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Towards an evolutionary approach to sustainability transitions in tourism

Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak of 2020 brought the whole travel and tourism industry to a standstill and, as a result, the tourism economy went through a crisis of unprecedented magnitude (with a 60-80% decline in international tourist arrivals and up to 100-120 million jobs at risk; *www.oecd.org*, 2020; *www.unwto.org*, 2020). This brought questions of the future of tourism into sharp focus, with different potential paths of tourism's post-COVID-19 "return from zero" widely debated (Brouder, 2020, p. 2). Academics (e.g. Brouder, 2020; Ioannides & Gyimothy, 2020; Nepal, 2020; Niewiadomski, 2020, Prideaux, Thompson, and Pabel, 2020), supranational organisations (e.g. UNWTO, OECD), policy-makers and national administrations (*www.unwto.org*, 2020), and various media (e.g. Monbiot, 2020) saw (at least in principle) the pandemic as a unique opportunity for a tourism reset and agreed that the post-COVID-19 re-development of tourism should be more environmentally sustainable and more economically and socially just. The so-called 'Tbilisi Declaration' (September 2020, signed by the national tourism administrations of the Members of the Executive Council of the World Tourism Organization, see *www.unwto.org*), whose signatories all agreed that "the crisis is an opportunity to rethink how tourism interacts with our societies, other economic sectors and our natural and cultural resources and ecosystems, to measure and manage it better, ensuring a fair distribution of its benefits, to advance the transition towards a carbon-neutral, more resilient and inclusive tourism economy", holds a promise that tourism will now embark on a path of climate change-driven transformation and that a shift to a low-carbon tourism economy will no longer be deferred (Prideaux et al., 2020). While some of the main processes that have been driving the unsustainable development of tourism to date have now been stopped or even reversed (Niewiadomski, 2020), there is a chance (and hope) that lessons will be learnt, a philosophical reset will occur and a "new sustainable normal" will eventually replace the "old unsustainable normal" (Benjamin, Dillette, and Alderman, 2020; Brouder et al., 2020; Mostafanezhad, 2020).

However, the counter-tendencies of "going back to normal" or "returning to business as usual" (often justified with the need to save businesses, jobs and livelihoods in the short term; see: Brouder, 2020; Nepal, 2020), which are likely to maintain the dominant neoliberal logic on which the global economy rests and which are therefore likely to undermine the opportunity to implement any systemic changes post COVID-19, are also now unfolding, perhaps even more quickly than pro-sustainability actions (Ioannides & Gyimothy, 2020). Indeed, despite the lofty ambitions and noble declarations, numerous governments offer financial subsidies and other economic packages to help tourism revert to the pre-crisis trajectory of growth as soon as possible (Ioannides & Gyimothy, 2020). The possibility that the tourism industry goes back to the pre-COVID-19 status quo (just as occurred after the terrorist attacks of 2001 and after the financial crisis of 2008-2009) and that the take-up of sustainable actions, policies and solutions will again be very slow is therefore realistic (Brouder, 2020; Ioannides & Gyimothy, 2020). Even though it has been over a decade since UNEP (2011) listed tourism as one of the ten key sectors in which (and through which) a transition to sustainable development should be pursued, and four years since it was identified by UNWTO as a key engine for realising the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017), the non-immediate nature of threats caused

by climate change and environmental degradation (to which tourism contributes), as opposed to the immediate threats of poverty, unemployment and economic depression caused by the pandemic, may again force governments to push 'sustainable tourism' to the bottom of the list of priorities (Prideaux et al., 2020).

One of the key terms that permeate the debate on the post-COVID-19 (re-)development of tourism is 'innovations'. The language of 'innovative solutions, mechanisms and responses' strongly features in political declarations and policy prescriptions that emerge in response to the tragic impacts of the pandemic on the tourism industry (e.g. *www.unwto.org*, 2020; *www.oecd.org*, 2020). Since capitalist development is a process of 'creative destruction' in which old technologies, practices and ways of doing things are continuously replaced by innovative solutions (Schumpeter, 1942, in: Boschma & Martin, 2007), the destruction which the pandemic has caused is indeed likely to be overcome by a wave of innovations. The adoption of this language as well as the hopes pinned on innovative thinking are therefore fully understandable. However, apart from the fact that the language of innovations used by policy-makers tends to be vague and bereft of any guidance (e.g. very few references are made to UNWTO & UNDP's (2017) report on tourism and the UN SDGs, including SDG 9: 'Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation'), even less is known about how and where innovations are to emerge, how they will be used, who will fund them, what factors will influence their development, and what results they will aim to bring, i.e. will they take tourism down a sustainable path or will they serve to restore the unsustainable practices? Either way, we are witnessing an emergence of a new research agenda to be addressed by tourism scholars from a variety of backgrounds.

Our objective here is more modest, however. Recognising how difficult (and contested) the transition to sustainable tourism is likely to prove in the context of the two clashing tendencies discussed above, we put together a conceptual language to more comprehensively address sustainability transitions in tourism and the role of innovations in such transitions. As such, we draw from two well-established theoretical frameworks in geography – evolutionary economic geography (EEG) and geographical political economy (GPE) – to make a case for an evolutionary and spatially-sensitive perspective on sustainability transitions in tourism. In this respect, we aim to bridge the gap between three research agendas to which geographers have significantly contributed – sustainable tourism, tourism evolution and the quickly growing sustainability transitions agenda. We acknowledge that, as much as tourism has the potential to contribute to wider sustainability transitions, the innovations which sustainability transitions rely on can serve as a window on the type of changes which the tourism industry requires to be sustainable in the long term. We argue that, despite the existence of the internationally-endorsed framework of the UN SDGs, sustainability transitions in tourism will always be spatially uneven. While EEG can shed light on how historically-influenced sustainability transitions in tourism are, and what place-specific factors mould them, GPE will help tackle the broader political-economic context in which they unfold.

The remainder of this chapter consists of three sections and conclusions. In the following section we revisit the three existing research agendas from which we draw and which we aim to merge to address sustainability transitions in tourism more comprehensively. In the third section we discuss evolutionary economic geography (EEG) and geographical political economy (GPE) to distil a useful conceptual language to help tackle the new amalgamated research agenda – sustainability transitions

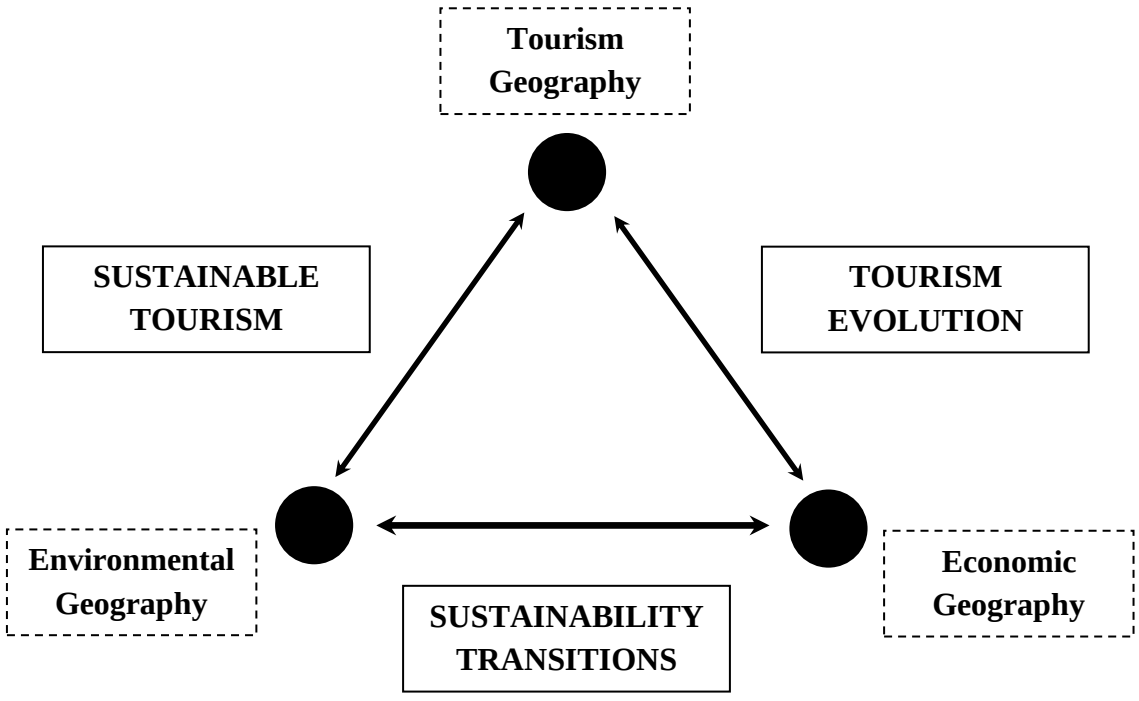
in tourism and the role of innovations in realising such transitions. The last section summarises the proposed agenda.

Connecting three research agendas

In this section we revisit three existing research agendas (i.e. sustainable tourism, tourism evolution, and sustainability transitions) to highlight the important advancements made in each of those that can serve as a basis for the new combined agenda we propose here – sustainability transitions in tourism. Given that each of these three agendas is already well developed and established, the point is not to carry out a profound review, but to outline the status quo before making an argument where to go from here if the desired transition towards more sustainable and greener forms of tourism (or a lack thereof) is to be better understood. Since each of these agendas suffers from shortcomings, we argue that the best way forward lies at the intersection of these three bodies of work.

Since later in this chapter we draw from two well-established geographical frameworks in order to advocate a spatial perspective on sustainability transitions in tourism, we look at these three themes as inherently geographical phenomena and, as such, we pay particular attention to the work conducted by geographers – mainly (although not exclusively) environmental geographers, tourism geographers and economic geographers. Although we do acknowledge that it is a generalisation, we present each of the three agendas as sitting at the interface of two of these three subfields of geography, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The three fields and the three research agendas which the chapter draws from



Sustainable tourism

Out of the three agendas we draw from, 'sustainable tourism' is arguably the oldest and most diverse one. It started emerging in the 1970s in response to the growth of (mass) tourism in the aftermath of

WWII (i.e. the number of international tourist trips increased from 25 million in 1950 to 277 million in 1980; UNWTO 2010) and the important concerns about the impacts which the movement of people on such a scale, and the corresponding development of tourism infrastructure, started producing (see e.g. Bryden, 1973; Coppock, 1977; Wall & Mathieson, 1982; for some of the earliest interventions). The concept of sustainable development, which emerged in the 1980s as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (WCED, 1987, p. 43), offered a useful framework for addressing the tensions and imbalances between tourism growth (both as an industry and an increasingly popular activity) and its negative impacts on the natural environment (Williams 2009). While the principles of sustainability became "a vehicle for addressing the problems of negative tourism impacts and maintaining its long-term viability" (Liu 2003, p. 460), the debate on sustainable development also naturally gave rise to the idea of sustainable tourism, broadly defined since as "tourism which is developed and maintained in an area (community, environment) in such a manner and at such a scale that it remains viable over an infinite period and does not degrade or alter the environment (…) in which it exists to such a degree that it prohibits the successful development and well being of other activities and processes" (Butler 1993, p. 29, see also Bramwell & Lane, 1993; UNWTO 1993). The emergence of the notion of sustainable tourism played a key role in solidifying the academic interest in tourism impacts, thus also becoming a distinct, albeit heterogenous, research agenda (Hall & Page, 2014; Sharpley, 2000; Williams, 2009).

Although research on sustainable tourism proliferated in the 1990s, taking many different directions and focusing on many different aspects of the problem, the initial sustainable tourism agenda found itself suffering from two important shortcomings. First, despite sustainable tourism being a subset of its parent concept of sustainable development, the principles of sustainability tended to be applied to tourism predominantly at the industry level, without placing sustainable tourism in the wider context of sustainable development or exploring tourism's ability to contribute to the sustainable development of a given area (Hall & Page, 2014, Williams 2009, see also Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Hunter, 1995, 1997; Sharpley, 2000; Wall & Mathieson, 2006 for a further discussion). There were multiple reasons for this. The contested and ambiguous nature of the notion of sustainable development (which derived from the tensions between the terms 'sustainability' and 'development' and a variety of development strategies which the concept might entail) and numerous problems with applying the concept to the fragmented, composite, and multi-actor tourism production system, should be listed here first. All of these were accompanied by a lack of recognition that tourism is not a discrete system, but, instead, it competes for resources with other sectors and, therefore, the developmental objectives of sustainable development may frequently undermine the ecological objectives of sustainable tourism as much as the environmental objectives of sustainable development may often hamper tourism as an engine for economic growth (Butler, 1999; Creaney & Niewiadomski, 2016; Sharpley, 2000; Wall & Mathieson, 2006, Williams, 2009). As a result, for a number of years, research on sustainable tourism tended to be parochial and tourism-centric (Hunter, 1997).

In many ways, the second shortcoming was a manifestation of the first one. Due to the fact that the concept of sustainable development emerged in the context of (and in response to) the global rise of environmentalism, with more and more political attention being given to environmental protection, most of the research on sustainable tourism focused on the negative impacts of tourism on the natural environment (Butler, 1999; Mowforth & Munt, 2009). Despite the fact that the concept of sustainable development is based on three pillars (i.e. environmental, socio-cultural and economic) and, as shown

above, the most common understanding of sustainable tourism also rests on this 'sustainability trinity' (Farrell, 1999; Mowforth & Munt, 2009), the ways in which tourism affects human environments and how the competing (often contradictory) economic and ecological objectives of sustainable tourism are (or are not) reconciled, initially received little scholarly attention (Butler, 1999). Indeed, the main objective was to help minimise negative impacts of tourism on the natural environment and promote various alternative forms of tourism (e.g. ecotourism, nature-based tourism, soft tourism, responsible tourism, etc.), which were often automatically (and sometimes erroneously) assumed to be 'more sustainable' than conventional (mass) tourism (Butler, 1999; Williams, 2009). Given that numerous forms of tourism inevitably rely on the natural environment as a key tourist attraction (Butler, 2000), this initial preoccupation of tourism scholars with tourism-nature relations is easy to justify. However, in line with the objective to minimise negative environmental impacts of tourism, much research on (sustainable) tourism took a rather narrow approach and, instead of exploring more complex aspects of tourism-nature relations, the emphasis was placed on managing environmental conservation and preservation (thoroughly discussed by Hall & Page, 2014; Mowforth & Munt, 2009; and Williams, 2009). Quite unsurprisingly, the concept of carrying capacity, which reflects the ability of a place to absorb and/or withstand the effects of tourism (Butler, 1999; Williams, 2009), played a central role in this strand of research (see Bramwell et al., 1996; Butler, 1999; McCool & Lime, 2001; Mowforth & Munt, 2009, for a further discussion and a critique of the concept). Since human-nature relations have always been of interest to geographers, it should not be a surprise that geographers contributed (and continue to contribute) to this agenda (see Butler, 1999; Hall & Page, 2014). It is mainly for this reason that, for the sake of our general argument, we place the sustainable tourism agenda between environmental and tourism geography. Nevertheless, because of the strong focus on environmental matters and resource management, most research on sustainable tourism in the 1990s was not only tourism-centric, but also largely managerial (Hunter, 1997).

From the 1990s onwards, research on sustainable tourism proliferated proportionally to the growing recognition of the problem in international policy circles. The vast array of policies, which emerged at that time to address negative impacts of tourism on the natural environment included 'Agenda 21' (a global action plan developed at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, 1992 and endorsed by the UN World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, 2002; Mowforth & Munt, 2009), the declarations of the First and Second International Conference on Climate Change and Tourism (in Djerba, 2003 and in Davos, 2007, respectively; *www.unwto.org*, 2020), UNEP's (2011) aforementioned recognition of tourism as one of the ten key sectors in which transitions to sustainability should occur, and, finally, the UN SDGs, which explicitly recognised the role of tourism in stimulating sustainable development (UNWTO & UNDP, 2017). Simultaneously, research on sustainability in tourism diversified rapidly and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to fully review it or to try to break it down into smaller agendas. One such attempt, however, has been made by Hashemkhani Zolfani et alia (2015) who distinguished fourteen main themes: the sustainable tourism paradigm (e.g. Bramwell & Lane, 1993, 1999, 2008, 2011); sustainable tourism development (e.g. Miller, 2001, Fortanier & van Wijk, 2010); market research and economics (e.g. Reddy, 2008); modelling and planning (e.g. Kernel, 2005; Padin & Svensson, 2013); policy-making (e.g. Hall, 2011; Liu, Tzeng, and Lee, 2012); infrastructure (e.g. Liu et al., 2013); environment and crises management (e.g. de Sausmarez, 2007; Day & Cai, 2012); rural tourism (e.g. Gössling, 2003; Park & Yoon, 2011); ecosystem and eco-tourism (e.g. Gibson et al., 2003); ecology (Hunter & Shaw, 2007); climate change (e.g. Pang et al., 2013; Weaver, 2011), human resource management (e.g. Cole, 2006); culture and

heritage (Richins, 2009); and energy and material saving (e.g. Michalena & Tripanagnostopoulos, 2010). As these examples show, while the relationships between tourism and sustainable development are increasingly explored, the focus has also shifted from environmental protection to a more balanced attention to all dimensions of sustainability.

Although the whole sustainable tourism agenda has been developing in a largely fragmented fashion and with very few coherent theoretical bases, some well-established frameworks and approaches from other disciplines and interdisciplinary fields have gradually found a way into research on sustainable tourism. A key role in this has been played by geographers and other scholars adopting geographical approaches. One such example is political ecology, one of the most common theoretical approaches in environmental geography, which helps tackle many different less obvious aspects of tourism-nature relations and, as such, is well-suited to address all three dimensions of sustainable tourism (see e.g. Mostafanezhad et al., 2016; Nepal & Saarinen, 2016 for further discussion). Another important example is evolutionary economic geography (EEG) (see Brouder et al., 2017; Gill & Williams, 2011, 2014), although much more remains to be done in applying EEG to the issue of sustainability in tourism (more on this below).

However, despite the significant progress, some legacies of the original two shortcomings persist and the lack of links between research on sustainable tourism and the sustainability transitions agenda serves here as the best example. While different elements of sustainability transitions in tourism tend to be addressed (as exemplified above), the existing work on sustainable tourism remains detached from the research on wider sustainability transitions, with the theoretical advancements made in the interdisciplinary field of sustainability transitions not being utilised in tourism studies almost at all. Some notable exceptions include the work of Gössling et alia (2012), which discussed the transitions management approach as a tool for implementing sustainable tourism, and Falcone (2019), who used the multi-level perspective (MLP) (one of the key theoretical frameworks for analysing sustainability transitions – see below) in his analysis of a tourism-based circular economy in Salento, Italy. It can be implied that, to some extent, the low level of engagement of tourism scholars with the sustainability transitions agenda, which heavily focuses on the role of innovations (as shown below), is a reflection of the so-called 'innovation defectiveness' in tourism studies (Hjalager 2002), which, despite various notable efforts (e.g. Booyens & Rogerson, 2016a, 2016b; Cooper, 2006; Ratten & Braga, 2019; Shaw & Williams; Williams & Shaw, 2011; see also below for the contribution of EEG-informed research to this agenda), has yet to be fully repaired. Meanwhile, bridging the gap between these two bodies of work could produce a few considerable benefits. First, it would help the sustainable tourism agenda to better acknowledge that minimising negative impacts of tourism on the natural environment will always be associated with political, economic and social changes above the level of the tourism sector (and thus better explore the contributions which tourism can make to wider sustainable development and wider sustainability transitions). Second, it would open up research on sustainable tourism to the role of innovations in fostering transitions to sustainable forms of tourism. And third, such a synergy would be a good platform for shifting the focus from sustainable tourism as a goalpost to the complex, multi-actor and multi-dimensional processes and mechanisms of transitions to more sustainable forms of tourism that are starting to unfold in many tourist destinations and many sub-sectors of the tourism production system in a different way.

Tourism evolution

The idea of destinations as evolving over time has been central to tourism studies. Richard Butler's (1980) seminal paper was, in fact, titled: 'The concept of a tourist area cycle of *evolution*' (emphasis added) and, while it spawned a plethora of important cases and augmentations, the evolutionary aspects have been downplayed over time for a greater emphasis on managerial agency. Important for this chapter was the keen focus of Butler (and the great many tourism scholars who followed him) on the natural setting as a resource to be cared for and proactively managed. What has been less central in the years that followed has been linking the economic geography literature to tourism studies. Ioannides and Debbage (1998) is the clearest example of a tourism text that strives to bridge the gap between economic geography and tourism studies. Their supply-side analysis set the stage for later re-imaginings more closely aligned to the evolutionary perspective (e.g. Brouder et al., 2017). The publication of volumes dedicated to economic geography ideas in tourism is rather infrequent, but the literature is replete with individual case studies in tourism. These cases are informed by economic geography ideas since tourism is highly place-dependent and naturally lends itself to economic studies which take the spatial characteristics into account.

More specific engagement with economic geography in tourism can be seen in recent applications of specific economic geography theories to tourism sub-sector cases. For instance, Niewiadomski (2014, 2015) utilised the global production networks (GPN) framework to examine the hotel sector, arguing that such an approach augments the more common management studies approaches in the hotel sector by more meaningfully considering the multi-actor interactions and territorial embeddedness. Such examples of papers with an economic geography core applied to tourism in often novel ways, when viewed in isolation, may be perceived as idiosyncrasies of the community of tourism geographers. However, when taken together they represent a strong sub-field of tourism studies.

Tourism evolution, or more specifically, the evolution of destination regions, was a feature of tourism studies well before Butler's seminal paper (e.g. Gilbert, 1939; Wolfe, 1952, Christaller, 1964, to note some of the earliest examples), but over the last decade, in particular, evolutionary economic geography (EEG) has ramified into and through the tourism literature. First mentioned by Gill and Williams (2011) in their case study of path dependence in the winter resort destination of Whistler, Canada, the decade which followed saw numerous applications of EEG to tourism cases. This decade of work has seen cases of tourism evolution in various geographical contexts (e.g. from Halkier et al.'s Western Siberia case, 2019, to Mitchell & Shannon's Newfoundland case, 2018). More significantly, various conceptual contexts are also to be found in studies of tourism evolution (e.g. Larsson and Lindström's study of the co-evolution of tourism and traditional boat building, 2014, to Gill and Williams's study of path creation through 'mindful deviation' in Whistler, 2014). One common theme of the last decade of studies of tourism evolution is the notion of tourism as an alternative development path for many regions. Whether this is in industrialised regions which are turning to tourism as a new development path (e.g. Halkier et al., 2019) or in tourism regions where new tourism paths are emerging to challenge the status quo (e.g. Gill & Williams, 2014), there is a clear understanding of the complexity, and often fragility, of change towards new forms of tourism. While this is a cautionary tale for any region pursuing tourism development, it is also an important consideration when examining sustainability transitions in tourism. Transformative change is not easy and requires innovation that is robust and resilient if the change is going to last for the long term.

Most of the literature on tourism evolution engages with the existing literature on innovation. If a region (or destination) is changing it is largely due to novel actions of entrepreneurs, organisations, and members of the community (and sometimes, in the case of destinations, actions of visitors too). Innovations leading to evolution in the tourism economy occur for a variety of reasons: responding to a regional crisis (e.g. García-Cabrera & Durán-Herrera, 2014; Sanz-Ibáñez et al., 2017); regional branching in resource-based economies (e.g. Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Halkier et al., 2019); purposeful change in governance for sustainability (e.g. Gill & Williams, 2014; Brouder & Fullerton, 2017). It is worth noting that, even when evidence of innovation is present, the long-term change of the regional economy, in general, and tourism economy, in particular, is often slow, strained, and even short-lived. While this raises questions about the role tourism can play in regional transitions in many contexts, it also highlights the study of innovative change as worthy of critical study in order to understand the "hows and whys" of success (and failure) in regional evolution and the proper role that tourism can play in supporting, if not leading, regional change.

Returning to the sustainability transitions agenda, it is clear from the empirical work on tourism evolution that, in many regional contexts, tourism does make space for change. Whether that change is transformative in nature, or whether it is incremental (by design or by the prevailing institutional setting) or if it is temporal (or even ephemeral) in nature, change is afoot. The question for tourism researchers is what role(s) tourism will play in sustainability transitions going forward. As we move on to examine sustainability transitions more closely, below, it is worth remembering that decades after the emergence of 'sustainable tourism' the transition remains largely incomplete.

Sustainability transitions

The third agenda that we draw from is commonly known as 'sustainability transitions'. Although it originally emerged at the interface of innovation studies and studies of technology and science (STS), with some important borrowings from evolutionary economics (see Essletzbichler, 2012; Hansen & Coenen, 2015; Smith, Voss, and Grin, 2010), it has evolved over the last 10-20 years into a complex, inter-disciplinary research field (Köhler et al., 2019), with both theoretical and empirical literature on sustainability transitions mushrooming proportionally to the growing importance of pro-sustainability agendas of multiple national authorities and supra-national organisations. 'Sustainability transitions' are defined here as complex shifts between distinctive socio-technical configurations which societies and economies need to undergo to mitigate climate change and address contemporary environmental problems – from current, unsustainable and carbon-intensive systems to new, more sustainable and less environmentally destructive modes of production and consumption (Coenen, Benneworth, & Truffer, 2012; Geels, 2010, 2011). Although the development of innovative sustainable technologies (mainly those based on renewable sources of energy that can facilitate and accelerate de-carbonisation of current systems) is a core element here, such transitions, to be effective, need to be aligned with corresponding, often more serious changes in governance systems, institutional frameworks, markets, legal regulations, policy-making procedures, consumer practices, consumption patterns, and cultural discourses (Coenen et al., 2012; Geels, 2010, 2011; Smith et al., 2010). Thus, the term 'sustainability transitions' (which for the sake of simplicity we consider synonymous to 'low-carbon transitions' and 'green transitions') captures wider processes than 'energy transitions' (seen as shifts from fossil fuels-based technologies and systems to those based on renewable sources of energy; Bridge et al., 2013;

Essletzbichler, 2012), although the latter is a necessary component, and often a key driver, of wider, more systemic sustainability transitions.

As complex phenomena, sustainability transitions have a few important features. First, by contrast to different historical transitions that were usually spontaneous, sustainability transitions are purposive and their goal is to address climate change (Geels et al., 2017). Second, given that various components of such transitions need to be reproduced, maintained and transformed not only by firms, sectors and consumers but also by civil society groups, governments, policymakers, engineers, researchers, the media and others (Geels, 2011; Geels et al., 2017), sustainability transitions are multi-actor in nature. The first two points imply that, third, sustainability transitions can often be disruptive, contested and non-linear, as actors with vested interests in maintaining the status quo may challenge the direction of changes (Bridge et al., 2013, Geels et al., 2017, Kivimaa & Kern, 2016). Fourth, crucially for this chapter, transitions to more sustainable configurations are also evolutionary in nature (Coenen et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2010).

Although a few different theoretical frameworks have emerged over time in research on sustainability and energy transitions, including technological innovation systems (TIS), strategic niche management (SNM) and transition management (TM) (see e.g. Coenen et al., 2012; Köhler et al., 2019 for a wider discussion), the one that has gained a dominant position is the multi-level perspective (MLP) (Coenen et al., 2012; Hansen & Coenen, 2015; Köhler et al., 2019; Markard et al., 2012). Combining insights from evolutionary economics, the sociology of innovations and institutional theory, the MLP views socio-technical transitions as outcomes of dynamic processes that take place within and between three analytical levels which socio-technical systems consist of – niches, regimes and landscapes (Coenen et al., 2012; Essletzbichler, 2012; Köhler et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2010). Innovations (including new technologies) are deemed to be developed in protected spaces called 'niches'. Meanwhile, 'regimes', which consist of networks of actors and institutions, sets of rules, practices, knowledge, technologies and infrastructure, and which play a key role in realising mainstream societal functions, have a natural tendency to retain existing configurations and even resist innovations until a possibility to transform the regime appears. Such possibilities often result from various pressures – either coming from niches or, importantly, being exerted by landscapes, i.e. wider (often global or supra-national) environments that are external to regimes (Coenen et al., 2012; Essletzbichler, 2012; Köhler et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2010, see also Geels, 2018).

Over time, proportionally to the interest which the topic of sustainability transitions has attracted from scholars representing many cognate disciplines, the sustainability transitions agenda has significantly diversified both empirically and theoretically (see Geels, 2010; Köhler et al., 2019 for more details). While it is beyond the scope of this section to review these developments, two advancements need to be highlighted. First, with 'transition' being a temporal concept, the sustainability transitions agenda being rooted in evolutionary economics, and with the MLP being a 'quasi-evolutionary theory' (i.e. one that recognises the role of history in how socio-technical systems in general, and innovations in particular, evolve) (Bridge et al., 2013; Hansen & Coenen, 2015; Raven, Schot, & Berkhout, 2012; Smith et al., 2010), research on sustainability transitions has gradually started adopting evolutionary approaches and concepts, often in conjunction with the MLP (e.g. Essletzbichler, 2012; Geels 2011). Second, the recognition of sustainability transitions as contested and based on political struggle has spawned nuanced attention to the politics and power in sustainability transition processes (Köhler et

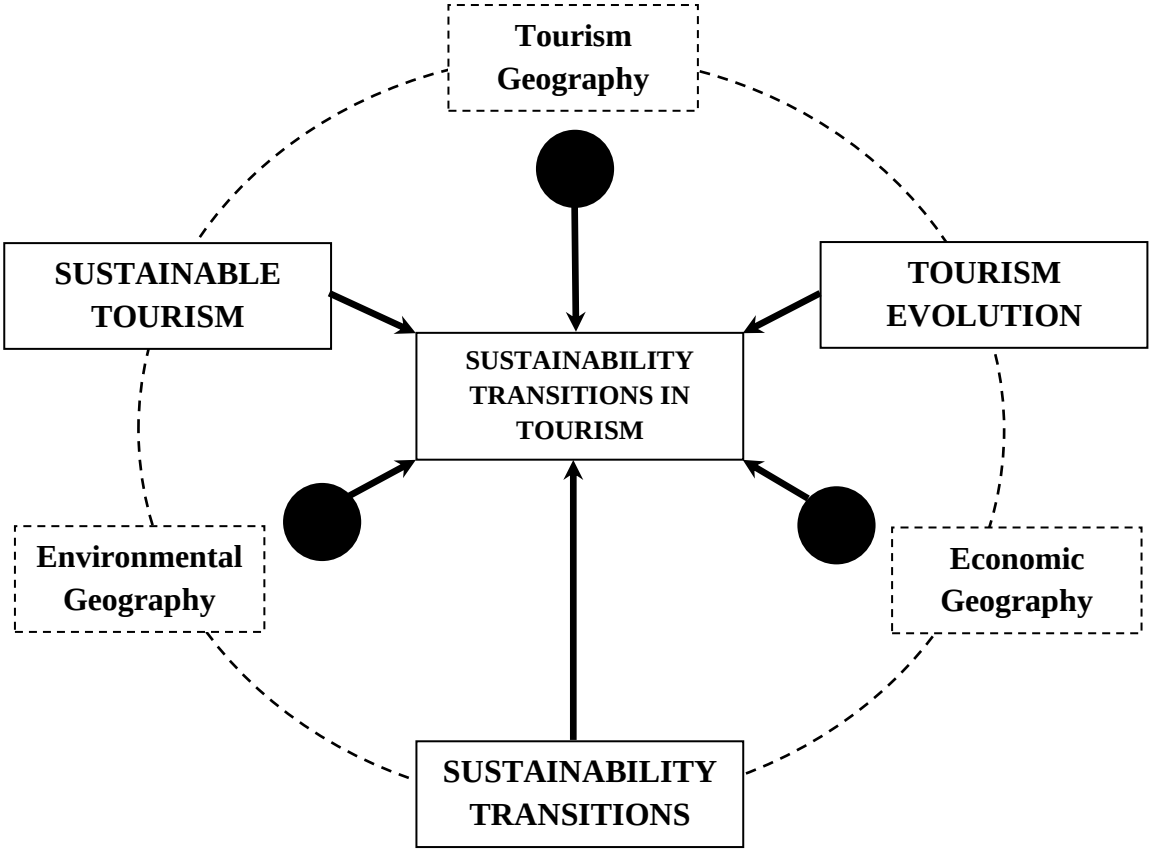
al., 2019; Smith et al., 2010) and the role of policy-making not only in encouraging innovations, but also in destabilising old, unsustainable socio-technical arrangements, or, in other words, supporting the processes of creative destruction in a more conscious and purposive way (Kivimaa & Kern, 2016).

Importantly, an array of theoretical contributions (including various extensions of the MLP) have also been made by geographers – especially economic geographers who, within the discipline, have done most work explaining the uneven geographies of technological change and innovations (Coenen et al., 2012). Indeed, by means of highlighting that sustainability (and energy) transitions are inherently geographical processes (i.e. while on the one hand they are shaped by context-specific factors, on the other they produce geographical change), geographers have helped recognise the spatial and multi-scalar diversity of sustainability transitions (see e.g. Bridge et al., 2013; Coenen et al., 2012; Hansen & Coenen, 2015; Murphy, 2015; Raven et al., 2012; Truffer, Murphy, and Raven, 2015), thus helping 'geography of sustainability transitions' to become a distinctive strand of research within the broader agenda (Köhler et al., 2019). Connected to this, geographers have also fostered an increased adoption of evolutionary concepts (e.g. Bridge et al., 2013, list path-dependence as one of the key concepts to inform research on energy transitions; see also Hansen & Coenen, 2015). The research on the offshore wind sector conducted by Dawley (2014), Dawley et alia (2015) and Mackinnon et alia (2019) from the perspective of evolutionary economic geography (EEG) also should be mentioned, although it focuses on the development of a particular industry, rather than wider transitions which this industry contributes to. As such, the geography of sustainability transitions agenda is a continuation of various 'environmental-economic geography projects', which, although very insightful and usually revolving around the common theme of innovations, often had the form of disparate studies invoking different, sometimes conflicting theoretical frameworks such as ecological modernisation, industrial ecology or evolutionary institutionalism (Coenen et al., 2012; Hayter, 2010; Smith et al., 2010). Thus, as an element of the wider agenda, 'geography of sustainability transitions' is also the first coherent synergy between environmental and economic geography.

However, quite surprisingly, despite its popularity and increasing sectoral coverage, the sustainability transitions agenda has not encompassed tourism at all (e.g. Köhler et al.'s, 2019, detailed review of the existing work on sustainability transitions does not mention tourism even once). Likewise, tourism geographers (and other scholars) have also not utilised any theoretical advancements made in research on sustainability transitions. In this respect, UNEP's (2011) aforementioned indication that tourism is one of the ten key sectors in which (and through which) sustainability transitions should be pursued has not been yet reflected in scholarly work on the topic. Little is therefore known on how transitions to sustainable tourism unfold, how tourism contributes to wider sustainability transitions, what roles different stakeholders play, and how these processes unfold in different economic, political, cultural, institutional, and social contexts. As this situation resembles the divide between economic geography and tourism geography in the 1990s (as discussed above), we contend that a lot can be gained from bridging this gap. While the work on sustainability transitions (including the MLP as a theoretical perspective – especially if combined with evolutionary approaches) can shed new light on the various changes which the global multi-actor tourism production system is undergoing (or should undergo) to become more sustainable, tourism, as a labour-intensive, low-technology, customer service-based, and, at least at first sight, not very 'innovative' sector, can provide a number of empirical examples enriching the sustainability transitions agenda and enhancing our understanding of these processes in ways that so far have been largely neglected. In the next section we aim to make a first step in this

direction. As a starting point, Figure 2, which is a modified version of Figure 1 above, presents how the three agendas discussed above can be merged to draw from each other and to mutually overcome each other's shortcomings and thus contribute to one amalgamated agenda 'sustainability transitions in tourism'.

Figure 2: Towards a combined research agenda



Towards an evolutionary perspective on sustainability transitions in tourism

Given that 1) the work on sustainable tourism has yet to utilise the theoretical advancements made in research on wider sustainability transitions, 2) the research on tourism evolution has so far addressed the emergence of sustainable tourism only negligibly, and 3) the sustainability transitions agenda has yet to recognise tourism as an important sector in which (and through which) sustainability transitions (should) unfold, we argue that a lot can be gained from bringing together the three agendas discussed above, if sustainability transitions in tourism are to be better understood (especially in the context of the post-COVID-19 recovery of tourism). In order to proceed, we recognise that:

- Just like sustainable tourism has the potential to contribute to the wider sustainable development of a given area, sustainability transitions in tourism can both contribute to and be driven by wider sustainability transitions, as argued by UNEP (2011).
- Although the main purpose of sustainability transitions in tourism is to reduce the negative impacts of tourism on the natural environment and limit its contribution to anthropogenic climate change, such transitions also require corresponding changes on the economic and socio-cultural levels, as recognised in research on wider sustainability transitions.

- As in wider, systemic sustainability transitions, the emergence of more sustainable forms of tourism will always be determined by history and, thus, it will always be evolutionary in nature, as implicated by the existing work on tourism evolution.
- Accordingly, because of the highly place-specific nature of tourism and the spatial fixity of tourism supply (Hall & Page, 2014), sustainability transitions in tourism will always be place-dependent, and thus spatially variegated and uneven, as demonstrated by both the work on tourism evolution, and, more generally, the research on the geography of sustainability transitions in other sectors.
- A key role in making tourism more sustainable will always be played by innovations (both those developed within the tourism sector and those adopted from elsewhere and imported into tourism), as assumed by both the sustainability transitions agenda and various evolutionary perspectives on capitalist development.
- Sustainability transitions in tourism do not occur in a political, economic and institutional vacuum. Instead, they will always be influenced by the broader, multi-scalar, political and economic context and the structures of the capitalist political economy, as shown by the work on tourism evolution.

On this basis, we make a case for an evolutionary approach to sustainability transitions in tourism – one that combines the insights of EEG and GPE – in order to add a new perspective to the existing frameworks for analysing low-carbon transitions. In doing so, we do not consider EEG and GPE as superior to other approaches (such as the MLP), but rather, we argue that the various insights of EEG and GPE can complement the existing conceptual language and thus help address some of the aspects of sustainability transitions in tourism which other frameworks do not fully account for.

Evolutionary economic geography

Evolutionary economic geography (EEG) is a theoretical paradigm concerned "with the processes by which the economic landscape – the spatial organization of economic production, distribution and consumption – is transformed over time" (Boschma & Martin 2007, p. 539). As such, EEG applies various concepts of evolutionary economics (e.g. Nelson & Winter, 1982; Hodgson, 1993; Arthur et al., 1997; Witt, 2003, 2006) to spatial processes in order to address the role of place-specific factors in shaping the nature and trajectory of evolution of the economic system (Boschma & Martin, 2007, 2010) – one of the most under-researched themes in economic geography prior to the emergence of EEG. As Boschma and Martin (2007, p. 540, see also Boschma & Martin, 2010; Coe, 2010) specified, EEG focuses on four main issues:

- Geographies of economic novelty (e.g. innovations, new firms, new institutions, new sectors, new networks, new technologies),
- How the spatial structures of the economy (e.g. regions) emerge from the micro-behaviours of economic agents,
- How the economic landscape exhibits self-organisation (as opposed to being a result of any form of central coordination); and
- How the processes of path-creation and path-dependence interact to shape economic evolution and transformation.

In this respect, EEG adopts some of the key assumptions of evolutionary economics, namely, it views the economy as dynamical and subject to continuous change (as opposed to one that tends towards any form of unique equilibrium) and the processes of economic evolution as irreversible (Boschma

& Martin, 2007, 2010). Also, and importantly for our main argument in this chapter, EEG recognises that the central role in economic evolution is played by novelty, innovation and knowledge. While the creative capacity of agents is the main factor driving economic evolution, the economic landscape is the product of knowledge and its internal development (although it also simultaneously influences knowledge creation). Thus, knowledge is not seen as a pre-given factor of production – instead, it is continuously re-developed. As such, because of its transformative power, it helps economic systems to adapt to changing circumstances and new challenges (Boschma & Martin, 2007, 2010). Although evolutionary economics and EEG initially focused on how the economy transforms itself from within, over time the role of external factors has also been recognised (see e.g. Mackinnon, 2012; Martin & Sunley, 2006). More generally, in line with Schumpeter (1942, in: Boschma & Martin, 2007), EEG sees economic evolution as a process of "creative destruction" where the search for profit and wealth drives the continuous replacement of old solutions (i.e. knowledge, technologies, practices) with new ones (i.e. novelty). This allows us to ask an important question: what innovations can help tourism to shift from old unsustainable practices to new, more sustainable ones, and what historical and place-specific factors condition (foster or hamper) their emergence? Our key argument is that various EEG concepts can prove helpful with these inquiries, particularly in the post-COVID-19 circumstances.

Although economic geographers started borrowing concepts and ideas from evolutionary economics as early as the 1990s (see e.g. Boschma & Lambooy, 1999; Rigby & Essletzbichler, 1997, for some of the earliest applications), evolutionary economic geography (EEG) emerged as a recognisable body of theory in the mid-2000s (see Boschma & Frenken, 2006). However, since evolutionary economics is not a single, coherent body of theory, but rather "a rich palette of ideas and concepts" (Boschma & Martin, 2010, p. 6) that derive from different approaches with different emphases, the same naturally applies to EEG (Boschma & Martin, 2007, 2010; Coe, 2010; Martin & Sunley, 2006). Indeed, while Boschma and Frenken (2006, p. 274) depicted EEG as a middle path between institutional geography and neoclassical approaches (one that puts "new wine in new bottles"), it remains contested to what extent EEG is a distinct paradigm or another 'turn' in economic geography (Coe, 2010; Mackinnon, 2012). Since it is not our objective to contribute to this debate, we acknowledge that the key ideas of EEG derive from, and can be therefore grouped into, three approaches – path-dependence, generalised Darwinism and complexity science. While we do not intend to downplay any of those approaches, in our further discussion we focus on concepts associated with the first of those.

As in evolutionary economics, one of the central concepts of EEG is path-dependence, where "a path-dependent process or system is one whose outcome evolves as a consequence of the process's or system's own history" (Martin & Sunley, 2006, p. 399). The notion of path-dependence recognises that every economic system inherits the legacy of its own past as early choices reverberate through history, validate a particular path and make alternative paths less probable, thus leading to outcomes that are not necessarily optimal or rational. As a result, systems remain committed to particular forms or trajectories of development, even though superior and more efficient alternatives may be available (Martin & Sunley, 2006). The notion of path-dependence can be applied to firms and sectors and how their reliance on routines, practices and technologies developed over time limits their ability to learn and adapt to changing conditions, thus giving rise to rigid economic structures (Boschma & Frenken, 2006, 2009; Boschma & Lambooy, 1999). However, it can be also applied to institutions (both formal and informal) and institutional frameworks, which are also important 'carriers of history' and which not only follow industrial development by co-evolving with firms and sectors, but also influence their

evolution as a wider context in which they operate (Martin & Sunley, 2006; Martin, 2010). Thus, the processes of path-dependence are always locally contingent and locally emergent, and, therefore, as much as path-dependence produces places, places produce path-dependence (Martin & Sunley, 2006; Martin, 2010). In this respect, the idea of path-dependence is helpful in explaining how regions and other spatial structures of the economy evolve, although each component of a regional economy may be subject to different processes of path-dependence to a different degree (Martin & Sunley, 2006). Martin and Sunley (2006) also distinguish various sources of regional path-dependence, including: high reliance on a particular raw material, sunk costs of local assets and infrastructures, dependence on a particular technological regime, reliance on an existing institutional framework, and commitment to existing linkages.

Closely connected to the idea of path-dependence is the notion of 'lock-in' which describes situations where the processes of path-dependence lead to a rigidification of the existing patterns of economic activity and behaviour (Boschma & Lambooy, 1999; Martin & Sunley, 2006). As a result, the existing structures and forms of economic behaviour constantly reproduce themselves over time (Mackinnon, 2012; Martin, 2006). In other words, a given system (e.g. a region) will be 'locked into' an existing path of development if it is so strongly committed to a particular technology, industry or institutional regime that the weight of inherited investments, practices and skills hampers its ability to adopt new practices, adjust to new forms, and adapt to wider processes of change (Boschma & Lambooy, 1999; Mackinnon, 2012, Martin & Sunley, 2006). Thus, in a state of lock-in, regions (as well as individual actors such as firms, institutions, labour, R&D, etc.) find it difficult to escape from prevailing routines (Boschma & Lambooy, 1999). Although at the initial stage 'lock-in' may be a positive condition (e.g. where a commitment to a given trajectory of development fosters growth and generates profits), over time it erodes adaptability and leads to negative consequences (Martin & Sunley, 2006). Such a lack of ability to adapt tends to be described by concepts of inertia, hysteresis or (institutional) sclerosis, with the last one referring to a situation where firms, institutions and other actors consciously oppose changes to protect their interests in the status quo (Boschma & Lambooy, 1999; Martin & Sunley, 2006). Finally, it is important to note that 'lock-in' is just a possible outcome and not an inexorable tendency of path-dependence (Martin & Sunley, 2006).

Given that the notions of path-dependence and lock-in are mainly concerned with how systems evolve and reproduce themselves once a form of development gets selected, EEG also pays attention to how new paths and forms of development come into being, where novelty comes from and how and why new paths get selected in the first place (Martin & Sunley, 2006). Although much of the literature on path-dependence initially assumed that new paths originate from chance events and random historical accidents, it has been acknowledged over time that path-dependence plays a role not only once a new path (i.e. a new sector, a new technology) has emerged, but also in influencing the emergence of new paths, how they emerge and where (Martin, 2010; Martin & Sunley, 2006). Thus, following Garud and Karnøe (2001), Martin and Sunley (2006, p. 408) made a case for a 'path as process' approach wherein economic evolution is seen as "an ongoing, neverending interplay of path dependence, path creation and path destruction that occurs as actors in different arenas reproduce, mindfully deviate from, and transform existing socio-economic-technological structures (…) and development paths". Whereas path-destruction denotes the decay of an inherited path (particularly in the face of wider technological or structural changes), path-creation involves the generation of new knowledge and the establishment of a new path by firms, institutions and/or entrepreneurs (Mackinnon, 2012; Martin &

Sunley, 2006). Importantly, the processes of path-destruction and path-creation are not always entirely contingent. Instead, they may originate from strategic choices and deliberate actions of entrepreneurs, institutions and firms – something that is well captured by the concept of 'mindful deviation' (Mackinnon, 2012; Martin & Sunley, 2006). Thus, the processes of path-dependence, path-destruction and path-creation always co-exist and are interdependent.

As an extension of the above understanding of path-creation, Martin (2010) drew from sociology and political science to define the concept of path-creation in terms of (institutional) layering, conversion and recombination. Whereas 'layering' involves a gradual addition of new rules, practices, structures and procedures (with each "layer" being a fairly small change, but the whole process being cumulative and ongoing), 'conversion' denotes a reorientation of an institution in terms of form or function. In turn, the notion of 'recombination' suggests that "any particular existing social-political-economic structure is, in effect, a system of resources and properties that actors can recombine and redefine, in conjunction with new resources and properties, to produce a new structure" (Martin, 2010, p. 15). As Martin (2010) also argues, these concepts can also be applied to industrial development, and not only institutional frameworks. As such, they account for a wider range of evolutionary patterns beyond the notion of lock-in.

However, just like the concept of path-dependence is closely related to the notion of lock-in, the ideas of path-creation and path-destruction are associated with various mechanisms of 'de-locking', i.e. different ways in which firms, industries and regions can escape lock-ins and embark on new paths of development. Based on the comprehensive review offered by Martin and Sunley (2006), Mackinnon (2012) lists the following de-locking mechanisms: the creation of a new endogenous path of growth; the harnessing of heterogeneity among firms, institutions and networks; the transplantation of new technologies or organisational forms from outside the region; diversification into related sectors; and the upgrading of existing industries. Importantly, as this list suggests, de-locking does not have to be initiated from within the region, but may be a result of exogenous factors, for instance, a conscious adoption of routines, technologies and practices from elsewhere, exposure to new, external pools of expertise and knowledge or an inward expansion of new firms (Martin & Sunley, 2006). Finally, it is essential to recognise that the pace of path-creation and de-locking processes may vary depending on the circumstances. While many de-locking mechanisms imply continuous, gradual and steady change (as suggested by Schumpeter's notion of 'creative destruction'), some of them may be more abrupt. Such 'gales of creative destruction' may result from major (often external) shocks and criticalities and lead to serious shifts in the trajectory and nature of economic development (Boschma & Martin, 2007).

Given that sustainability transitions are evolutionary and context-specific in nature, we argue that the concepts of EEG have the enormous potential to shed new light on how sustainability transitions in tourism – a highly place-specific industry – unfold. It is conceivable to contend that, since the rise of mass tourism in the 1950s and 1960s, the global tourism production system has been developing in an unsustainable way and, although different innovative organisational and structural arrangements have over time given rise to new forms of tourism, no single innovation helped to sufficiently de-lock tourism from the original unsustainable and strongly path-dependent routines and technologies. While the high level of reliance on those unsustainable routines, practices and technologies in the era when environmental concerns were far less serious could serve as an example of a positive lock-in (indeed,

since the 1950s tourism has grown to become one of the largest industries in the world), the weight of inherited unsustainable practices and routines effectively hampers tourism from switching to more sustainable solutions. In other words, the tourism system is locked into an inferior arrangement (i.e. one that destroys the very resources on which it largely rests), even though more superior (i.e. greener) solutions are available. Moreover, because of their non-immediate nature, neither climate change, nor environmental degradation caused by tourism, have been sufficient shocks to help tourism shift to an alternative trajectory of growth (Prideaux et al., 2020). As a result, despite various lofty declarations and ambitious targets set by governments, destinations and businesses, most tourist firms, most tourist destinations and most institutions responsible for governing the tourism sector remain committed to old (and yet still profitable) ways of doing things and other unsustainable arrangements, with a limited ability to take climate change seriously, address new challenges and adapt to the new circumstances. The concepts of inertia and hysteresis can be deemed to describe this condition very well. In addition, because of the resistance to changes (often justified with the need to protect existing income streams and a lack of funds to initiate changes), the tourism production system is also often a victim to sector-wide sclerosis, evident, for example, in carbon-heavy transport industries.

However, alternative, more sustainable paths are not impossible and various attempts to develop and implement more sustainable technologies (and other acts of mindful deviation) are not uncommon. For the time being, however, the forces of lock-in are stronger than the forces of path-creation and it may take time until pro-sustainability innovations in tourism prevail and shift the industry to a new, more sustainable trajectory. While there is common consensus that the old path should be 'destroyed', it remains to be seen how new sustainable paths will emerge, what pro-sustainability innovations will develop, what structures they will give rise to and which of the three scenarios (layering, conversion, recombination) this development will follow. These questions are particularly important at the tourist destination level where regional path-dependence dominates. How will individual firms adapt their routines? Will they do this themselves or will they have to adopt new technologies and solutions from elsewhere? Will these changes be driven by individual firms or by regional institutions and how will the two groups of actors co-evolve? What other place-specific factors will shape this evolution? How will regional instances of sustainable path-creation inform and influence wider multi-scalar changes across the tourism system? It is also here where the assumptions of EEG complement the MLP, as shown by Essletzbichler (2012) regarding energy transitions in the UK. To rephrase the above questions using the language of the MLP, we can ask: How and to what extent will tourist destinations act as niches? How will innovations developed by individual tourist destinations (and actors within destinations) help reshape unsustainable (tourist) regimes? How will destinations and wider (tourist) regimes accommodate the pressures coming from the wider landscape (e.g. the UN SDGs)?

Despite various tragic consequences (which we do not intend to downplay), the COVID-19 pandemic has created an opportunity for tourism to adjust its development. Indeed, the unprecedented standstill, which the tourism industry is experiencing as a result of the measures taken by governments to stop the spread of the virus (Niewiadomski, 2020), serves here as a 'gale of creative destruction'. Never before has the tourism system had a better opportunity to de-lock itself from unsustainable practices, address its various 'dark sides' and embark on a path of transition to sustainability, as argued at the beginning of this chapter. Meanwhile, the aforementioned tendencies to go back to 'business as usual' that are deeply grounded in the neoliberal agenda are significantly strengthening the current state of lock-in in unsustainable forms of tourism. It is for this reason that, to understand the dynamics of

sustainability transitions in tourism, EEG and the MLP need to be complemented by insights from geographical political economy (GPE). It is to GPE that the next subsection now turns.

Geographical political economy

For over a decade now, the umbrella concept of 'geographical political economy' has been promulgated as a way of putting political economy studies firmly in place. While acknowledging that any such umbrella term runs the risk of being controversial, Sheppard (2011) presents three distinct criteria that go beyond the basic (geographical) political economy approach of "conceptualizing capitalism as an unstable economic system, characterized by uneven geographical development" (Sheppard, 2011, p. 320). The three criteria of geographical political economy are:

1. Capitalism is not the only way to organise the economy of a given society. This is an important reminder as the hegemony of capitalism often makes alternatives seem impossible, but this is not the case and some alternatives may even be superior (Sheppard, 2011, p.321).
2. Geography and economy are co-produced with each shaping the other. This view improves analyses of long-term change as spatial conditions are not seen as by-products of economic development but rather as part of a larger socio-spatial dialectic (Sheppard, 2011, p.321).
3. Natural, cultural, and social processes co-evolve with economic processes. There is a two-way cause and effect relationship between each of these and all are co-implicated due to their inseparability (Sheppard, 2011, p.321), thus inviting a complex relational analysis.

Other leading scholars have attempted to link GPE to evolutionary approaches in economic geography, arguing that broader conceptualisations of institutions, social agency and power would strengthen evolutionary analyses of economic change and that GPE is a suitable overarching framework (Pike et al., 2009). While this general appeal did not receive a wholesale uptake in evolutionary economic geographies it certainly brought meaningful critique to the emerging field. More recently, and in the specific context of path creation, MacKinnon et alia (2019) make a compelling argument for GPE as a foundation for improving popular research strands such as regional path creation. "GPE provides an integrated understanding of the broader processes and relations that shape path creation" and so enriches studies of path development (MacKinnon et al., 2019, p.120). Likewise, when considering larger scale transitions, a GPE approach fully embraces "the plural, messy, and contested character of its constituent processes" (Bridge & Gailing, 2020, p. 1039). Bridge and Gailing (2020) note three key facets of GPE perspectives on energy transitions:

1. 'new energy spaces' are continuously produced and reproduced
2. broader dynamics of accumulation (including capitalisation and disinvestment) are at play
3. spatial relations across energy systems (from sites to supranational scales) are contested

So if we wish to understand processes of transition then we must be fully engaged with the modal system through which transition occurs. Geographical political economy offers a window on how "the spatialities of capitalism co-evolve with its economic processes" (Sheppard, 2011, p. 319) and is an important perspective for understanding change within economic systems.

In a tourism transition context, we may be concerned with how various destinations embrace the idea of change to a more sustainable future and how the existing tourism (economic) systems facilitate or inhibit such change. In other words, a "GPE of tourism should be fully cognizant of the uneven

geographies of tourism development and how destination development is a continuous process (or set of processes) […] at play in the region where the destination is evolving" (Brouder, 2019, p. 72). Moreover, a GPE approach to tourism development (including transitions to a more sustainable tourism) ensures that 'sustaining tourism' does not simply mean 'sustaining capitalism' (Brouder, 2019).

One consideration in exploring a GPE of tourism is the existing research within tourism that would closely align with GPE studies. Brouder (2019) highlighted three key areas within tourism studies which are of particular relevance for a GPE of tourism:

- labour studies in tourism
- political ecologies of tourism
- community-first tourism

The fact that tourism is a labour-intensive sector is no surprise but the relative lack of critical studies of tourism labour is more than a little surprising. Recent research has addressed this gap (see Ioannides & Zampoukas, 2018, and the eight papers of their special issue in *Tourism Geographies*) and there is still more to be done. A deeper understanding of the unique challenges of tourism labour is vital for understanding the broader GPE of tourism as issues ranging from labour precarity to labour mobility are spatially resonant yet remain somewhat silenced in broader tourism studies.

A much more recently researched area has been the aforementioned political ecologies of tourism (Mostafanezhad et al., 2016; Nepal & Saarinen, 2016). Studies in this area highlight the vital natural world phenomena that impact on and are impacted by tourism development. No research on sustainability transitions in tourism (including any GPE of tourism) can succeed without a meaningful understanding of the present environmental conditions and the historical conditions that brought them about (see Mostafanezhad et al., 2016). Likewise, the rise of community-first tourism, a very well researched area within tourism, brings critical questions such as "why tourism?" to the fore. A GPE perspective on tourism development in communities offers two views on such questions: 1) it allows the value(s) of tourism to be weighed more holistically than traditional economic approaches, and 2) it includes the community's political and cultural processes in the analysis. In summary, a GPE of tourism offers a critically-informed, spatiotemporally-aware mode of analysis.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this chapter we recognised that the transition to sustainable tourism will continue to be difficult and is likely to remain highly contested. This is evidenced by the very fact that seismic events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, with its attendant calls for building a better (tourism) future (see Lew et al., 2020, and the dozens of papers in their special issue of *Tourism Geographies*) have not resulted in a dramatic shift in the tourism development landscape. Likewise, the global 'climate emergency' (UNEP, n.d.) is not being treated in the manner its name would suggest. This is true for society, in general, and for global tourism, in particular.

We also acknowledge that analyses of tourism, capital, and place have not gone much deeper than the seminal critique offered by Britton (1991) over three decades ago. More specifically, we have identified three different agendas, i.e. three important, influential and ground-breaking bodies of

scholarly work that have significantly developed over the last 30-40 years, but which – despite the enormous contributions they have made over time – have failed to draw from each other and harness the potential which such links would provide (Figures 1 and 2). While the work on sustainable tourism has not utilised the theoretical advancements made by the interdisciplinary sustainability transitions agenda, the research on sustainability transitions has yet to recognise the important role of tourism in wider transitions to sustainability. Although the work on tourism evolution has shed new light on how tourism evolves over time and how it shifts between different political, economic, institutional, social, technological and organisational configurations, an evolutionary perspective has been employed in research on sustainable tourism only negligibly, without capitalising on the novel insights which the tourism evolution agenda has spawned. Finally, even though the work on sustainability transitions and the research on tourism evolution have equally recognised that the complex processes of change which they address are both moulded by history and driven by various innovations, there has been no dialogue between these two bodies of work. Meanwhile, as much as the work on (sustainable) tourism evolution could benefit from theories of sustainability transitions, the sustainability transitions agenda could develop even further by encompassing tourism as a specific industry and a source of relatively unique empirical examples. In order to address the shortage of exchange between these three agendas, we have argued for stronger links between them. In this way, the understanding of how sustainability transitions in tourism evolve and how tourism contributes to wider sustainability transitions will be enhanced.

What we have also endeavoured to elucidate is an emerging conceptual language which is suitable for the task at hand. We have argued that evolutionary economic geography (EEG) and geographical political economy (GPE) perspectives are well suited to addressing the persistent theoretical deficits in sustainable tourism thinking and helping tourism scholars fully engage in studies of the spatially-layered and institutionally-evolving contexts in which changes towards (or away from) sustainable tourism occur. Thus, the new, EEG- and GPE-informed agenda on sustainability transitions in tourism and the role of tourism in wider sustainability transitions could be summarised as follows:

- How path-dependent, place-dependent and historically-determined is the transition to sustainable tourism? To what extent is the tourism industry in various geographical and institutional contexts locked into unsustainable (e.g. carbon-intensive) practices, routines, organisational arrangements and technologies? What specific local (and extra-local) factors determine this state of lock-in and how? How rigid and resistant to change are current tourism regimes and why?
- How easy is it for tourism to de-lock itself from the unsustainable path of development and embark on a path of mindful deviation towards more sustainable forms? What mechanisms of de-locking (e.g. external shocks like COVID-19 or gradual indigenous change 'from below'?) and modes of path-development/path-creation foster such a transition most effectively? What role is played in this set of processes by landscape pressures on the one hand and local initiatives in various tourism-related niches on the other?
- What technological, organisational and policy innovations can foster this change? To what extent can the tourism sector initiate such innovations internally and to what extent does it have to import them from other industries? How can innovations developed within tourism – a labour-intensive, place-specific, multi-actor, multi-sector and volatile industry – influence and inform sustainability transitions in other sectors?
- To what extent can new, more sustainable forms of tourism challenge the neoliberal logic that has largely underpinned the unsustainable tourism development to date? How and why will the wider

structures of the capitalist economy hamper the transition to sustainable tourism? How contested is the transition to sustainable tourism, given its multi-actor, diverse and composite nature? How strong a voice will local communities and actors (e.g. labour) have in deciding the direction of the transition? What power dynamics will determine the pursuit of sustainable tourism and what new geographies of winners and losers will the transition to sustainable tourism produce?

To sum up, the transition to sustainable tourism is a nuanced and long-term process so we need a nuanced and long-term approach to study it. A GPE-informed evolutionary framework is one promising way to deepen our understanding of sustainability transitions in tourism.

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