

Urban Restructuring Policies in Consolidated Tourism Destinations: An Evolutionary Approach

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Background

The growing transformation and multiplication of mobility in global population flows has led to the development of complex urban structures and new demographic and economic processes, which in turn have driven the emergence of new social, spatial and environmental dynamics and conflicts.

In this context, tourism places acquire new functionalities, transforming into spaces of innovation and development and generating new opportunities for their surrounding regions while forcing them to deal with new risks deriving from the dynamics of global change.

These transformations may be approached through the lens of Evolutionary Economic Geography (EEG) (Boschma & Martin, 2010) and Cultural Political Economy (CPE) (Ribera Fumaz, 2009).

Popular approaches to understanding **tourism destination** evolution:

- Butler's Model based on Tourism Area Life Cycle
- Agarwal's Model based on Restructuring Theory

Two alternative approaches

1) Defining characteristics of resortscapes as **major urban structures (Cultural Political Economy CPE)**

2) Evolution of **new economic and political pathways** of destinations as urban places (**Evolutionary Economic Geography**)

The city beyond the destination: an evolutionary governance-based focus

- **Evolutionary focus:** pathways for change (path dependency / creation / ‘plasticity’)
- Emergent **transitive situations** in which the ‘touristic’ gives way to the ‘urban’ and ‘metropolitan’ via the creation of new economic pathways out of a dependency such as tourism.

Breaking Destination Path Dependency: Governance, Path Creation and Path 'Plasticity'

- Gill and Williams (2012): **Path Creation** factors:
Endogenous, Exogenous, Human Agency, Critical Change Events... plus approaches to development that don't necessarily embrace growth....
- Halkier and Therkelsen (2012): **Path Plasticity** (after Strambach) factors:
More incremental, less radical (via more flexible planning, ownership flexibility, innovation focus in policy, new marketing, coordination of small providers...)

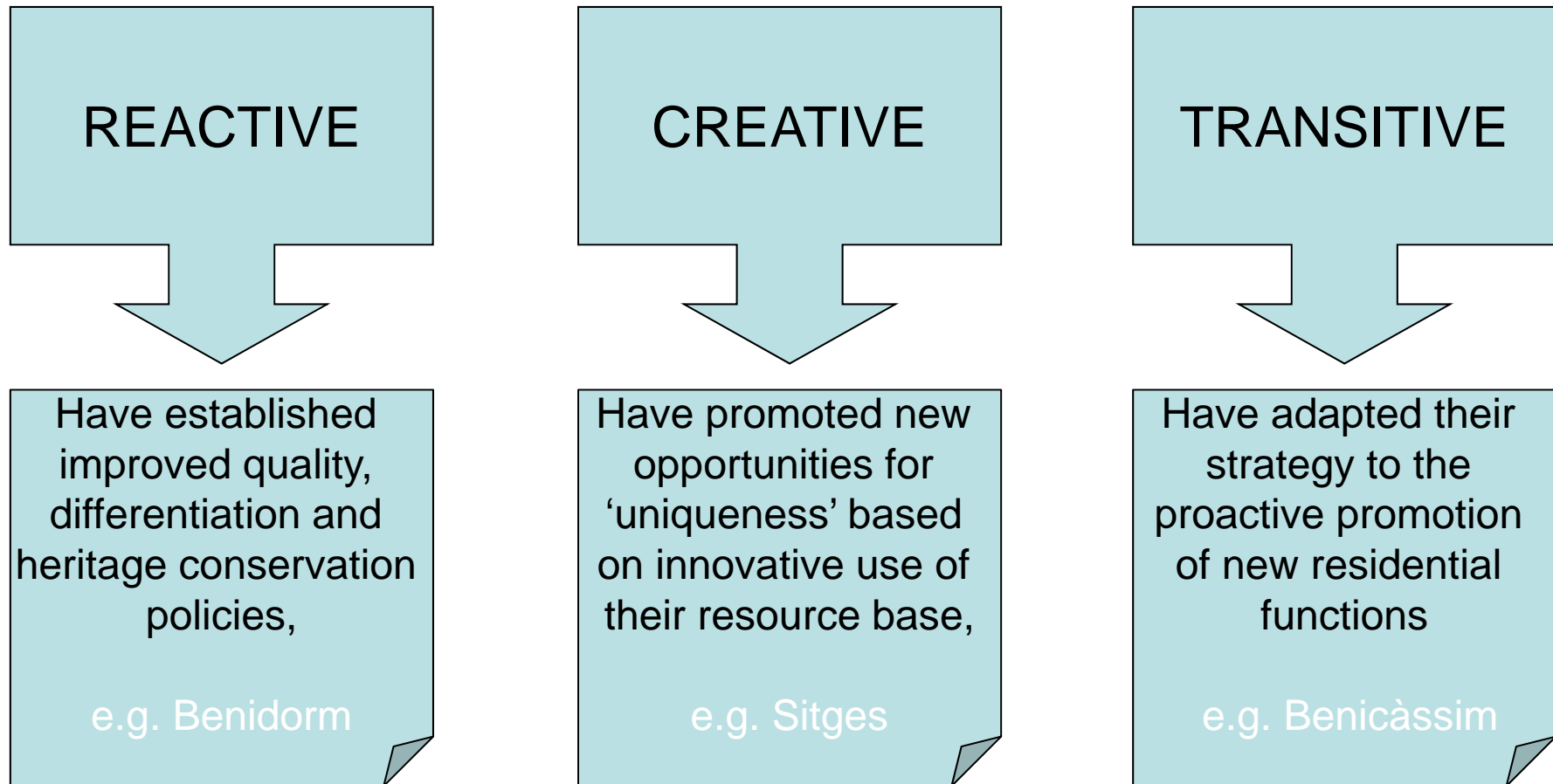
Halkier and Therkelsen (2012): From path creation to path plasticity

- ❑ Concept of path dependency well-established
 - System of institutions maintaining direction
 - Firms, regulation, actor behaviour, discourse
- ❑ Traditional way out: Path creation
 - Sudden change, from outside existing system
 - Focus on big transformations
- ❑ Alternative: Path plasticity (Strambach)
 - Incremental change in institutions/system
 - Enabled by interpretable ill-enforced institutions
 - Actors within, sometimes external inspiration



Path plasticity: responses

- Anton Clavé (2012): Innovation-led responses to decline can be



Parallels?

REACTIVE –
RELATED
VARIETY



CREATIVE –
UNRELATED
VARIETY



TRANSITIVE –
New forms of
capital
accumulation



Path plasticity in the case of Vila-seca

REACTIVE + CREATIVE + TRANSITIVE (*via a more incremental shift*)

Vila-seca as an example of 'path plasticity' of a consolidated destination





Why?

- Because tourism consumption still takes place
 - Because there are new social agents and capacity / capital
 - Because there are new competences that don't fit within existing 'destination' management structures
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- **The social, cultural and political change beyond the purely economic changes necessitate consideration of major destinations as fledging (or fully-fledged) cities.**

Vila-seca: the path towards the 'urban condition'

- Planning actions and governance emerge as a fundamental axis of political intervention in terms a specific and functional urban transformation model (rather than a resort model).
- Rather than opting for political short-termism, the success of the destination reinvention process in this case is due to:

....**having correctly designed the long-term urban restructuring model** with the destination's specific characteristics in mind.

Concluding remarks

- Path plasticity as an idea 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 major urban structures
- In the case of Vila-seca, rather than the path creation concept, innovation-led responses to decline can be interpreted better using the **path plasticity concept**

Thank you!

Feedback very welcome...

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