An Evolutionary Approach to Coastal Resort Transformation

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The importance of coastal mass tourism

- High % of the total global tourism demand
- Diversity of mobility flows
- Development of destinations as urban spaces (Mullins, 1991, 1994)
The nature of coastal mass tourism resorts

- Functional specialization
- Urban form uniqueness
- Attraction of new social groups as residents
- Attraction of other economic and innovative activities
- Economic diversification and urban growth
Research on mass coastal resorts

- Subject only partially developed from tourism studies and neglected from urban theory

- Importance of study cases

- Lack of basic data at destination scale

Main focus:

- Specific history of local destinations (see, for instance, Walton, 2000 or Cirer, 2009).

- Impact analysis (Jennings, 2004)

- Cultural and post-structural dimensions of mass tourism in coastal destinations (Obrador Pons et al., 2009).

- Development models (Gormsen, 1981, 1997; Miossec, 1977).

- Analysis of the life cycle of local and regional destinations (Butler, 2006a, 2006b or from a different perspective, e.g. Andriotis, 2006)

- Restructuring processes of mass coastal destinations (Agarwal, 2002).
Towards a new perspective

Mass coastal resorts as a social phenomena that allows places to emerge and evolve with new systems of actors and new social and urban practices (Equipe MIT, 2002, 2004; see also Stock, 2003).

Evolutionary focus

Pathways for change
(path dependency / creation / ‘plasticity’)
Proposal

To reinterpret the evolution of a mass tourism destination to a complex urban place under the framework of Evolutionary Economic Geography from a policy perspective.
Key concepts

- Path dependency (Martin y Sunley, 2006, Martin, 2010)
  - System of institutions, firms, actors and behaviours maintaining direction

- Traditional way out: Path creation (Garud & Karnoe, 2001)
  - Sudden/big change, from outside existing system

- Alternative: Path plasticity (Strambach, 2010)
  - Incremental changes in institutions/system
  - Actors within, sometimes external inspiration

From: Halkier & Therkelsen (2012)
Case study: Vila-seca as an example of ‘path plasticity’ of a mass coastal resort
Policy actions

- Urban planning
  - Public Private cooperation
  - Administrative innovation
  - Public spaces creation
  - Natural areas management
  - Beach recovery
  - Hotel quality improvement
  - Private leadership willingness
  - Resort image rebuilding
  - Knowledge transfer network development
The Fledgling City Beyond the Destination?

Path Plasticity: Innovation, Sustainability and Quality

• **Creation of new mechanisms of governance -Processes**
  – [Smart and slow land-use planning policies and tools]
  – [‘Retrofit’ urban policy and regulation]
  – [New PPP governance alliances]
  – [Building an atmosphere of political, entrepreneurial and social consensus]

• **Diversification of touristscape -Products**
  – [Services-related SMEs incubator]
  – [Urban regeneration “spear-head” – PortAventura leisure complex]
  – [development of an University and knowledge cluster]
  – [Emergence of a new hotel-led model of development]

• **Development of a new image/renewed identity -Mechanisms**
  – [Environmental, beach and landscape enhancement]
  – [Historically themed attractions – boardwalk promenade]
  – [Artistic image-building (Mariscal pine sculpture) for the the city]
  – [Cultural programming based on local talent]
Concluding remarks

• Path plasticity may offer an interpretive framework for understanding incremental and innovation-led evolution of tourism destinations
• The idea also has potential to refocus our understanding of the transformation of consolidated coastal destinations into urban places
• In the case of Vila-seca, rather than the path creation concept, innovation-led governance responses to decline can be interpreted better using the path plasticity concept
Thank you!

Feedback very welcome…

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