



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 & Haskink, 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 & Atejevic, 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

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