region (Table 2). Interviews lasted from 30 min to 1 h on average and were recorded with participants' consent, ensuring confidentiality using coded identities. Data analysis was performed using Atlas.ti, with pre-established codes structured around tourism evolution processes, key moments, participating actors, development plans and projects, and challenges faced, and additional categories emerging from interviewee contributions. This analytical approach was successfully applied in studies such as Rambaree et al. (2021) and Santos-Júnior et al. (2021) (Table 2).

Table 2. List of interviewees.

Type of interviewee	Description	Number of interviewees	Respondent code	Place of residency
Early settlers	Farmer	1	C1	Barra de Navidad
Private sector	Owners and administrators of enclave tourism initiatives	4	E1, E2, E3, E4	Careyes, Chamela
	Conventional tourism entrepreneurs	10	E5, E6, E7, E8, E9 E10	Careyes, Chamela, Melaque, Barra de Navidad, La Manzanilla, Cuastecomates
Public officials	Regional tourism delegates, municipal mayors, and environmental protection authorities.	6	G1, G2, G3, G4, G5, G6	Melaque, La Huerta, Punta Perula, Autlán
Academics	Researcher knowledgeable about social and environmental issues in the area.	1	I1	Mexico
Civil society	Individuals with knowledge of the region and tourism dynamics, having worked in tourism-related activities	3	T1, T2, T3	Careyes, San Mateo, Melaque

Source: Authors.

The Southern Coast of Jalisco, from untamed rural lands to a coevolving tourism destination

This section presents the research findings, detailing the development sequences linked by episodes of successive transformation that have shaped the evolution of the study area from being a rugged land colonized by farmers from the center of the country for

agricultural exploitation in the 1930s to the present, becoming a territory mainly oriented towards the development of several distinctive and coevolving tourism models.

The section is divided into several subsections, each designated to elucidate the characteristics of the identified historical-geographical stages in the evolutionary dynamics of the area's development as a tourism destination. In this sense, the main focus of the investigation are the path development processes and episodes of transformation explaining the emergence and evolution of the different tourism models promoted in the area over time. The analysis also considers the interactions between the tourism and primary sector pathways, with a particular focus on key issues related to land use and ownership. Human agency is central in explaining these complex and dynamic processes, in connection with the structural conditions operating at various scales. The qualitative description of the findings is complemented by a figure that represents the Southern Coast of Jalisco's evolutionary trajectory from the 1930s to present (see [Figure 3](#)) and several tables summarizing the agency dynamics occurring in each of the phases ([Tables 3–8](#)).

1934-1950: arrival of the first agricultural settlers

The Southern Coast of Jalisco underwent significant social transformation following its settlement in the late 1930s ([Table 3](#)). Initially shaped by agrarian reforms aimed at providing land to farmers, the region's primary objective at this time was to produce agricultural goods destined for consumption in central urban areas. During this early stage, the labor force mainly consisted of immigrants from the country's central region, who migrated with the prospect of receiving land through the *ejido* system - a form of communal land tenure established by the government. A decade later,

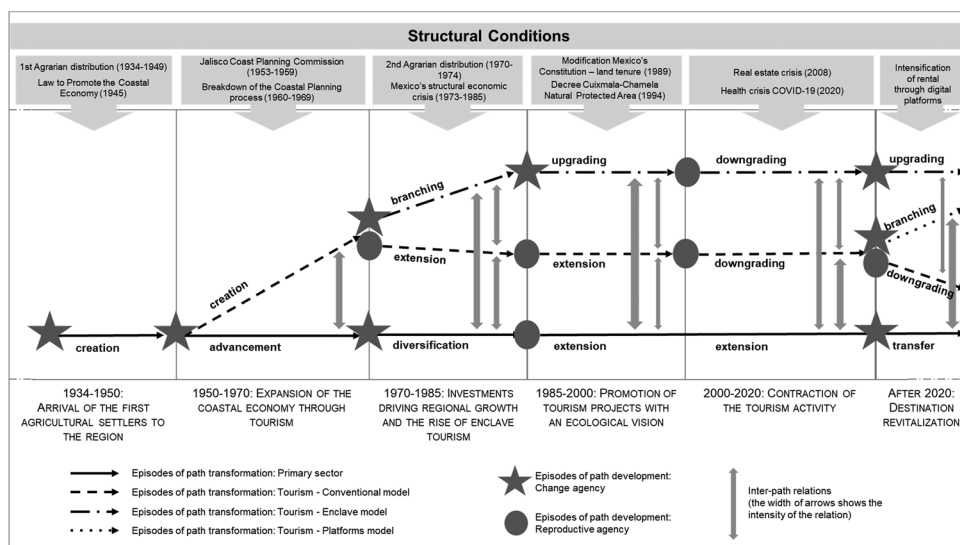


Figure 3. Coevolutionary path development of the Southern Coast of Jalisco. Source: Author's elaboration inspired by Benner (2023) and Flood Chavez et al. (2023).

Table 3. Agency dynamics in the path development of the Southern Coast of Jalisco (1934-1950).

	Primary sector – creation	Tourism - nonexistent
Government	Implementation of new policies and laws (agrarian reforms) Investments in road infrastructure	
Labor	Immigration from central areas given communal land tenure	

Green = change agency.

Source: Author's elaboration drawing on Bækkelund (2021) and Benner (2022b, 2023).

spurred by a coastal convention organized by the state government in 1945 and the enactment of the Law to Promote the Coastal Economy, a new phase of development unfolded. This initiative included the construction of essential road infrastructure, which greatly facilitated the commercialization of agricultural produce from the region (Castillo, 1991). In this early phase, local stakeholders had no plans to promote or invest in tourism in the region, and it lacked both the infrastructure needed to support it. This can be illustrated with the words of a local farmer and entrepreneur: '[The area] was initially settled for agriculture, not tourism... tourism came later... there was nothing back then' (Interviewee C1).

1950-1970: expansion of the coastal economy through tourism

In the 1950s, the first major planning effort was the establishment of the Jalisco Coast Planning Commission. Its objectives were bringing essential services to local residents - and a few new immigrants who no longer received land - while also developing infrastructure to improve connectivity with the country's central regions—including the completion of the Guadalajara-Barra de Navidad highway. Inhabitants settled in the common lands and took advantage of the cultivable areas along the rivers. There was a significant development of agricultural activities and livestock was introduced, in addition to rudimentary coastal fishing, which allowed an expansion of the primary activities.

In this period, tourist activities were introduced, being the 'beauty of the place, its climate, its flora, and peace' (Interviewee E7) the main attraction. The areas with higher development prospects were Barra de Navidad-Tenacatita, Puerto Vallarta and Careyes-Chamela (Nuñez & Scartascini, 2010). Land occupation in favour of tourism activities was shaped by the agrarian redistribution and the visionary approach of key figures in the public sphere and new investors, who took control of lands situated in scenic coastal areas to develop tourism projects (Table 4). This led to ongoing land conflicts between original owners (*ejidatarios*) and new investors, with the federal government at times intervening in favor of investors. The Barra de Navidad master plan, which envisioned a low-rise building hotel, a marina, residential subdivisions, and an industrial port linked to the manganese mine in Autlán, anticipated to be of significant economic importance. However, this ambitious project faced setbacks, including the failure of the manganese mine, extensive infrastructure damage caused by a hurricane in 1959, and the bankruptcy of the company promoting the initiative. These circumstances also cancelled the Planning Commission of the Coast of Jalisco. This period coincided with a national coastal development program driven by post-war geopolitical interests (Tello-Díaz, 2014).

Table 4. Agency dynamics in the path development of the Southern Coast of Jalisco (1950-1970).

	Primary sector - advancement	Tourism - creation
Government	Investments in road infrastructure Provision of essential services to the population Conflicts over land ownership	Investments in road infrastructure Introduction of institutions in primary sector unrelated industries (tourism) Implementation of new policies and laws Promotion of (failed) tourism projects
Local entrepreneurs	Development of agricultural and livestock activities. Start of rudimentary fishing activities. Conflicts over land ownership	New business formation oriented towards tourism (accommodation)
Non-local entrepreneurs	Conflicts over land ownership	Promotion of (failed) tourism projects
Labor	Settlers and new immigrants developing agricultural and fishing activities.	Family labor and incorporation of new immigrants with lack of formal training.

Green = change agency.

Red = conflicts or negative impacts.

Source: Author's elaboration drawing on Bækkelund (2021) and Benner (2022b, 2023).

Despite these challenges, the completion of the Guadalajara-Barra de Navidad highway marked a milestone, and tourism developed organically as landowners welcomed the few arriving tourists into their homes and properties, offering lodging and basic services. This informal hospitality laid the foundation for local tourism, relying primarily on family labor. Additionally, some new immigrants found work in emerging tourism-related activities. However, the workforce lacked formal training, and skills were acquired spontaneously through experience. In parallel, some tourism ventures began to emerge in Barra de Navidad and Melaque, such as the Melaque Hotel. As one local actor reflected: 'Tourism came later, yes people came... those who dared to come, because it was not easy to get there' (Interviewee C1).

1970-1985: investments driving regional growth and the rise of enclave tourism

In mid-1968, Italian investor Jean Franco Brignone acquired the Careyes property (Tello-Díaz, 2014), which was officially certified as unaffected by federal government expropriation in 1971, ensuring its protection and ownership for Brignone. According to interviewees, this acquisition marked the inception of unique tourism projects, distinct from the existing tourism activities in the area up to that point. Club Méditerranée, renowned French corporation with operations throughout Europe and Asia, attracted prominent figures of the international jet set, embodying a new era of glamor in the region. Its business model introduced a novel form of tourism offering privacy and exclusive facilities for guest use in an exceptional space. This can be illustrated with the testimony of Interviewee E1: 'Club Med was important because it changed the mentality of people, as they changed from primary [sector] to tertiary [sector] in 20 years'. Likewise, other entrepreneurs interviewed stated: 'Club Med, in one way or another, served as a tourism school for the entire region' (Interviewee E3), 'they brought mid-level employees... and they trained the [local] people' (Interviewee E1). The incorporation of specialized tourism workers from Europe who trained local staff in customer service and tourism management not only benefited this company's operations but also conventional tourism businesses, as a consequence of the natural employee turnover. Brignone's family also promoted and operated

another enclave facility, the Hotel Careyes. Primary challenges faced by these ventures was the provision of basic services: 'being in the middle of nowhere... there are issues with phone service, electricity, and roads' (Interviewee E2). Mechanical equipment had to be imported for electricity generation and water pumping to sustain their operations. Simultaneously to the construction of these hotels, Brignone developed his private property and initiated a new ambitious tourism project known as Puerto Nuevo Chamela, which envisioned the construction of chain hotels, a marina, and a golf course but never came to fruition (Tello-Díaz, 2014). Overall, enclave businesses established strong labor relationships with their employees, who began to earn higher wages and consequently experience improved well-being - in some cases, they were even provided with housing during the initial stage of these projects' development. The improvement in working conditions, combined with the need for full-time employees to care for the resorts, led to greater job retention and, as a result, greater employment stability.

During the 1970s several national public policy actions spurred development in the region (Table 5). These included a second agrarian redistribution and the construction of the Cajón de Peñas dam, with a system of canals that provided irrigation for 30,000 hectares. These actions facilitated the establishment of the Chamela biological station by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), a pioneer project for coastal environmental protection (Tello-Díaz, 2014). Other infrastructure developments in the early 1970s were pivotal. The completion of the coastal highway linking Barra de Navidad-Melaque to Puerto Vallarta in 1972 (Ramírez-Sevilla, 1992) greatly enhanced accessibility. As interviewee E3 explained: 'What first happened in a positive way [in relation to tourism] was the opening of this road in the 1970s, this triggered everything'. The inauguration of the Manzanillo International Airport in neighboring Colima in 1973 served as a crucial air link, catalyzing the consolidation of tourism in the area. Statistical data collection started between 1977 and 1985, showing a 23% growth in the number of tourists, reaching nearly 200,000 visitors in 1985. Ninety percent of these tourists were domestic, explaining the continued boom of conventional tourism in the Barra de Navidad-Melaque area, driven by initiatives promoted by public authorities and local stakeholders. The process of integrating labor into conventional tourism continued primarily as a family-run activity and based on self-organized businesses, leading to a process of informal training complemented with experiential learning imported by some migrant employees from other tourist destinations nearby. This resulted in low-skilled workers receiving limited income, as well as a high turnover within the tourism services and seasonal migration to develop agricultural work during off-peak periods. The state government intervened in training processes, but its efforts were limited and did not have a significant impact on improving service quality.

In this period, private investor groups became interested in beach areas, leading to 'conflicts and controversies [over land ownership with peasants who had been granted the land], and the consequent insecurity for investors' (Interviewee E7). Dispossession of land by private individuals was a recurring issue, especially in areas like Chamela, Careyes, and Tenacatita (Interviewee I1). The most notable case occurred in Tenacatita Bay, where the federal government transferred property to the national

Table 5. Agency dynamics in the path development of the Southern Coast of Jalisco (1970-1985).

	Primary sector – diversification	Tourism Conventional model – extension	Tourism Enclave model – branching
Government	Implementation of new policies and laws (agrarian reforms and environmental protection) Investments in road and irrigation infrastructure Mediation but also cause of conflicts over land ownership	Investments in road and airport infrastructure Mediation and facilitation of new local-led private initiatives	Investments in road and airport infrastructure Adaptation of policies and laws to facilitate foreign direct investment and land ownership
Local entrepreneurs	Conflicts over land ownership	Emergence of new firms Drive of tourism growth – national market	
Non-local entrepreneurs	Conflicts over land ownership		Foreign direct investment and ambitious development plans (Jean Franco Brignone, Italian) Introduction of new business models and international markets (Club Méditerranée) Efforts to find and prepare workforce (importation of talent and training of locals) Investments in infrastructure for private operations Coping of external shocks affecting development plans and investments
Labor	Seasonal migration of tourism workers	Family-run activities and low-skilled workers High turnover, seasonal work and limited incomes Enriched knowledge base thanks to natural turnover of enclave tourism workers	Imported talent to train local workforce Locals and migrants from other destinations trained by companies to provide high-quality services Employment stability and improvement of working conditions

Green = change agency.

Grey = reproductive/maintenance agency.

Red = conflicts or negative impacts.

Source: Author's elaboration drawing on Bækkelund (2021) and Benner (2022b, 2023).

sugar union, which built a vacation spot for workers later sold to Posadas de México, the only chain hotel built at the time (Ramírez-Sevilla, 1992). Prominent public figures, including former governors González Gallo and García Barragán, were involved in land appropriation, leading to ongoing legal disputes over ownership (Tello-Díaz, 2014).

Starting in the mid-1970s, Mexico faced a prolonged economic crisis, including an interest rate crisis, oil crisis, and debt crisis, which severely affected the country and the Southern Coast of Jalisco. This hindered development projects and nearly bankrupted Brignone. Another major failed project was Costa Careyes, promoted by Italian entrepreneur Gianni Pirri, whose ambitious vision lacked the necessary infrastructure (Interviewee E4). Despite attracting partners like Trafalgar House, the project was abandoned due to the economic crisis, investor confidence loss, and conflicts with Brignone over differing tourism models, as Pirri wanted to favor mass tourism (Tello-Díaz, 2014).

1985-2000: promotion of tourism projects with an ecological vision

In the mid-1980s, English investor James Goldsmith transformed the coastal tourism scene by purchasing the Cuixmala hacienda and developing an exclusive residential area through his company Costa Cuixmala. He also established the Cuixmala Foundation, which helped create the Chamela-Cuixmala Biosphere Reserve (Tello-Díaz, 2014). Although his vision clashed with that of Brignone, both benefited from the new direction promoted for the enclave tourism model, later termed 'the environmentalism of the rich' (Ávila-García & Sánchez, 2012). According to one of the informants: '[this new direction] provides the most benefits with the least harm. If we move towards more mass tourism, it may not balance environmental concerns with good returns as well' (Interviewee E4). In 1992, Goldsmith constructed the high-end boutique hotel Las Alamandas (Tello-Díaz, 2014), adding to the region's luxury enclave tourism offerings. A pivotal event shaping enclave tourism was the decree establishing the Cuixmala-Chamela Protected Natural Area in 1994, promoted by the UNAM and the Cuixmala Foundation in line with the United Nations' environmental conservation priorities. Goldsmith contributed over nine thousand hectares, impacting real estate owned by Brignone and local *ejidatarios*, whose farming and livestock projects were consequently halted (Cano Castellanos & Lazos, 2017; Castillo et al., 2009). The reserve also became a protective buffer for residential and resort enclaves, increasing the exclusion of locals and conventional tourists visiting the area. The management of basic services - water, electricity, health, and security - and urban planning within these enclaves was controlled by the investors, with minimal intervention from public authorities. This is shown by one informant's testimony: 'The Chamela-Cuixmala Biosphere generates all environmental services for us; it provides water and contact with nature, which is what we sell in Careyes, Tamarindo, and Chamela' (Interviewee E3).

Local communities - expanded with new residents - were relegated to working in the construction sector, working on public infrastructure and residential developments, as well as in service and operation roles within enclave resorts (Ávila-García & Sánchez, 2012). Given the nature of these properties, jobs were primarily limited to household services such as maintenance, gardening, cooking, and security, along with the operation of essential utilities (electricity, water, telecommunications, etc.). As a result, hiring remained relatively low, but these jobs provided workers with a basic level of well-being. In parallel to these dynamics, some enclave businesses, such as Careyes, have established foundations to support basic education for local children and adolescents. These initiatives focus on teaching English, robotics, environmental stewardship, and vocational training in fields like cooking and hospitality. This effort served a dual purpose: enhancing the skills of younger generations while also contributing to social development by addressing issues such as crime and substance abuse, which were on the rise in the region.

The public sector proposed several projects to continue promoting the region. These included the Declaration of Priority Tourist Zone on the Jalisco Coast, the Jalisco Pacific System Plan XAPAC XXI, and the designation of Costalegre as an Ecological Tourist Development Zone integrating four strategic projects: El Tecuan, Careyes, Puerto Careyes, and Villas Chamela. Additionally, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency conducted a study in 1997, which featured three specific projects of tourist

corridors: Guadalajara-Puerto Vallarta, Guadalajara-Manzanillo, and Costalegre. This plan is considered one of the best-prepared and has served as a reference for subsequent projects. All of these projects were quite similar, with actions formulated without meaningful participation from local stakeholders - ‘authorities do not take into account the willingness and capacity of the people who live in the area; [although] they are the ones who understand the issues’ (Interviewee E9). The majority of projects had no significant impact, as they ‘remained in the planning stages... and ultimately were not executed’ (Interviewee G5). A notable exception were the environmental declarations—The Ecological Planning Study of the Costalegre Region (1993) and the Ecological Planning Program in 1999 -, which have persisted due to alignment with global policies and support from universities and civil groups.

Table 6. Agency dynamics in the path development of the Southern Coast of Jalisco (1985-2000).

	Primary sector - extension	Tourism Conventional model - extension	Tourism Enclave model - upgrading
Government	Modification of laws and regulations (land tenure)	Promotion of government-led tourism development projects (some unsuccessful or discontinued)	Establishment of new scientific and research support (environmental protection) Adaptation of policies and laws to promote environmental protection of specific areas Public-private initiatives promoting environmental protection
Local entrepreneurs	Farming and livestock projects halted as a result of environmental protection laws	Emergence of new firms (mid-quality) Drive of tourism growth – national market	
Non-local entrepreneurs		Privatization of the territory, exclusion of national markets	Foreign direct investment in housing for private purposes (Goldsmith) Promotion of private organizations for environmental protection Expansion of business models and niche international markets by new large corporations Privatization of public functions (management of basic services and urban planning) Conflicts among leading non-local entrepreneurs Failure of some development plans and investments Exclusion from specific areas
Local community Labor		Expansion of full time and temporary employment. Migration flows to work in the sector. On-the-job training and limited initiatives from the state government.	Demand of non-qualified labor (construction & operations) Foundations to support basic education enhancing skills of younger generations and social development

Green = change agency.

Grey = reproductive/maintenance agency.

Red = conflicts or negative impacts.

Source: Author's elaboration drawing on Bækkelund (2021) and Benner (2022b, 2023).

Overall, tourism in the region grew by over 80% during this period, expanding into other areas like La Manzanilla and Tenacatita. The conventional tourism path experienced the rise of mid-range hotels like Villas Polinesia on Chamela beach, distinct from traditional hotels and high-end enclave establishments, leading to an expansion of full-time and temporary employment opportunities requiring on-the-job training (Table 6). As tourism grows, it also attracts migrants seeking employment in the sector. However, due to a lack of training, many of these newcomers struggle to integrate into the local workforce. Along these lines, the state government continued to support conventional tourism businesses with limited training initiatives aimed at workforce development.

2000-2020: contraction of the tourism activity

This phase saw a contraction of tourism in the region - in 2010, the reduction was 24% compared to 2000. Official statistics showed an increase in establishments and bed places, but this was largely attributable to a change in data collection that included unclassified apartments. This methodological shift created the illusion of increased tourist numbers, which did not actually occur. At this stage, both the workforce and conventional tourism businesses struggled with low competitiveness, while a growing population faced limited short-term job opportunities due to a lack of training programs. This challenge was further exacerbated by an initial emergence of investments in new ventures, such as apartment rentals through online platforms, which generated business activity but created minimal employment.

The 2008 real estate crisis had a profound impact on enclave property developments in the region (Gauna & Vargas, 2018). The paralysis in international real estate loans, particularly for clients from the United States and Europe seeking second homes, led to the cancellation of major projects such as Gran Bahía de Chamela, Marina Careyes, La Tambora, and Chalacatepec, the latter of which included an airfield. These initiatives 'received a lot of publicity, [local stakeholders] were invited to the openings, meetings, and progress updates... but are stagnant and the area remains unchanged' (Interviewee T3). Despite the financial crisis affecting projections and planning in the region, there was no significant disruption to ongoing dynamics. Enclave tourism continued to attract a stable number of international visitors, allowing businesses to maintain hiring levels according to their specific needs.

The state government actively promoted a myriad of projects during this period. Some tourism development planning tools and initiatives failed, such as the Tourism Vocationality in the Coastal Zone of Jalisco, the Sectoral Project 05 for Development and Promotion of Tourism, the Costalegre Subregional Tourism Development Program, the Costalegre Master and Strategic Development Plan, and the Development Master Plan for the Costalegre Corridor. As actors reported, this situation was explained by, on the one hand, the fact that governments 'have a peremptory deadline [and] if something was missing [in the project], they started again, with their idea, with their vision' (Interviewee E8); and, on the other hand, 'there has been a lack of follow-up on what has worked' (Interviewee G1). In environmental protection, the state government conducted a State Territorial Ecological Planning Study in 2006, producing studies for each municipality and declaring the wetlands of the Jalisco coast as Ramsar

sites. Additionally, the Chamela Islands Sanctuary was declared a protected natural area. The 2006 Inclusive Tourism project at Cuastecomates beach aimed to create an accessible beach for people with disabilities, featuring public investment in mobility equipment, caregiver training, and urban rehabilitation. However, after the state government transferred its management to the Cihuatlán city council, the initiative declined, despite local business interest. Other public policy actions aimed to reactivate tourism, i.e. the rehabilitation and expansion of the Malecón in Barra de Navidad and the construction of the Malecón de Punta Perula, the latter creating a space for local boats providing island tours and fishing services in Chamela Bay. In contrast, state police carried out a violent eviction of local tourist service providers on Tenacatita beach in 2010, which was followed by a judicial resolution favoring private businessmen. This eviction resulted in significant losses for the service providers, and the issue remains in litigation, creating ongoing uncertainty.

By the end of this period, COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted tourism in this area by 2020, resulting in the most substantial drop in tourism demand - mostly international, mirroring global trends and dynamics (Ivars Baidal & Soares, 2024). Tourism operations were nearly completely shut down due to limited protective supplies reaching the region from the state center. Local communities had to take action, with municipal authorities leading efforts to care for residents. Despite these circumstances, infection rates remained relatively low compared to other regions, with approximately 2,500 confirmed cases (0.2% of the regional population) and a case

Table 7. Agency dynamics in the path development of the Southern Coast of Jalisco (2000-2020).

	Primary sector - extension (continued)	Tourism Conventional model - downgrading	Tourism Enclave model - downgrading
Government		Increase of promotion of tourism-oriented projects (some failed or discontinued) Loss of trust relationships with small service providers	Adaptation of policies and laws favoring non-local entrepreneurs' private interests Continued efforts promoting laws and projects for environmental protection
Local entrepreneurs	Agricultural processes continue Land tenure conflicts continue in beach areas	Loss of competitive capacity, with no incentives for its reactivation. Sudden external changes affecting tourism demand (COVID-19).	
Non-local entrepreneurs			Real estate failed projects – second homes Stagnated demand dynamics, later affected by sudden external changes affecting international markets (COVID-19)
Labor		Low-skilled workforce Limited employment opportunities Inability to retain staff or paying employees during COVID-19 crisis	Retention of staff with reduced wages and staggered work schedules

Green = change agency.

Grey = reproductive/maintenance agency.

Red = conflicts or negative impacts.

Source: Author's elaboration drawing on Bækkelund (2021) and Benner (2022b, 2023).

fatality rate of 8.6% among confirmed cases (INEGI, 2022). Conventional tourism businesses faced complete closure initially, followed by a phase of reopening, facilitated by the distribution of protective supplies coordinated by local authorities in partnership with hotel associations, that still resulted in significant economic losses and their inability to retain staff or continue paying their employees. Enclave businesses implemented health screenings and utilized their private hospitals to test their employees and families. Despite employment impacts, most employers managed to retain staff, albeit with reduced wages due to the strategic implementation of staggered work schedules (Table 7). In a later phase, healthcare capacities of these enclaves were extended to neighboring communities around the Careyes enclave.

After 2020: destination revitalization

Following the COVID-19 crisis, tourism experienced a notable reactivation, with an increasing number of visitors each year. Enclave operations continued implementing protective measures for a time, which allowed most employees working on staggered schedules to return to regular duties. In contrast, the return to work in conventional tourism was slower due to the economic losses suffered. Nevertheless, the prompt return of domestic tourists created a demand to rehire staff. Protective health measures were initially retained but were soon abandoned, often at the request of visitors.

In relation to the conventional tourism model, this resurgence has been accompanied by a gradual recuperation of domestic tourism and the return of international tourists staying for extended periods - some of them for remote work -, which prompted the upgrade of tourism businesses to offer internet access. Those lacking resources for such upgrades were left behind. Additionally, there was notable growth in the real estate sector, driven by increased demand for second homes and short-term rentals *via* digital platforms, which now compete with traditional hotel tourism. This shift has significant implications, as the construction of apartments has surged with the promise of higher profits than those offered by the financial market. Consequently, *ejidal* and private landowners have begun selling their urban lots in an unregulated manner, particularly in Barra de Navidad, Melaque, and Punta Perula, where 'there is currently a strong pressure' (Interviewee E9). 'These areas have no urban planning' (Interviewee E7) or 'a growth plan' (Interviewee E1) and plots of land are 'subdivided without considering the authorities... [but] later require services like drainage, water, and electricity', which is starting to generate problems for the municipalities (Interviewee G2).

This trend also affects the enclave tourism segment, albeit to a lesser extent. Homes within enclaves can now be rented out on digital platforms during unoccupied periods, providing additional economic benefits. What is pivotal for this tourism model is the resurgence of real estate projects, with notable examples like Las Rosadas, Zafiro, El Tecuan and Chalacatepec, which integrate an airfield capable of operating as an international airport. Additionally, the Four Seasons hotel within the El Tamarindo complex has commenced operations, and there are plans to expand the Careyes complex, which remains the region's flagship project and 'a globally recognized brand' (Interviewee E4).

At this stage the two tourism models diverge significantly (Table 8). The enclave model is reviving old projects and starting new ones, with investors concerned about regional issues like connectivity, security, and services. In contrast, conventional tourism, despite a significant increase in both national and foreign visitors that boost local incomes, lacks renewal and innovation. This segment views enclave initiatives with suspicion, noting a lack of communication and minimal interaction. This is reflected in the interviewee’s words: ‘areas like Careyes or Chamela, which have a relatively similar history of dispossession, appropriation, conflict, and violence - where the conflict remains latent - have now found some semblance of balance. However, ‘tourism continues to grow, and at some point, private entities will likely seek to introduce something new [in other areas]’ (Interviewee I1). The branching process of the tourism model using digital platforms for apartment and property rentals has just begun, and analyzing its impact on the transformation in the region’s tourism landscape will be essential in the coming years. Another potential driver of regional tourism is the new state administration, in office since December 2024, which has pledged to prioritize the sector. However, no concrete initiatives have been implemented yet to generate a significant impact.

Table 8. Agency dynamics in the path development of the Southern Coast of Jalisco (After 2020).

	Primary sector - transfer	Tourism conventional model - downgrading	Tourism enclave model - upgrading	Tourism platforms model - branching
Government		Loss of trust relationships with small service providers Increase of promotion of tourism-oriented projects (some failed or discontinued)	Loss of trust relationships with entrepreneurs	Inexistent urban planning Municipalities facing Issues for providing basic services
Local entrepreneurs	Unregulated sell of urban lands for construction of second homes	Lock-in of traditional tourism services due to lack of innovation and investment	Latent conflicts, lack of communication and minimal interaction with enclave ventures	Adaptation to new market conditions and emergence of new business models (short-term apartment rentals through digital platforms)
Non-local entrepreneurs			Adaptation to new market conditions Increased foreign direct investment in real estate and luxury tourism projects Concerns about local conditions and services	Emergence of complementary business models (short-term property rentals in unoccupied periods)
Labor		Return of workers at lower pace due to economic losses	Return of employees to regular work conditions	

Green = change agency.
Grey = reproductive/maintenance agency.
Red = conflicts or negative impacts.
Source: Author’s elaboration drawing on Bækkelund (2021) and Benner (2022b, 2023).

Agency in coevolutionary path development

This study supports the vision that agency is a fundamental driver of change and adaptation, and together with structural factors highly influence regional coevolutionary development (Boschma, 2017; Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2023; Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2014, 2022). Thus, the research details how micro-level agency has been key to change and adaptation during critical junctures (Bækkelund, 2021; Grillitsch et al., 2021; James et al., 2025) of regional coevolutionary development in the Southern Coast of Jalisco. A multi-actor perspective identified various local public and private stakeholders playing a pivotal role in the path development process (Hassink et al., 2019) and highlight the empowered leadership role of key individuals, especially foreign investors and public figures, in shaping new paths and evolving the destination - as evidenced by Gill and Williams (2014) in other American destinations. Interestingly, the case study emphasizes the crucial role of non-local agents - i.e. the public sector and external entrepreneurs—whose actions are particularly relevant in emerging countries or economies (Belay & Adu-Ampong, 2023) and impact coevolving paths differently. The national government performed vital change agency in earlier path development stages in both conventional and enclave paths, but its influence waned as tourism paths became more consolidated. Non-local entrepreneurs have focused solely on the enclave tourism path, driving ambitious development plans, privatization of public functions, and new tourism models and markets. Over time, they have adapted to changing contexts, importing and training the workforce to support their objectives. Along these lines, this research also examines labor force dynamics and emphasizes the significant role of labor practices, conditions, and migrations in constraining or stimulating change (Ioannides & Brouder, 2017).

The study also explores the different impact that reproductive and change agencies have in path development (Bækkelund, 2021; Benner, 2022b), particularly, in the coevolution of multiple paths within the same industry and in relation to other industries. In so doing, the research aligns with recent EEG developments that recognize the complexity of inter-path relations when multiple development paths coevolve (Benner, 2023; Breul et al., 2021; Flood Chavez et al., 2023; Stihl, 2022). Relations with traditional economic activities were mostly related to the opportunities brought to local farmers to sell their produce to accommodation providers and to fishermen who diversified their livelihoods by offering tourist experiences. Nevertheless, the primary sector-tourism inter-path relations have also been the source of negative impacts, conflicts and inequality, particularly in relation to enclave initiatives. These less synergistic connections relate to the strong competition for land use and ownership, and also to the exclusion of locals and national markets. Finally, another inter-path relationship identified refers to the transfer of capital and workforce from the primary sector to tourism paths because of the primacy and higher benefits of the tourism activity. Notably, the analysis also explored the role of agency and related variety in the case of coevolving multiple paths of the same industry (conventional, enclave and platform tourism). This kind of unrelated/related variety inter-path relations and their role in the shaping of the evolutionary path of each branch are novelties in the current literature about coevolution and agency in regional path development.

The paper also examines how tourism path creation differed from traditional activities (primary sector) and was not related to local capabilities at the moment in an initial stage. The scenario differed significantly in the first branching process (enclave tourism) and even more so in the second one (platform tourism). In these cases, local capabilities aligned with tourism and were strengthened by leveraging related variety (Bathelt & Storper, 2023; Boschma, 2017). This phenomenon is not unique to the specific Mexican case study of the Southern Coast of Jalisco but can also help understand tourism development across Latin America and the Global South. Moreover, the case study shows that factors shaping the evolution of tourism pathways were largely driven by agency dynamics, reflecting the complex interplay of various actors' roles and interventions (Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2022).

Structural factors, long central to regional economic development discourse (Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2023), were analyzed in the Southern Coast of Jalisco to understand how agency operates within this context. This approach provides a deeper understanding of the intricate dynamics that shape a destination's coevolutionary path development. Social, economic, environmental, and political conditions are fundamental in facilitating or hindering actors' decisions, actions and interactions, thus influencing the development of new branches within the destination's complex, multi-scalar context. In this case, the key factors were: laws and planning strategies (especially those connected to land use and ownership, tourism development plans, and environmental protection); economic recessions and global crises; global health crisis; and global market trends.

The research contributes to the core aims of the EEG literature by analyzing the destination's emergence and evolution, providing valuable insights for several reasons. First, it applies the more recent 'path as process' perspective, going beyond the use of canonical conceptualizations (Benner, 2023). Second, it provides nearly 100-year longitudinal perspective, offering deep understanding into the destination's long-term evolution as called for in the literature (Benner, 2023; Henning, 2019; James et al., 2023). Third, this paper contributes a conceptual framework table that clearly and succinctly defines selected forms of agency and pathways with specific examples, while also introducing two new path categories—path advancement and path transfer - to the existing literature (James et al., 2023, 2025). Finally, the analysis accentuates the importance of developing tailored policy recommendations focusing on social innovation, sustainability, inclusive and cohesive growth, and social equality (Gong & Hassink, 2019). This becomes crucial for addressing destination-specific challenges, ensuring policy relevance and effectiveness by considering local contexts and promoting sustainability economically, socially and environmentally. The focus should be on reducing disparities, ensuring equitable resource access, and fostering inclusive growth. Effective implementation, continuous evaluation, and diverse stakeholder involvement are essential to ensure policies achieve these objectives and contribute to broader development goals.

Conclusions

This paper illustrates how applying coevolutionary theories focusing on the role of agency and inter-path relations can enhance our understanding of the

multifaceted and complex evolution of tourism places. These insights are invaluable for policymakers aiming to foster resilient, adaptive, and inclusive path development strategies.

The research reveals that the coevolution of distinct tourism models on the Southern Coast of Jalisco, faces common challenges. These include the deployment of transportation infrastructure, provision of public services, workforce training, and government planning processes. The research also demonstrates that the observed coevolutionary process is driven by the actions of various actors, whose efforts and interests have shaped the distinct paths of tourism development in the area (Sanz-Ibáñez & Anton Clavé, 2014). Those coevolutionary paths have been non-linear and non-deterministic. They were built in various moments, with actors responding to them driving transformation and, in some cases, setting up branching processes determined by structural conditions on global, national, regional, and local scales (Benner, 2023). Likewise, the paper also discusses how branching creates differentiated paths that face common adversities - e.g. social, economic, environmental and even public health related - that require coevolution to sustain each paths' market operation (Hassink & Ma, 2017; Ma & Hassink, 2013).

From a theoretical perspective, this article contributes to strengthening EEG as an approach for studying the evolution of tourist destinations (Butler, 2024) by joining current discussions on the role of change and reproductive agency in shaping different types of paths that influence regional development (James et al., 2025). In this sense, the paper provides evidence of two new forms of path development, enriching the 'path metaphor' framework (Sanz-Ibáñez et al., 2017): path advancement and path transfer. Likewise, it takes into account the role of work and workers in these processes, showing how the agency of tourism sector workers combined with the practices of other stakeholders shape the destination's evolutionary trajectory (Ioannides & Brouder, 2017). By offering empirical evidence on the complex coevolutionary and branching dynamics in a destination's trajectory (Benner, 2022b; Brouder and Fullerton, 2015), this paper also addresses Bathelt and Storper (2023) implicit call for analyses that identify the factors driving tourism development in destinations where local capabilities were initially lacking. In this vein, the paper results in an in-depth micro level analysis of the impact of change and reproductive agency in coevolving path development (Bækkelund, 2021; Grillitsch et al., 2021), with a multi-actor and multi-scalar perspective that reveals the key role of non-local actors -national government and individual foreign investors- in emerging countries or economies (Belay & Adu-Ampong, 2023; Gauna & Oliveros-Ocampo, 2021). A final key contribution to the literature is linked to this last question. The research demonstrates how, through tourism, Global South countries integrate into the capitalist market by developing projects that cater to global elites, who privately exploit their natural and cultural heritage. While these projects partially involve local communities through jobs and small service companies, similar initiatives are also developed for domestic visitors to boost demand for leisure services, expand the global market, and funnel economic benefits back to the capitalist center. In this model, the Global South keeps limited economic benefits and most of the social and natural impacts, which are often irreversible (Wallerstein, 2013).

Already connected to global circuits of tourism development, today the Southern Coast of Jalisco is immersed in new moments of transformation (and, thus, branching), motivated by changes (second residence and rentals on digital platforms, among others), that once again are transforming the place for its adaptation to a challenging reality.

As a limitation of the study, it is important to recognize when implementing the path tracing methodology that stakeholders' narratives are subjective and local stakeholders, through their retelling of past events, often seek to legitimize their actions, as well as to align them to broader political and economic agendas to attract support (James et al., 2023). This signals that further analysis of destination coevolutionary path development can greatly benefit from incorporating recent discussions on processes of legitimation, which have been highlighted as a crucial dimension of path development (Benner, 2022a). Moreover, expanding the analysis to other destinations where tourism development paths were not strongly tied to local capabilities (Bathelt & Storper, 2023) can also be a crucial future task to deepen understanding of the factors influencing tourism places' evolution.

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