



TOURISM EVOLUTION: ON THE SYNERGIES OF TOURISM STUDIES AND EVOLUTIONARY ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY

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Abstract: Evolutionary Economic Geography (EEG) is receiving increasing interest from tourism scholars. EEG has proven to be a useful explanatory paradigm in other sectors, *e.g.*, high-technology and creative sectors. There remains, however, a lack of theoretical discussion on evolutionary principles of economic change within relatively low-technology service sectors, of which tourism is a prime example. This paper introduces EEG to a wider tourism audience by presenting the core principles of EEG and how they relate to tourism studies. A selection of new research paths combining EEG and tourism studies is highlighted together with a number of latent research synergies which can progress both EEG and tourism studies. The paper calls for further empirical and conceptual engagement with EEG by tourism scholars. **Keywords:** evolutionary economic geography, path dependence, TALC, tourism. © 2013 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

The challenging epistemology of tourism studies has been at the core of its scholarly development for decades as tourism studies has embraced and advanced theory from several disciplines (Xiao, Jafari, Cloke, & Tribe, 2013). Therefore, calls from tourism scholars for closer theoretical connection between economic geography and tourism studies should be taken seriously (Ioannides, 2006; Mitchell & Murphy, 1991; Song, Dwyer, Li, & Cao, 2012). This article presents one emerging paradigm within economic geography—Evolutionary Economic Geography (EEG)—which is receiving increasing interest from tourism scholars (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Ma & Hassink,

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2013). EEG focuses on how past conditions both enable and constrain future courses of economic change (Boschma & Martin, 2010a) and this paper shows how it may be a fruitful ground for future empirical and conceptual development.

A number of years ago Boschma and Frenken (2006) asked ‘why is economic geography not an evolutionary science?’, paraphrasing Veblen’s (1898) seminal call for greater heterodox thinking in economics. Would tourism studies benefit from asking a similar question? Several publications in *Annals of Tourism Research* have shown the potential of evolutionary perspectives dating back to Cohen’s (1979, 1982) call for multilineal models of tourism development. More recently, evolutionary concepts are found in studies of how knowledge is produced and diffused between tourism stakeholders (Cooper, 2006; Weidenfeld, Williams, & Butler, 2010) as well as in studies focusing on the evolution of tourism destinations and resorts (Ma & Hasink, 2013; Papatheodorou, 2004). Elsewhere, tourism scholars have roundly dismissed simplistic modelling of the tourism economy and have instead embraced the complexity of tourism development (Baggio, 2008; Milne & Ateљеvic, 2001). Thus, in order to better conceptualise the tourism economy, new theoretical avenues must be explored with EEG seeming particularly promising.

EEG focuses on how the spatial economy self-transforms through irreversible and dynamic processes of economic novelty emerging from the micro-behaviour of economic agents such as individuals and firms (Boschma & Martin, 2010a), and is, according to Boschma and Frenken (2006), reducible neither to neoclassical approaches nor to institutional approaches in economic geography. EEG relies not only on the territorial (institutional) scale of regional development but focuses on the important elements of change, micro-level agency of firms and individuals, and localised preconditions in studies of sectoral development. The foundation is the neo-Schumpeterian viewpoint that human creativity (or knowledge) and innovation drive economic evolution since knowledge within firms and individuals is constantly created and not a pre-given factor as often assumed in endogenous growth theory (*cf.* Schumpeter, 1934). Such a conceptualisation of knowledge and the economic actors carrying knowledge may help tourism scholars to achieve a greater understanding on the growth and decline of regional tourism economies and why some destinations are resilient while others are in a more precarious position. Thus, it creates space for theoretical cohesion between different aspects of tourism research and ties tourism research to broader questions of economic restructuring and regional development.

This article presents the central epistemological precepts of EEG—path dependence, complexity theory, and generalised Darwinism—as well as its main empirical developments. Also, the utility of the paradigm for tourism research is contextualised with an illustration relating EEG to Butler’s TALC, followed by four pertinent realms of enquiry for tourism scholars, departing from path dependence (and new path creation) to regional branching, networks and knowledge transfer, and entrepreneurship. Just as importantly, the potential contribution of

tourism studies to the development of EEG is highlighted. This overview of EEG reveals new theoretical and empirical perspectives for tourism scholars working with questions of tourism development and regional development in different geographical contexts. The utility of the EEG paradigm for tourism studies is also critically appraised. Given that a number of recent empirical studies of tourism evolution have emerged in tourism journals, some explicitly invoking EEG (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Ma & Hassink, 2013) and others not (Ivars i Baidal, Rodríguez Sánchez, & Vera Rebollo, 2013), it is timely to explore the potential value of an EEG approach within tourism studies.

EVOLUTIONARY ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY AND TOURISM

In our evolutionary approach to economic geography, we start from the definition of economic geography as dealing with the uneven distribution of economic activity across space. An evolutionary approach specifically focuses on the historical processes that produce these patterns. The current distribution of economic activity across space is thus understood as an outcome of largely contingent, yet path dependent, historical processes.
(Boschma & Frenken, 2011, p. 286)

In recent years there has been an evolutionary turn in economic geography (Boschma & Frenken, 2006; Boschma & Martin, 2007; Grabher, 2009; Martin, 2009) focussing on how past conditions both enable and constrain future courses of economic change. Drawing inspiration from evolutionary economics (*e.g.*, Hodgson, 1999; Nelson & Winter, 1982; Witt, 2003), EEG stresses complex interdependencies, competition, growth and structural change through both actions formed by experience and interactions of economic agents over time. The evolution of the tourism economy has a special spatial dimension because it emerges and evolves in different regions around the world in quite different ways and so this paper primarily focuses on the literature of evolutionary processes in a regional context, rather than on technological, organisational, or sectoral change *per se* (*cf.* Carroll & Harrison, 1994; Dosi & Nelson, 2010). This is also because evolutionary processes build on learning exchanges which tend to be geographically bounded at the regional level (Eriksson & Lindgren, 2009; Glaeser, Kallal, Scheinkman, & Schleifer, 1992). It is important to note that within a regional economy, multiple levels of agent interaction in the form of labour, firms, networks, technologies and institutions are found so that the region can be regarded as a bundle of many sources of evolutionary change.

Several studies offer comprehensive overviews relating EEG to both institutional and political economy approaches in geography, as well as evolutionary economics (*e.g.*, Boschma & Frenken, 2006, 2010; Boschma & Martin, 2010a; Coe, 2011; MacKinnon, Cumbers, Pike, Birch, & McMaster, 2009). This paper draws on these and presents the three main conceptual foundations on which EEG relies: path dependence,

complexity theory, and generalised Darwinism (Boschma & Martin, 2010b). Tourism, as a place-based sector, is open to wide variations in its development depending on local factors and so it is well suited to studies utilising an EEG perspective. EEG also opens the analysis to interactions and relationships beyond the tourism sector since regions are more heterogeneous than destinations by definition. However, in practical terms, both region and destination are multifarious terms and have variegated applications in empirical studies. Nevertheless, the three antecedents of EEG mentioned above are most often studied in a regional context and how each relates to previous studies in tourism requires elaboration from the outset.

Path Dependence

Much of the previous research on path dependence within economic geography is based on the work of David (1997) and Arthur (1994). According to Henning, Stam, and Wenting (2013) these standard models share three commonalities which define a formal interpretation of path dependence, *i.e.*, improbable events have a long-run effect on economic structures, mechanisms of increasing returns or network externalities reinforce situations created by chance (*i.e.*, lock-in), and external shocks can disrupt the persistence of lock-in patterns (*cf.* Martin, 2009). This approach is not merely a signal that history matters but a focus on how reinforcement mechanisms lead to path dependence (Sydow, Schreyögg, & Koch, 2009). Martin (2009), however, argues that path dependence approaches only consider path dependence once a technology or industry is established at a location and therefore give little information on exactly why, apart from random chance, it appeared at a specific location (Boschma & Frenken, 2006). Moreover, the notion of lock-in in this model tends to rely on equilibrium-based (or multiple equilibria) conceptualisations of economic change in which, once a series of historical selections have become stable, it is not possible to escape that particular path unless an external shock creates a new path. Thus, lock-in becomes more a reflection of different stages of local convergence and therefore offers an incomplete view of change (Martin & Sunley, 2010).

Tourism scholars have found path dependence a useful concept in the past (Bramwell, 2011; Bramwell & Cox, 2009; Gill & Williams, 2011; Papatheodorou, 2004; Williams & Baláž, 2002) with studies focusing on the agency of tourism stakeholders in new path creation while also acknowledging the traditional administrative structures which cause inertial trajectories in regions with either an established (*e.g.*, Whistler winter resort, Canada) or emerging (*e.g.*, post-socialist central and eastern Europe) tourism economy. These studies have shown the usefulness of a path dependence (and path creation) approach in tourism research. Williams and Baláž's comprehensive study of the former Czechoslovakia shows that tourism, after the transition to the free market, developed divergently but in a path dependent manner based on the set up of the regional economy before the transition (Williams &

Baláz, 2000). Thus, while tourism research on economies in transition has highlighted stark changes over a relatively short period of time (Bramwell & Meyer, 2007; Williams & Baláz, 2000), it is also important to understand the multiple paths, both endogenous to the tourism economy and exogenous to it, affecting evolutionary (long-term) changes in all regions. It is here where EEG with its incorporation of complexity theory may facilitate some advancement.

Complexity Theory

To engage more fully with actual evolution, or the internal transformation of the regional economy, the complexity of local industrial development must be considered (Martin & Sunley, 2010). A focus on complexity theory allows for path dependent co-evolution since different local industries, as well as different local firms within the same industry, are characterised by a variety of different technologies, activities, and competitors. Thus, the economy is seen as an open system subject to constant dynamic interactions with surrounding agents. This implies that different activities may follow their own evolutionary path, which may not necessarily correspond to the institutional trajectory of the region itself. This complexity of paths and variety of interactions between agents also influences the possibility for new technological and industrial paths to develop endogenously and co-exist with the already existing paths. Incremental changes can thus occur in firms or sectors within a region while the region itself still exhibits path dependence and continuity.

A number of studies within tourism have called for embracing complexity (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004; McDonald, 2009; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001; Russell & Faulkner, 2004; Zahra & Ryan, 2007), primarily as a mode of understanding tourism's place within a broader sustainable development agenda. While studies have embraced complexity theory in terms of, for example, tourism and the environment interactions, complexity theory is rarely incorporated in studies of the tourism economy (*cf.* Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). Williams and Baláz (2000, p. 161) point the way towards studies of evolutionary change when they state that understanding tourism's role in economic change is not only about jobs or income "but also the linkages between economic sectors in terms of products, services, capital flows and the transfer of entrepreneurial skills." Bramwell and Meyer (2007, p. 768) go further, stating that economic entities "achieve their meanings through their complex interconnections". Therefore, potential exists for studies to include the multiple, co-evolving, tourism development paths within a regional economy of multiple, co-evolving, non-tourism development paths.

Thus, tourism development is contingent and embedded within the wider regional economy (Williams & Baláz, 2000). Using Newcastle Gateshead as a related example, Comunian (2011) shows that a predominantly 'one size fits all', top-down policy approach of attracting and facilitating the growth of creative industries throughout the

western world fails to acknowledge the interaction-based nature of service growth and how the growth of one sector is linked to processes in other sectors and regional institutions. This insight reminds researchers and policy makers to carefully consider where to draw the boundaries of firms and individuals that should be included in analyses of sector-specific development since all agents contribute to defining the local economic landscape. This ultimately leads to considerations of the mechanisms of interaction which are the concern of generalised Darwinism.

Generalised Darwinism

While path dependence focuses on the retention of existing knowledge and complexity theory on the co-existence of heterogeneous paths, generalised Darwinism is the most frequently utilised approach in EEG with its focus on how concepts such as variety, selection, novelty and continuity provide insights on economic change. According to [Essletzbichler and Rigby \(2010\)](#), this approach examines how a population of heterogeneous entities evolves through interaction among themselves and with the landscape they help shape and possible interactions with other populations in other regions. Regions are not seen as units of selection but regarded as selection environments within and across which evolutionary processes operate ([Boschma & Martin, 2010b](#)). Thus, this approach differs from many other contemporary notions within the innovation and regional development literature (such as cluster theory, innovation systems and learning regions) which regard regions as subjects able to compete and/or learn.

In generalised Darwinism, the notion of variety rather than regional diversification or specialisation is highlighted as crucial for regional change and renewal. It is, however, related variety (*i.e.*, complementarity) which is assumed to trigger positive externalities since knowledge cannot be too different nor too similar to induce localised learning processes ([Boschma, Eriksson, & Lindgren, 2009](#); [Boschma & Iammarino, 2009](#); [Frenken, Van Oort, & Verburg, 2007](#)). This fits well into the conceptualisation of tourism development since the tourism sector is widely regarded as a conglomeration of related industries ([Ioannides & Debbage, 1998](#)).

There are as yet no tourism studies specifically invoking generalised Darwinism. A few studies have taken the approach of [Weidenfeld et al. \(2010\)](#) in exploring the mechanisms of knowledge transfer between tourism firms. Since there is evidence in other sectors that knowledge transfer between firms has a positive effect on firm and regional performance ([Eriksson, 2011](#)), further studies on the mechanisms of knowledge transfer between tourism firms could take a broader scope. Moreover, the myriad studies on knowledge transfer and tourism clusters (*cf.* [Cooper, 2006](#); [Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006](#); [Shaw & Williams, 2009](#)) show that there is room for testing generalised Darwinism in a tourism context. Ultimately, generalised Darwinism favours a multi-level evolutionary theory ([Essletzbichler, 2012](#)) and so studies

of evolutionary approaches within tourism will need to carefully consider the demands of a generalised Darwinism approach so that methodological reductionism does not preclude an openness to the ontological holism proffered by generalised Darwinism.

Illustrating the Latent Synergies of EEG and Tourism using the TALC

Many tourism scholars may be unfamiliar with EEG yet they are experienced with notions of change at the destination level. Basic evolutionary approaches in tourism studies have been highly influenced by the seminal work on the Tourist Area Life Cycle (TALC) which used population theory from ecology as well as the product life cycle as its underpinnings (Butler, 1980). This section highlights the latent synergies of EEG and tourism studies with the TALC as a relatable example for all tourism scholars. While it has drawn much critique for its apparent deterministic view of tourism development as well as its lack of consideration of endogenous change (*cf.* Butler, 2006a, 2006b), it has spawned considerable theoretical development in tourism studies (*cf.* Butler, 2006a, 2006b).

More recently, Ivars i Baidal *et alia* depart from the TALC to explain the evolution of a mass tourism destination but conclude that such models “cannot entirely explain the complexity of local tourism systems and their interaction with the market” (Ivars i Baidal *et al.*, 2013, p. 194). Furthermore, Ma and Hassink (2013) apply EEG theory to tourism area development by synergising the TALC model with evolutionary notions to refine studies of tourism area development. Does EEG then offer possibilities for broader conceptualisations of the tourism economy? Since tourism occurs across regions as well as at individual destinations and since tourism is made up of a number of different sub-sectors with independent but interacting development paths, there is good reason to consider new perspectives on the tourism economy which may reveal new angles of interpretation of economic change. Figure 1 shows the standard TALC model of Butler (1980) alongside Martin’s (2009) conceptually-proximate evolutionary path development model showing that there is further potential in evolutionary approaches to understanding the tourism economy.

Martin’s (2009) model begs the question of whether long-term tourism development is best conceived in a unilineal or multilineal manner. Is a life-cycle trajectory the ‘natural’ course (as most TALC-inspired studies have assumed)? Or, is cyclical resurgence over the long-term more likely (tourism retreats when other sectors are booming making a comeback when those industries are in crisis?, *e.g.*, Schmallegger and Carson (2010) ask whether tourism is another type of staple in resource-based economies, only developing when traditional staples are in crisis. Given that tourism in many places is relatively new, is a period of rapid growth before settling in to a stable equilibrium the dominant pattern?, *i.e.*, where tourism becomes so commonplace that it is virtually indistinguishable from other mobilities/economies, as is argued to be the case in large urban centres like

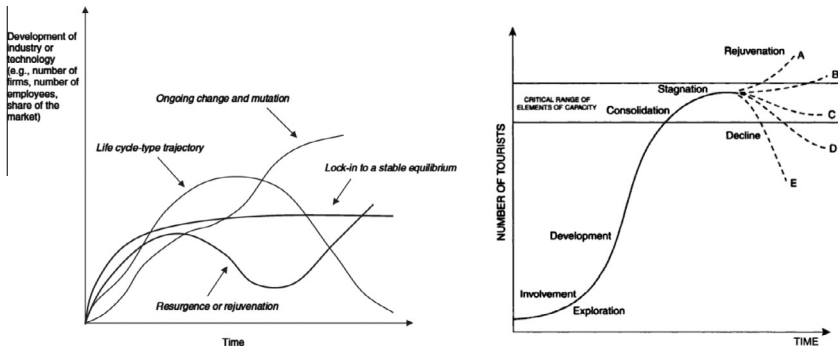


Figure 1. Martin's (2009) stylised alternative evolutionary paths of an industry or technology alongside Butler's (1980) more familiar Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC)

New York or London (*cf.* Urry & Larsen, 2011)? Or, is ongoing change and mutation the most common occurrence?, *i.e.*, where tourism evolves and co-opts other sectors (such as creative arts) leading to new forms of tourism at destinations over time, as is argued to be the case in mass tourism destinations in the Mediterranean (Anton Clavé, 2012; Ivars i Baidal et al., 2013). Since evolutionary pressures are not internal to tourism systems then departing from various hypothetical patterns better conceptualises regional change processes.

Martin and Sunley (2010) argue that an evolutionary approach to path development opens up for new conceptualisations of the processes which drive change. Concomitantly, Haywood (2006) calls for TALC theorists to explore the elusive processes of change and “to adjust their vocabulary and thought processes—from the concept of ‘change’ to the processes of ‘changing’” (Haywood, 2006, p. 53). Włodarczyk (2007) cautions against ignoring the cumulative geographical change in long-term studies of tourist destinations implying development of tourist space may be better conceptualised as an ongoing process of evolution. Furthermore, there is not one way for a region (or destination) to develop and if there are different ways then why do different long-term development patterns occur in different regions (or destinations)?

The point where either decline or rejuvenation occur catches attention in the TALC but it is the unseen and complex interactions throughout the development up to that point and beyond which are of interest from an evolutionary perspective. As Haywood (2006, p. 68) notes, the TALC “will be enhanced when more is known about the motors of change”. Thus, Haywood does not criticise the TALC, it has served (and continues to serve) a purpose. However, other theoretical approaches may yield new insights on the mechanisms underpinning the evolution of the tourism economy. EEG has had success in investigating the motors of change in other sectors and having highlighted its potential synergies with tourism research, the following

section discusses the main research paths departing from long-term path dependence and including research areas which are actionable for tourism studies.

Research Paths for Tourism and Evolutionary Economic Geography

There are a number of research paths along which tourism studies and evolutionary economic geography may co-evolve. Four themes are presented in this paper with path dependence as the over-arching theme from which three sub-themes are derived: regional branching into tourism; networks and knowledge transfer in tourism, and tourism entrepreneurs. These themes are chosen for three reasons: (i) they are all established empirical fields in studies of EEG and hence the possibility of comparative studies with tourism exists, (ii) they are all focussed on the mechanisms of change within a region or destination rather than describing patterns of change and thus have potential to go beyond descriptive models of change in tourism, and (iii) one of the paths is under researched in tourism studies (regional branching) while the others are well established paths within tourism which may benefit from an EEG lens (path dependence, networks/knowledge transfer, and entrepreneurship). Thus, tourism studies benefits from the heterodox and holistic perspectives of EEG but tourism scholars also contribute to filling some epistemological gaps in EEG by providing applications of EEG theory in the relatively untested service sector of tourism.

Path Dependence and New Path Creation. Path dependence is the term used to reflect the inertial trajectory of a region as a result of long-term processes, a state which will only be altered by either major intervention, some external shock, or the embedding of new seeds of structural change in the hope that they will germinate and grow in the long-term (Neffke & Svensson Henning, 2010). By studying the dismantling of the Danish shipyard industry, Holm, Østergaard, and Olesen (2013) found that laid-off employees that started working in spin-off firms were less affected by skill-destruction than workers that were re-employed in different (unrelated) sectors. Their findings also show that, the more specialised the region, the more likely it is that employees end up in other related industries, while in diversified regions (*e.g.*, Copenhagen) laid-off workers tend to end up in different sectors. Thus, to understand how a new path is created (*e.g.*, if tourism is to develop in manufacturing or agricultural regions) it is essential to acknowledge the regional specificities which facilitate new routine replication leading to a new development trajectory based on new regional combinations of human capital resources.

Path creation has been a theme in tourism studies as a way for agents to change the path dependent trajectory of their destination through policy intervention and stakeholder collaboration (Bramwell & Meyer, 2007; Gill & Williams, 2011). Papatheodorou (2004) has argued for further theoretical development of resort evolution explicitly utilising

economic geography to present a model which incorporates the agency of fringe firms and fringe locations in the tourism economy, which implies that evolutionary path creation is mediated through the existing local socioeconomic structures. Path dependence studies generally take an after-the-fact approach with the presence of, for example, mass tourism in urban areas adjudged to create negative externalities as well as exposing the region to some inevitable future shock which will lead to crisis in the regional economy. However, it is also essential to show whether the historical processes not only reproduce the dominant path but whether they influence the development of alternatives (Henning et al., 2013). For example, Boschma and Wenting (2007) show that the local emergence of new industries is more likely from related industries rather than only chance events, implying a path creation through successive paths with incremental changes. This process can be investigated by means of, for example, survival analysis of firms.

At the other end of the spatial spectrum, small-scale tourism in rural areas is seen as a marginal phenomenon in all but a few locations and one which most likely cannot break the path dependence of agricultural or manufacturing based regions. However, while path dependence is a noted constraint in most regions (either by locking them into unsustainable forms of tourism or by locking them out from diversifying the economy to include tourism) studies of new path creation reveal just how intricate and challenging change really is (Gill & Williams, 2011). It should be acknowledged, however, that the forces of path dependence are very difficult to resist and future studies of regions which cannot break with their path trajectory would offer insights on the inhibitors to innovation in destinations. Also, the mechanisms of change have been alluded to in tourism studies (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Marchant & Mottiar, 2011) but need to be researched directly to show, for instance, how tourism development is introduced to regions which were previously reliant on different sectors, *e.g.*, resource-based economies in peripheral regions. Furthermore, studies on the mechanisms by which regions break with path dependence and create new paths is needed, particularly studies from mass tourism dominated regions trying to create more sustainable future development paths (*e.g.*, Anton Clavé, 2012).

A major concern within economic geography is how to explain the uneven spatial distribution of economic activities. In tourism, as in other sectors, more than locational advantages influence why, where, and when certain clusters emerge (Christaller, 1964; Porter, 2000). EEG offers a micro-level, historical perspective on the development of the spatial economy and shows that successful routines survive over time but that the acquisition of successful routines is limited by the bounded rationality of economic actors (firms and individuals), *i.e.*, success tends to breed success but finding new ways to succeed is subject to cognitive constraints (Boschma & Frenken, 2006) since individuals/firms have a limited capacity to embrace change.

Regional Branching. Closely related to path dependence and creation, regional branching is the process through which new types of business emerge from related local industries by exploiting and recombining existing regional capabilities. This can be by means of firm diversification, firm spinoff, labour mobility, and social networking (Nygaard Tanner, 2012), and typically causes greater variety in a region through the selection process of certain diversifiers. In particular, related diversifiers (*i.e.*, new firms with similar or related routines) promote incremental changes to the regional industrial structure while unrelated diversifiers (inexperienced start-ups) may impede successful knowledge transfer since too much cognitive distance between incumbents and entrants is likely to obstruct knowledge transfer (Neffke & Svensson Henning, 2010). Neffke, Henning, and Boschma (2011), for example, show that industries are more likely to emerge in regions where related sectors are already present. Their study also finds that industries have lower risk of exiting a region if they are related to the existing industries. Thus, selection and variety are symbiotic since (related) variety drives selection and selection processes tend to create further variety (*e.g.*, Metcalfe, 1994). New firm success is not only shaped by the inherited routines of the entrepreneur, this process also tends to be unevenly distributed in space and greatly influenced by past local conditions. The territorial context thus matters in EEG and this becomes clear when examining similar processes in different territories and milieus (*cf.* Rigby & Essletzbichler, 2006).

Tourism is a composite product offer (Cooper & Hall, 2008; Ioannides & Debbage, 1998) and so, in one respect, the more businesses offering various products and services the greater the related variety present in a destination (*i.e.*, a composition of technologies or economic activities that is neither too similar nor too different) and, therefore, there is certainly potential for successful branching to occur. An example from within tourism is the long-term development of 'lifestyle entrepreneurs' (*cf.* Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000) with recent research showing that not all who have lifestyle motives are constrained by these motives over time (Marchant & Mottiar, 2011). It is reasonable, however, to argue that even if lifestyle entrepreneurs are not against growth *per se* their lack of focus on a growth-oriented strategy may slow development in any case. However, striving for growth-oriented tourism development is an unrealistic goal for most communities (Sharpley, 2002). From an evolutionary perspective lifestyle entrepreneurs become a special agent of change since they are the actors who introduce new skills and ideas to a locality and who see new value in local assets (Anderson, 2000), and who can thus initiate processes of regional branching by recombining their knowledge of, for example, external markets with local knowledge to develop new products.

However, regional branching into tourism remains a rough road, where numerous possible dead-ends are common and formulaic developments are not at all common. Nascent successes may be easily undone. The preponderance of successful cases is somewhat misleading in tourism studies since it is the more common but less studied development failures which are a better reflection of reality. Moreover, there

are also minor, incremental successes through, for example, project-based temporary networks which leave behind an almost unnoticed legacy of increased knowledge and local understanding (Brouder, 2012; Conway & Cawley, 2012). How exactly regional branching comes about is an underdeveloped research area and requires greater attention from tourism scholars. How does a recognisable tourism economy become established in a region and how does nascent success become embedded? Which internal transformations allow new sectors to emerge? These research questions offer plenty of opportunity for empirical research in tourism across the globe since tourism development is at different evolutionary stages in different regions. The potential for comparative studies with other sectors also exists.

Networks and Knowledge Transfer. The role of networks in enabling effective regional development has led to calls for a relational turn in economic geography (Bathelt & Glückler, 2003; Dicken & Malmberg, 2001). Despite the critique of the relational turn as offering only a partial, thematic episteme (Sunley, 2009; Yeung, 2005), EEG scholars see networks as an important element of any framework to understand long-term economic change (Boschma & Frenken, 2006). The evolution of spatial networks has proven difficult to study due to a lack of available longitudinal data and a limited Euclidean-distance conceptualisation of proximity (Boschma & Frenken, 2010).

An important consideration for tourism scholars is the nature of knowledge transfer since the relatively standardised routines and generic skills requirements of low-technology sectors may not share the ontological essence of routines and skills requirements in high-technology sectors. For example, can the same knowledge requirements be expected in different technological regimes and if the knowledge requirements are different how transferable are theories from one sector type to a very different one? EEG studies of, for example, the book publishing industry (Heebels & Boschma, 2011) and non-EEG studies of the cognitive-cultural economy (Scott, 2007) are similar enough to tourism studies to somewhat reduce the theoretical leap of faith. However, the operationalisation of studies of knowledge transfer needs careful consideration.

Accumulation of knowledge is accepted as an important driver of regional specialisation (Storper, 1995). The composite nature of the tourist product and the sequential consumption process (Huijbens, Hjalager, Björk, Nordin, & Flagestad, 2009) complicate analyses of regional knowledge transfer since there are many interactions and not all can be attributed to formal network relations. However, the transfer of innovative knowledge in tourism has been shown to occur in geographically-proximate clusters and is largely driven by intentional network cooperation between stakeholders offering related products (Weidenfeld et al., 2010). This begs the question whether knowledge transfer is more dependent on volitional networking or related routines between firms. How different can the network members be for a fruitful exchange to occur? Does the geographic location of a tourism network

(*e.g.*, urban/rural/peripheral) relax the need for similarity between actors or increase it? Diverse tourism destinations with their myriad stakeholders offer a rich laboratory for future studies.

Tourism Entrepreneurs. Researching entrepreneurs is one way to include individuals in analyses of how new routines are created and diffused and entrepreneurship is a central mechanism through which regional branching occurs. Tourism is dominated by SMEs and so research on entrepreneurs is a natural approach for applying EEG in tourism studies. Entrepreneurship rates have grown rapidly across the globe in recent decades (Carree, van Stel, Thurik, & Wennekers, 2002) and so entrepreneurs are more present than ever. Ateljevic (2009) links the growth in entrepreneurship across the industrial world in recent decades with the growth in tourism demand in the same time-frame highlighting that this has created opportunities for a wide variety of small-scale enterprises and thus entrepreneurship is a key driver of tourism development.

Although entrepreneurship is the mobilising factor in the production process (Drucker, 2007), an EEG lens sees entrepreneurship as being affected by the economic development history of the region, *e.g.*, some regions have a long tradition of reliance on large industrial employers while others have had an entrepreneurial spirit since their foundation. Empirical studies within EEG are inspired by research showing that new firms entering a market tend to have a higher survival rate if they inherit routines from previous establishments (spin-off firms) rather than if they lack previous experience (start-up firms) (Klepper, 2007) with successful spin-off firms most often located near their parent firm. Audretsch (2006) found that entrepreneurship in low-technology sectors had a strong influence on regional growth in Germany and so studying this group offers important insights to the spatial evolution of an industry. Whether or not new firm formation will lead to an actual transformation of the regional economy is dependent on the entrepreneur bringing successful routines forward. Thus, by studying factors influencing entrepreneurial survival, it is possible to learn more about the long-term contribution of the tourism sector to regional development. This is one area which Thomas, Shaw and Page (2011) highlight as currently under-researched in tourism studies.

EEG also investigates how the behavior of entrepreneurs influences the development of the spatial economy. Current activities are determined by inherited practices based on past decisions and activities (Boschma & Frenken, 2006; Boschma & Martin, 2007). These inherited practices are accumulated as skills in individuals, particularly entrepreneurs, and are difficult for others to copy and are thus highly actor-specific (Nelson & Winter, 1982). Brouder and Eriksson (2013) show that, while most new tourism firms fail in the early years, entrepreneurs with previous experience in tourism related activities increased their survival rate significantly and surviving tourism entrepreneurs contribute to employment in a region not traditionally associated with tourism. This implies that regional branching into

tourism may be facilitated by long-term routine replication and incremental gains.

Tourism entrepreneurship already holds a strong position in tourism research and would benefit from evolutionary approaches by, for example, investigating the (re)production of successful routines in empirical studies. Ateljevic and Li (2009, p. 10) state that there are: “new approaches by both the private and public sectors in the creation of innovative businesses as well as tourism development models worldwide”. Many new approaches exist, often competing for supremacy, and which of these new approaches will survive and become embedded and ultimately go on to develop further is a central concern of evolutionary research. EEG relates to innovation through its neo-Schumpeterian view on continuous reproduction of knowledge as central to economic change. Thus, entrepreneurs are potentially key subjects of evolutionary studies in tourism. Methods such as survival/event history analysis can be applied using both quantitative and qualitative data to show just how inherited practices affect new tourism firm performance over the long-term. Empirical studies would then be able to assess the micro-foundations of regional branching and how possible alternative development paths emerge. This will inform policy by showing how tourism entrepreneurs interact (between themselves and with related industries and institutions) and ultimately how they contribute to long-term regional economic diversification.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents evolutionary economic geography (EEG) to a wider tourism audience and demonstrates how it might be applied in tourism studies. A number of extant tourism studies have applied two of the theoretical antecedents to EEG—path dependence and complexity theory—while no previous tourism studies have applied the third EEG antecedent—generalised Darwinism. The paper highlights path dependence (and new path creation) as an important synergy between EEG and tourism studies and adds three further themes for empirical and theoretical development in common realms of enquiry: regional branching, networks and knowledge transfer, and tourism entrepreneurship. Although the epistemological coherence of EEG and tourism studies has barely been tested, tourism scholars engaging in these matters will contribute to scientific enquiry in two ways: first, by validating (or contesting) EEG principles in a new and different context, and second, by utilising a potentially powerful explanatory paradigm (EEG) to examine developments in the tourism economy and advance tourism theory.

This paper concludes that the latent synergies between evolutionary economic geography and tourism studies are worthy of scientific enquiry and calls on tourism scholars interested in new perspectives on regional development to engage with EEG theory (and EEG scholars). Whether tourism emerges newly (through branching) or anew (through revitalisation), or whether in isolation or tightly intertwined

with other economic activities, an evolutionary perspective offers scope for both broader and deeper understandings of the processes which bring change about.

Limitations of Evolutionary Economic Geography in Tourism Studies

There are three important limitations to applying EEG in tourism studies. First, there is a general critique against evolutionary approaches in the social sciences. This critique has diminished in recent years and much of it is based on the legacy of social Darwinism and the negative connotations of its association with eugenics projects in Europe up to World War II (Radick, 2003). However, a persistent critique of evolution is that it has no telos, *i.e.*, it is incorrect to assume that evolution necessarily leads to betterment of socioeconomic realities, this is no less so in economic evolution than in biological evolution (Essletzbichler, 2012). Essletzbichler (2012) rebuts this critique by highlighting the agency of human actors to redress the imbalances in the capitalist system so that evolutionary theory may become a socially progressive programme, *i.e.*, awareness of the mechanisms of change does not necessarily mean acceptance of those changes. Understanding how the economy evolves enhances our ability to question the nature of that evolution with, for example, growth-oriented models often challenged as unsustainable in tourism (Butler, 1999).

Second, there is an internal critique of evolutionary approaches within economic geography as “yet another turn” (Grabher, 2009). Despite its increasing utilisation by scholars, Essletzbichler and Rigby (2010) list a number of unresolved issues regarding generalised Darwinism. For example, the long-term self-organisation of economic entities can help explain how order emerges but tends to come up short in understanding the characteristics of interacting agents, how new orders react with existing orders or how an emerging order adapts and survives. Also, is it specific sectors, firms, or workers which should be the focus? Moreover, there is still little knowledge concerning the interaction between units in populations and their environment. There is also a debate within economic geography as to whether a separate evolutionary economic geography is limited, particularly from institutional and political economy scholars, due to its relegation of institutions to selection environments and the relatively downplayed roles of labour relations and the uneven dynamics of capital accumulation. The counter-argument stresses that it is a lack of empirical engagement with questions of political economy in particular, and not a theoretical deficiency of EEG, which causes the apparent deficit (*cf.* Essletzbichler, 2009; MacKinnon et al., 2009).

Third, there is the consideration of the appropriateness of extending evolutionary approaches into tourism studies. Despite the openness to multi-disciplinary approaches of the tourism academy, there is an inherent risk in bringing in exogenous theory to any established research arena. Tourism scholars need to ask themselves not just whether the tourism economy is fundamentally different from other economic

activities but also how it is different in terms of, for example, knowledge transfer and processes of regional branching. In fact, not just tourism, but almost all products and services are a result of complex input-output relations and cannot be easily reduced to the efforts of single entities (Porter, 2000). However, the question for tourism scholars is whether the effort to engage with EEG is worth the new insights EEG might reveal.

Epistemological quid pro quo

Despite the potential limitations listed above, there remain two strong reasons why tourism scholars should consider incorporating evolutionary economic geography perspectives into their research. First, multi-disciplinary endeavour has been at the heart of the development of tourism studies (Xiao et al., 2013). Tourism scholars who engage with EEG will discover fertile ground for inquiry by addressing the roles of enterprise, networks, and the state in shaping regional evolution. The outcomes of such inquiry will add to tourism studies by at least verifying its distinctive traits and perhaps also by identifying its common evolutionary traits with other sectors. Second, tourism scholars engaging in empirical studies with an evolutionary focus are in a position to offer theoretical challenges to, or confirmations of, EEG research which has had much of its empirical focus on a narrow group of industrial sectors.

Evolutionary economic geography and tourism studies are poised for a long-term *quid pro quo*, if they can come together in the spirit of multi-disciplinary scientific endeavour. Initial attempts have shown both empirical and theoretical synergies exist (Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Ma & Hassink, 2013) and there is scope for further development. There are methodological challenges for empirical studies and epistemological challenges on the nature of knowledge in different sectors but new enquiries will add to better understanding of the ontology of the spatial economy including tourism's important place in it. As more empirical studies are emerging it is clear that an epistemological *quid pro quo* is under way and will likely result in advancement of tourism studies and evolutionary economic geography. ■

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