



Book Review

P. Brouder, S. Anton Clave, A. Gill, D. Ioannides.
(Eds.), *Tourism destination evolution*,
Routledge, Abingdon (2017). 200pp (Hbk.),
£110 ISBN: 9781472453990

At face value this appears as a very erudite, overly conceptual and extremely niche title and addresses one of the persistent themes in tourism research – destination evolution. Perhaps I am judging any book in this field against one of the most scholarly, meticulous and seminal studies published on destination evolution by John Walton (1983) *The English Seaside Resort*. Walton, using historical analysis and an empiricist approach, addresses the basic proposition of this book – the historical processes which produce patterns of uneven economic activity in time and space associated with tourism development. Walton also extends this focus to social and cultural issues associated with resort development. Therefore, one would expect a book that starts with this proposition of destination evolution, would review the major contribution to identifying these themes outside of the immediate confines of economic geography, namely from historical researchers.

Unfortunately this book does not do that. Chapter 1 points to these historical processes but fails to outline why the notion of evolutionary economic geography lends itself to the analysis of tourism. Perhaps I am beginning to show my age and disciplinary background, but is there really a fundamental difference between evolutionary economic geography and historical geography? For example, seminal studies in historical geography that are highly theoretical such as Gregory's (1983) influential study of the Yorkshire woollen industry examine economic phenomena in a historical setting. This is by any measure a scholarly if not masterly historical geographic study that looks at evolution in economic geography. To my mind, economic geography examined in a historical context, especially in longitudinal terms is historical geography and it is the analytical tools and methods applied to the research problem that are important rather than the 'labels' people seek to use. That aside, Chapter 1 is fundamentally blinkered given the complete absence of the historical context and rich tradition of historical research on this topic. Instead, we are supplied with the predictable Tourism Area Life Cycle concept (TALC). Any historical researcher would be looking for a basic appreciation of two fundamental terms – *continuity and change* which essentially shape the nature of social and economic development associated with tourism. A reading of Walton (1983) or any of the subsequent monographs by the same author would illustrate the critical role of other contextual factors such as power, land ownership, class and local politics. Instead we are given the concept of evolutionary economic geography and a table that lists some of the key studies of TALC.

I am not sure I would agree with labelling TALC as a theoretical framework. Even seminal studies such as Pearce (1981) are omitted from this discussion which arguably provides the foundation of this economic geographical approach. On a technical point, this introductory chapter is also very poorly edited, with sentences starting 'Also', and a lack of any clear rationale of how and why this new

approach might contribute to understanding evolution through time. If Table 1.2 lists all the key studies on evolutionary economic geography applied to tourism, do we really need a book that reiterates much of this (including republishing previously published studies)? I will leave the reader to make their own judgement of this.

Chapter 2 adopts resilience as the focus of the study and the style used for quotations seems very odd. If we are discussing evolution, is a decade really a sufficient time period for analysis? It seems a relatively short timeframe to me. Chapter 3, based on Whistler covers familiar ground already examined in a Journal of Sustainable Tourism paper published in 2011. Similarly Chapter 4 on tourism area research and economic geography also covers familiar territory from a paper published in Annals of Tourism Research. I am not sure whether this degree of repetition of previously discussed themes is helpful in compiling what a monograph is supposed to do - to fill a gap in the market with something new and novel. Clearly we could debate the merits of this position. If this were a 'major work' then reproducing the classic studies is the principal focus of the project. But this monograph does not set out with that in mind.

Chapter 5 on 'Moments as catalysts for change in the evolutionary paths of tourism destinations' focuses on the ways destinations may depart from their historical legacies. Yet there is little discussion of the key role of destination marketing organisations who will initiate and lead change in this area, focusing instead on the 'path metaphor' as the underpinning rationale for analysis. Chapter 6 examines path dependence as a theme, though much of the chapter is focused on central Australia. I did wonder what this chapter was trying to achieve. I found it was poorly edited, highly descriptive and based on value judgements about the factors affecting the path.

Chapter 7 on knowledge transfer looked at the hotel industry in Eastern Europe. It claims to bridge the gap between economic geography and tourism studies as its main contribution. Based on seminal studies such as Britton (1991), the paper also reverts to path dependencies and how knowledge transfer relates to this and is not in the theoretical tradition or with the focus of Britton's holistic view of tourism production. Chapter 8 commences with a discussion of regional economic growth, with a focus on 'co-evolution and sustainable tourism development'. The sweeping statement that regional tourism growth occurs around a central theme or place and is seen all over the world in mass tourism destinations is a gross generalisation. This fails to acknowledge the development processes occurring and the particular spatial configuration of that development, given the nuances and local economic development occurring. The chapter focuses on Niagara Falls and the evolution of tourism paths therein, including institutional changes contributing these paths.

Chapter 9 examines regional development in Fryslân, focusing on complex adaptive systems given the large number of actors involved and interactions with a complex array of factors. The chapter begins to highlight the unpredictability of future development. The last chapter returns to the debate on evolutionary economic geography. It would be unprofessional of me to make any comments on this chapter as part of the early debate critiques Hall and Page (2014), though interestingly

not the most recent edition published in 2014 which is arguably the more recent synthesis of the field.

Overall, I found this a disappointing book to read as it was a subject that looked very promising and potentially helpful in addressing the supposed gap that still exists between tourism and economic geography. My criticisms of the book illustrate that researchers need to evaluate the debate at a more interdisciplinary level to understand that other disciplines have also covered some of the same territory using different methods of analysis. I have not been sufficiently convinced about the unique contribution of evolutionary economic geography based on the chapters I have read in this book. I will keep an open mind on this but I did not read anything in this book matching the theoretical insights of Britton (1991) to help convince me that this new area will bridge the gap between tourism and geography. I will leave fellow scholars to decide for themselves if this is a fair and reasonable assessment but I did not feel it met its underlying rationale to present this new approach to tourism and to bridge the gap with economic geography. I would argue that historical geography, and history, have

bridged that gap in helping to understand the nuances of destination evolution and change.

References

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