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Leisuring landscapes

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This thesis examines the role of spatial planning in shaping the development trajectories of regions that are in the process of 'leisuring'. Leisuring is understood as the on-going spatial transformations driven by activities and projects related to tourism, recreation and leisure (Bunce, 2008; Hartman, 2013). Many places are being developed as tourism destinations, including cities, villages, and areas featuring specific natural beauty or cultural heritage. Peri-urban areas are experiencing transformations, becoming transitional zones between the urban and the rural and facing new activities and facilities related to leisure and recreation. The influx of new functions, land uses, firms and activities is driving the gradual change of existing functions, structures as well as the identities.

These socio-spatial transformations relate to our globalized economy and network society, are complex, and result in development trajectories – how regions evolve over time – which are nonlinear, are open to change and are uncertain. This thesis shows that it is possible, nevertheless, to observe patterns that emerge, to examine directions in which places evolve, to distinguish transitions, and to develop adaptive planning strategies and reflexive governance approaches to support and guide places in their evolution in a meaningful way. The argument is developed that strategic spatial planning increasingly involves a focus on adaptive capacity of places so to navigate (themselves) through a contextual environment that is changing continually. Doing so meets the aims of the thesis: 1.) discuss the implications and issues that the leisuring of regions raise for spatial development and planning; 2.) elaborate how institutional frameworks shape regions that are leisuring; and 3.) discuss how the leisuring of regions can be stimulated through spatial planning.

The leisuring of regions is an addition to the spatial planning repertoire and adds to the difficulty of managing the development of today's society. It is a dynamic process that includes multiple actors, policy domains and governance levels. Due to the rise of regions that are leisuring communities are facing new challenges, planners are confronted with new issues, and actors in decision-making positions are presented with new options for development. Fortunately, we are also learning about the emergence and management of such new situations. The chapters that are part of this thesis contribute to this body of knowledge by presenting the results of multiple case studies. The main conclusions of the individual chapters are the following.

Chapter 2 examines the transition of the Wadden Sea Region from a predominantly agricultural area to a more leisure-oriented landscape. It shows that this transition is inhibited by a quite strong restrictive planning

regime. Mainly in spite of and not because of this planning regime, land uses and activities related to the leisure economy do emerge as these are triggered by changing circumstances. In this context, it is argued that planners are challenged to become “*transition managers* who aim to guide regions through transition processes by ensuring that those regions have the adaptive capacity to do so” (Hartman & De Roo, 2013, p. 566). This allows for transitions “to become more fluid; instead of a collapse, this could involve a gradual process of moving from one state to the other through iterative adaptation to changing circumstances” (ibid, p. 566).

Chapter 3 examines how planning interventions shape the integration of peri-urban Midden-Delfland and Vlietzone into the urban fabric of the Greater Hague Region (GHR). Midden-Delfland is gradually becoming a metropolitan park and positioned as ‘Hof van Delfland’ whilst Vlietzone remains a less coherent, somewhat fragmented leisure zone. The chapter develops the perspective that peri-urban areas are open and nested socio-spatial systems that adaptively respond to a dynamic contextual environment, which drives change (urban growth in the GHR, emergent leisure economy) but also inhibits change (planning interventions, financial crisis). In turn, planners and planning authorities are challenged to manage and adapt to the changing speed, intensity and character of peri-urban development. This includes timely changing visions about the future of peri-urban areas, establishing new organizations to steer and reshaping governance arrangements.

Chapter 4 concerns a case study on the policy approach of the Dutch province of Friesland to stimulate spatial quality, which is a fundamental pillar of the development of the leisure economy. It argues that places should not only feature the capacity to mitigate and avoid developments that negatively perturb spatial qualities (robustness) but should also feature a degree of flexibility in order to progress and improve (flexibility). The province of Friesland therefore created an institutional framework that consists of a set of *generic norms* relating to environmental quality, *process requirements* including planning principles and the obligation to account for the so-called ‘core qualities’, and *planning strategies* revolving around stakeholder management to organisationally connect actors, societal organisations and institutions at various governance levels and spatial scales. The analysis also shows that what is conceptualized and enforced as spatial quality in Friesland is selective, which relates to political and pragmatic choices made in decision-making processes.

Chapter 5 connects contributions of storytelling and transitions for the analysis of two projects wherein strategic storytelling (SST) is used to foster the

‘leisureing’ of the Hondsrug and Friese Meren regions. It examines the extent to which SST can serve as a transition catalyst for regions that are leisureing. The research findings suggest that SST may serve as a transition catalyst in the sense of uniting actors, pooling resources, and fostering spatial development. The effect of SST may not instantly become visible in terms of spatial development because the leisureing of regions is a long term transitions process. The contribution of SST may (at first) concern mobilizing and uniting actors and establishing or institutionalizing actor networks. An adaptive approach of continually evaluating and adjusting stories is suggested in order to continually reinforce actor commitment.

Chapter 6 examines the planning challenge to stimulate *adaptive* tourism areas, being capable of responding to changing contexts in order to maintain or improve the performance of these areas as competitive tourism destinations. Theories on complex adaptive systems are used to draw attention to the importance of a balanced degree of diversity in terms of tourism products, experiences and firms. Encouraging a degree of diversity requires among other things interconnectivity among actors to ease communication and coordination, (policy) experimentation for niche-innovations, learning and reflexivity.

Throughout this thesis complexity theories are used for conceptual support to examine the emergence, development and management of regions that are leisureing. When the contributions of all chapters are taken together they offer a complex adaptive system (CAS) perspective on regions that are leisureing.

Nonlinear development trajectories

The CAS perspective is used to show that regions are leisureing as a result of the interplay between changing contextual circumstances, planned interventions and processes of self-organisation by actors on multiple governance levels and spatial scales. The result is that planners are facing development trajectories that evolve nonlinearly. Nonlinearity applies to situations that cannot be interpreted as exact continuations or extrapolations of past trajectories due to fundamental changes in terms of structures, functions and identities. It applies to regions that are leisureing as these areas are undergoing a complex and often long-term transition process of departing from one relatively stable state and gradually moving towards a state that fundamentally differs in terms of structures, functions and identities. The cases of the Wadden Sea Region (chapter 2), peri-urban development in the Greater Hague Region (chapter 3) as well as the areas of Hondsrug and Friese Meren (chapter 5) show that the state of agricultural dominance is gradually being supplemented amongst others by

functions, structures and identities that relate to the development of these areas as destinations for tourism, leisure and recreation. The development trajectories of these areas are therefore conceptualized as nonlinear. This process is not easy and generally takes time – the cases of Midden-Delfland and Vlietzone show that it takes many decades to change and the strategic storytelling projects reveal the difficulty to achieve/enforce change.

A long-term transition process

Transitions may take several decades to become spatially manifest at a regional level because of various reasons. First, the upper hand is often with approaches that restrict projects and plans that intend to fundamentally change structures and functions at a large scale and in a relatively short period of time. Strong restrictive planning regimes can ‘trap’ places and prevent agents from exploring alternative options for development. When spatial transformation gains support it is then often incidentally, ad hoc by opportunity and rather locally as is shown by the cases of the Wadden Sea Region and the Greater Hague Region. Second, the leisuring of regions requires the coordination and organization of many actors (individuals, firms, societal organizations, and institutions), the mobilization and allocation of financial resources, and the adaptation of spatial, organizational and institutional structures. It requires individuals and/or intermediary organizations (‘signifying agents’) to actively create and manage networks of actors (e.g. using storytelling) and on leadership to persuade these networks to engage in collative action. Organizing and coordinating actor networks is a delicate as well as time and energy consuming challenge which means successes are not guaranteed. Third, no single agent is in complete control of how development trajectories evolve over longer periods of time because of the involvement of many actors in different (policy) domains that are dispersed over multiple governance levels and spatial scales. The implication is that trajectories cannot be completely predicted or steered neither by means of blue-print planning and end-state plans nor for that matter by consensus planning and participatory plans. Although for certain periods command-and-control planning approaches may be used to strongly shape development trajectories (compare to the Reconstruction Act in the case of peri-urban Midden-Delfland), in the long haul they may need to be adapted (shown by the cases of peri-urban Midden-Delfland and Vlietzone) or can become counterproductive (shown by the case of the WSR).

The capacity to adapt

Regions that are leisuring are conceptualized in this thesis as ‘open’ socio-spatial systems because actors that are part of these systems continually respond and adapt to changing circumstances. Adaptation is an important capacity to have and, therefore, an interesting capacity to actively pursue by planners. Adaptation is the process of achieving a better ‘fit’ between a system and its contextual environment. Because contextual circumstances often change, systems will need to be ‘refitted’ by means of adaptation. Similarly, regions that are leisuring also need ‘refitting’ in response to changes in their contextual environment such as changing economic structure, life styles, demographics, technology, travel behaviour, etc. The following (non-exhaustive) set of factors is identified in this thesis that contributes to the adaptive capacity of regions and thereby to their ability to transition towards enhanced states.

- **A diverse regional leisure economy**

Diversity makes regions robust and flexible at the same time. It contributes to the robustness of regions because eliminating or replacing elements does not cause negative effects on the overall functioning of regions. Moreover, diversity makes regions flexible, easing the ability to reorient or switch between multiple trajectories. This is important to avoid negative lock-in situations and important to adapt to a highly competitive leisure economy and (re)claim a competitive position.

- **Collective action**

The development of attractive, competitive destinations for tourism and recreation depends on the collective actions of a range of actors. Governance arrangements are needed that consist of (representatives of) governments, societal organizations and/or private actors that have a shared or common interest in the realization of particular projects. This requires intermediaries and bridging organizations that establish relationships and networks between public and private sector agents. Such connectivity is a prerequisite for aligning the actions of governments, societal organization and market parties. Forming such governance arrangements requires leadership: (groups of) entrepreneurs and representatives of (semi-)governmental agencies that take initiative and mobilize resources to establish and support the bridging organizations that are entrusted with the formation of governance arrangements around initiatives that support the leisuring of regions.