

2022/01

## Legitimizing path development by interlinking institutional logics: The case of Israel's desert tourism

Maximilian Benner

This is an original manuscript of an article published by SAGE in “Local Economy” on 25 April 2023, available online:  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/02690942231172728>.

# Legitimizing path development by interlinking institutional logics: The case of Israel's desert tourism

## Author

Maximilian Benner; e-mail: [maximilian.benner@univie.ac.at](mailto:maximilian.benner@univie.ac.at);

Department of Geography and Regional Research, University of Vienna, Austria;

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1386-808X> \*

\* *corresponding author*

## Abstract

The legitimation of new industrial regional paths has become a crucial issue in path development since it touches the institutional foundations of regional evolution. In institutional theory, legitimacy is considered a critical fundament of institutionalization, and the institutional logics perspective draws attention to the different material and symbolic sources of legitimacy. Drawing on neo-institutional sociology, this article proposes a nuanced understanding of legitimation dynamics in regional industrial path development by arguing that new paths are legitimized by interlinking different institutional logics through symbolic constructions used for meaning-making such as future-oriented visions. Empirical examples from two tourism destinations in Israel's Negev desert illustrate this mechanism.

## Keywords

evolutionary economic geography; institutional logics; legitimacy; path development

This is a pre-print version of a paper that has been submitted for publication to a journal.

## **Introduction**

The development of new regional industrial paths critically depends on how agents manage to legitimize them. Since new industries lack legitimacy, agents have to employ legitimation strategies to promote knowledge and acceptance (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). Since legitimacy is a fundamental aspect of institutions (Bathelt & Glückler, 2014; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Oliver, 1992), the strategies agents employ to legitimize an emerging new path can be understood as acts of institutional agency (DiMaggio, 1988; Gong et al., 2022; Mörner, 2020). These acts are rooted in systems of institutionalized practices and meanings known as institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, 2008). Given that new paths emerge in an institutional environment that, even if not necessarily outright hostile, is tenuous to them, agents will have to build their actions on the basis of an institutional logic that is likely to find public acceptance.

Apart from common legitimation strategies described in the literature (e.g., Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Suchman, 1995; Suddaby et al., 2017; Zimmermann & Zeitz, 2002), agents can do so by interlinking pre-existing institutional logics that are generally acknowledged as legitimate and thus create a bridge on which the legitimacy of the new path can be built. To interlink institutional logics, agents can employ wider imaginaries that include forward-looking visions and backward-looking narratives (Benner, 2020a, 2022; Sotarauta, 2018; Van Lente, 2021) that justify the carrying over of legitimacy.

This article seeks to explore how agents interlink institutional logics as a legitimation strategy in new path development, based on a conceptual framework that weds the notion of legitimation known from neo-institutional sociology and the technological innovation systems (TIS) literature with the concept of institutional logics. The article seeks to develop a nuanced understanding of how new paths are legitimized by placing the strategies agents adopt to build the legitimacy of a new path into the set of institutional logics available in a regional economy. Specifically, the article argues that agents legitimize new paths by interlinking different institutional logics by shaping the symbolic basis of institutional logics and thus creating new meanings, and thus proposes interlinking as a legitimation strategy.

The article starts by reviewing the role of legitimation in the literature on path development, TIS, and socio-technical transitions. Then, the article reviews the concept of institutional logics and focuses on how new paths are legitimized in terms of their consistency with existing or emerging

institutional logics. In its empirical part, the article elaborates on how agents in the two towns of Mitzpe Ramon and Yeruham in Israel's Negev desert drew on various institutional logics to legitimize new tourism paths. The article ends by laying out conclusions and limitations.

### **Legitimation in path development**

The emergence and evolution of a regional industrial path can be classified in a number of different types such as path creation, diversification, branching, importation, extension, and upgrading (Grillitsch et al., 2018; Martin and Sunley, 2006; Isaksen et al., 2018, 2019; Tödtling and Trippel, 2013). According to Binz et al. (2016), a regional industrial path is basically “a set of functionally related firms and supportive actors and institutions that are established and legitimized beyond emergence” (p.177). The reference to the “legitimized” nature of a regional industrial path implies that legitimacy and legitimation are critical aspects of new path development (Gong et al., 2022).

Pfeffer (1981) stresses how the legitimacy of organizations hinges on making their “operations and outcomes appear to be consonant with prevailing social values and useful to the larger social system” (p.22). According to Aldrich and Fiol (1994), gaining legitimacy is a specific challenge confronting entrepreneurs in new industries because a range of resources that need to be mobilized such as “access to capital, markets, and governmental protection are all partially dependent on the level of legitimacy” (p. 647). Zimmerman and Zeitz (2002) understand legitimacy simply as “a social judgment of acceptance, appropriateness, and desirability” (p.414). In Suchman's (1995) well-known definition, legitimacy makes agents' activities appear “desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (p.574). Suddaby et al. (2017) distinguish the three different views of legitimacy as an asset, as a perception, and as a meaning-related process, with the latter relating to activities of legitimation. In the technological innovation systems (TIS) literature, legitimation has been identified as a system function (Bergek et al., 2008; Hekkert et al., 2007). For example, Hekkert et al. (2007) see legitimacy as related to overcoming resistance and to advocacy of new technologies. According to Bergek et al. (2008), “legitimacy is a matter of social acceptance and compliance with relevant institutions” (p.416) and derives from agentic processes of legitimation (Johnson et al., 2006). Building on the TIS literature, Binz et al. (2016) describe four system functions for path creation that include technology legitimation to “embed a new technology in

existing institutional structures or adapt the institutional environment to the needs of the technology” (p.181).

Aldrich and Fiol (1994) describe legitimacy as containing a cognitive aspect and a sociopolitical one, with the former referring to public knowledge about the industry and its product and the latter referring to public acceptance. Similarly, Zimmerman and Zeitz (2002) distinguish between regulative, normative, cognitive, and industry legitimacy, and Suchman (1995) distinguished between pragmatic, moral (or normative), and cognitive legitimacy.

In new path development, legitimacy counters the “liability of newness” (Stinchcombe, 1965) that agents face when pursuing innovations (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Gong et al., 2021; MacKinnon et al., 2019). In the technological innovation systems framework proposed by Bergek et al. (2008), visions and expectations (see also Borup et al., 2006) are part of the direction of search function while legitimation is identified as a function of its own, thus highlighting that both are related in the workings of an innovation system. Recently, Gong et al. (2022) sketched a research agenda on institutional conditions for emerging industries with legitimation processes at its core.

In the neo-institutional literature, the role of legitimation in the development of new technological and industrial paths is well acknowledged, as cases from the early American automobile industry (Rao, 2004), advertising in the U.S. broadcasting industry (Leblebici et al., 1991), French *nouvelle cuisine* (Rao et al., 2003), or the transition from whaling to whale-watching in Canada (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004) show. In economic geography, drawing on neo-institutional field theory, Lenz et al. (2020) discuss legitimation strategies in newly emerging firm succession consulting. Harris (2021) analyzes legitimation in the emergence of software clusters in London and Singapore. More specifically in the path development literature, case studies for legitimation include self-driving cars in West Sweden (Mörner, 2020), the reused potable water industry in California and the video games industry in Hamburg (Binz & Gong, 2021), and modular water technologies in six countries (Heiberg et al., 2020).

The importance of the socio-institutional context for new path development implies that legitimation is a broader concept than technology legitimation (Jolly & Hansen, 2021). It is not only (new) technologies that have to be legitimized but new paths as such, and these new paths can be based on non-technological innovation and embedded in sectors with low degrees of strictly technological progress (Gong et al., 2022) including service industries such as tourism

(Benner, 2021b). Further, legitimation activities can span various spatial scales (Binz & Truffer, 2017; Heiberg et al., 2020; MacKinnon et al., 2019, 2021; Miörner, 2020).

Agents can employ a range of strategies to build legitimacy. For example, Aldrich and Fiol (1994) discuss legitimation strategies employed by entrepreneurs. Generally, legitimation strategies can take the form of conformance, creation, manipulation, or selection (Bergek et al., 2008; Suchman, 1995; Zimmermann & Zeitz, 2002). In a more elaborate categorization, Suddaby et al. (2017) summarize legitimation strategies identified in different streams of the literature under the headers of (i) conforming, (ii) decoupling, (iii) performing, (iv) persuasion, translation, and narration, (v) theorization, and (vi) identification and categorization. This list evokes strategies of institutional work that are intricately linked to the legitimation or delegitimation of institutions to be created, maintained, or disrupted (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). These strategies play an important role in (de)legitimizing different technologies and industries (Binz & Gong, 2021; MacKinnon et al., 2021; Fuenfschilling & Truffer, 2016).

### **Institutional logics, meaning, and legitimacy**

According to Miörner (2020), legitimation is a type of institutional agency aimed at the future through “institutionalizing change directions” in path development through visions and narratives (p.286), and MacKinnon et al. (2019, 2021) similarly demonstrate the role of visions and narratives in the legitimation of new paths. Hence, legitimation can be understood as a central function in acts of institutional entrepreneurship (DiMaggio, 1988) and in the role of visions in them (Benner, 2022).

In neo-institutional sociology, legitimacy is acknowledged as constitutive for organizational fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Seo & Creed, 2002), and its loss can lead to deinstitutionalization (Oliver, 1992). For example, in the social field of French gastronomy, Rao et al. (2003) discuss the legitimacy of the *nouvelle cuisine* based on the institutional logics perspective. Friedland & Alford (1991) understand institutional logics as “material practices and symbolic constructions” (p.248) while Thornton and Ocasio propose the more elaborate definition of a “socially constructed, historical pattern of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules” that charge social action with meaning (1999, p.804) and that “are sources of legitimacy” (2008, p.108). Institutional logics can refer to broad societal sub-systems such as politics, business, the family, or religion (Friedland & Alford, 1991) but also

more specifically to the ways an industry works (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, 2008). Institutional logics include, for example, economic or market logics, community logics, or aesthetic logics (Bækkelund, 2022; Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Institutional logics entail “criteria of legitimacy by which role identities, strategic behaviors, organizational forms and relationships between organizations are constructed and sustained” and thus related to sense-making (Glückler & Eckhardt, 2021, p.5). Different institutional logics are not isolated but interact. For example, Lenz and Glückler (2021) describe how the community logic of regional economies moderates the role of business and family logics in firm succession. Institutional logics are not mutually exclusive but can overlap, compete, complement each other, and be blended by agents (Bækkelund, 2022; Fuenfschilling & Truffer, 2016; Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005; Rao et al., 2003; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008).

Following Seo and Creed (2002), the heterogeneity of available institutional logics and contradictions between them are selectively employed by agents (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) who draw on their social skills of mobilization (Fligstein, 2001). When working towards new paths, agents can rely on the legitimacy of established institutional logics and carry their meanings over to other institutional logics. In this way, an institutional logic gets “endowed with some level of legitimacy by other institutionalized meaning systems within the same social boundary” (Seo & Creed, 2002, p.237). Since different institutional logics are based on different underlying meanings (Friedland & Alford, 1991), agents can “use different frames of interpretation in their institutional work” (Bækkelund, 2022, p.4). Hence, combining the underlying meanings of different institutional logics will rely on narratives or “stories” used to create primarily sociopolitical legitimacy (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005), based on Swidler’s (1986) proposition that culturally based “symbolic vehicles of meaning” (p.273) open strategic choices for agents (Fligstein, 2001; Pfeffer, 1981; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). For example, Harris (2021) and MacKinnon (2022) describe how narratives serve to legitimize clusters or emerging industries. Hence, when pursuing strategies to build legitimacy for new path development, agents can draw on various kinds of imaginaries, i.e., “collectively available symbolic meanings and values” (Van Lente, 2021, p.23). These imaginaries have “meaning-making and world-shaping” qualities (Salazar, 2012, p.864), include narratives and visions (Sotarauta, 2018), and are used strategically by agents in economic and political processes of institutional entrepreneurship (Benner, 2022). They can be understood as an expression of

what Friedland and Alford (1991, p.248) call “symbolic constructions”. Among imaginaries, visions are particularly relevant for the legitimacy of new or significantly transforming paths (Baumgartinger-Seiringer et al., 2021; Steen, 2016). Hence, they serve as the glue that binds together different institutional logics.

In economic geography and transition studies, how institutional logics contribute to legitimation is addressed in a number of case studies about regional development and technological progress, for example addressing the different institutional logics underlying firm succession (Lenz & Glückler, 2021), the institutional logics in green restructuring in tourism (Bækkelund, 2022), and institutional logics behind the (de)legitimation of competing water technologies (Fuenfschilling & Truffer, 2016). The strategy of “institutional folding” described by Glückler and Eckhardt (2021) provides an example for carrying over legitimacy between two institutional logics in brewing that includes delegitimizing one of them.

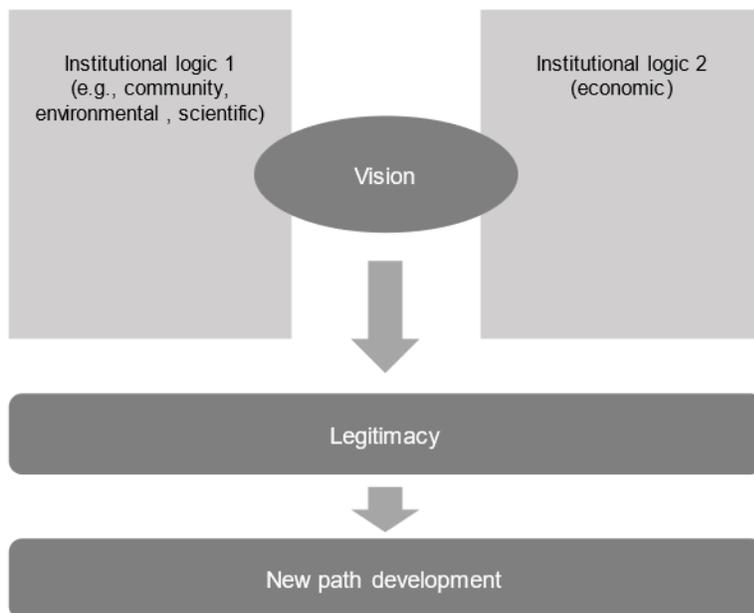
### **Conceptual framework: interlinking as a legitimation strategy**

The remainder of this article argues that apart from the generic legitimation strategies discussed in the literature (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Bergek et al., 2008; Suchman, 1995; Suddaby et al., 2017; Zimmermann & Zeitz, 2002), a more specific strategy for agents to build legitimacy in new path development is to draw on existing institutional logics and to interlink them through specific symbolic constructions used for meaning-making such as future-oriented visions (Pfeffer, 1981). Agents can thus carry over cognitive and sociopolitical legitimacy from existing institutional logics into new ones (Seo & Creed, 2002).

In contrast to blending (Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005) and folding (Glückler & Eckhardt, 2021), interlinking is not based on competition between institutional logics but on their complementarities. Nevertheless, this complementarity does not rule out situations in which inconsistencies and contradictions between the underlying institutional logics surface (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Suchman, 1995; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) once the new path has been legitimized and developed. In any case, interlinking does not involve delegitimization of one logic (e.g., Fuenfschilling & Truffer, 2016; Glückler & Eckhardt, 2021) but is purely constructive. The complementarities between the institutional logics involved are what enables the carrying over of legitimacy needed for a new path to gain traction.

Interlinking enables agents to strategically use the gaps in their fragmented socio-institutional environment through selection (Hinings & Greenwood, 1988; Suchman, 1995) but goes beyond by adding an act of purposeful combination of different institutional logics in a new context (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Interlinking works similarly to spillovers of pragmatic legitimacy within an organization (Suchman, 1995) or legitimacy spillovers between industries, sectors or scales (Jolly & Hansen, 2021; Punt et al., 2021) but can combine different forms of legitimacy, extends beyond the confines of an individual organization, and draws on different social spheres with their specific institutional logics. Hence, following Suchman's (1995) legitimation strategies, interlinking is a hybrid that includes aspects of selection by drawing on the normative legitimacy of available institutional logics but also manipulation as agents employ visions to form a new basis of cognitive legitimacy (see also Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Pfeffer, 1981; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). By according a critical role to visions in interlinking institutional logics, the conceptual framework (Fig. 1) sees legitimation as a process driven by agents with their particular interests and outlooks (Johnson et al., 2006), using their social skills to construct and promote specific meanings (Fligstein, 2001) and thus drawing on discourse (Suchman, 1995; Suddaby et al., 2017) by harnessing visions for path development (Baumgartinger-Seiringer et al., 2021; Steen, 2016).

*Fig. 1: Conceptual framework for interlinking institutional logics*



*Source: author's elaboration.*

Given that new paths emerge in an institutional environment that, although not necessarily outright hostile, are tenuous to them, agents will have to build their actions on the basis of an institutional logic that is likely to find public acceptance. They can do so by interlinking pre-existing institutional logics that are generally acknowledged as legitimate and thus create a bridge on which the legitimacy of the new path can be built. To interlink institutional logics, agents can harness wider imaginaries, visions, and narratives (Benner, 2022; Harris, 2021; Sotarauta, 2018; Van Lente, 2021) that explain and justify the carrying over of legitimacy between the institutional logics involved (see also Heiberg et al., 2020; Miörner, 2020). Hence, the construction of imaginaries and, in particular, future-oriented visions provides a mechanism for cognitive legitimacy that makes sense of the normative legitimacy (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Suchman, 1995; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002) of one institutional logic that is carried over to another. For regional industrial development to succeed, this interlinking has to lead to industry legitimacy (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002) and pragmatic legitimacy (Suchman, 1995) within an economic logic.

Drawing on Swidler (1986), Friedland and Alford (1991), and Seo and Creed (2002), both the heterogeneity *and* complementarity of institutional logics are assumed to enable strategic action by agents who use their social skills of mobilization (Fligstein, 2001) to legitimize a new path by interlinking institutional logics through visions. Instead of resolving contradictions (Seo & Creed, 2002), these visions serve to preventing major contradictions between institutional logics in the first place by building cognitive legitimacy.

*Table 1: Institutional logics*

	<b>Community logic</b>	<b>Environmental logic</b>	<b>Scientific logic</b>	<b>Economic logic</b>
<b>Fields</b>	Arts and culture, education, civic engagement, policymaking, religion	Environmental activism, policymaking, administration	Scientific research and education	Business, policymaking, administration
<b>Agents</b>	NGOs, artists, schools, citizens, policymakers, religious organizations	NGOs, citizens, policymakers, authorities	Researchers and students in universities or research institutes, NGOs	Firms, entrepreneurs, business associations, policymakers
<b>Values and motivations</b>	Strengthening solidarity, facilitating artistic expression, providing religious orientation	Preserving the natural environment	Advancing and diffusing scientific knowledge	Generating income or profit, promoting economic development

*Source: author's elaboration drawing on Bækkelund (2002), Friedland and Alford (1991), Fuenfschilling and Truffer (2016), Lenz and Glückler (2021), and Thornton and Ocasio (1999, 2008).*

Building on Friedland and Alford (1991) and Thornton and Ocasio (1999, 2008), the framework assumes a number of different institutional logics, each with their own agents, practices, incentives, values, and legitimacy. These logics include, in particular, (i) a community logic that refers to several fields whose values are not strictly economic, (ii) an environmental logic, (iii) a scientific logic, and (iv) an economic logic (Bækkelund, 2022; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Lenz & Glückler, 2021; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). While the first three logics do not have to be present at the same time, the fourth one is indispensable for path development. This economic logic includes a business logic (Lenz & Glückler, 2021) but goes beyond because it guides not only the business decisions of profit-seeking firms and entrepreneurs but also the political decisions of policymakers aiming at economic development in their jurisdiction (Benner, 2021b; Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020). Table 1 provides a simplified overview of the characteristics of these logics and generic values and motivations that provide a broad repertoire (Swidler, 1986) from which agents can draw to construct specific visions for interlinking logics.

### **Desert tourism in Mitzpe Ramon and Yeruham**

The empirical case of desert tourism in the small towns of Mitzpe Ramon and Yeruham (see also Benner, 2022; Schmidt and Uriely, 2019) in Israel's Negev desert illustrates how agents legitimize new paths by shaping the symbolic basis of institutional logics.

Table 2: Overview of interviews

Interviewee category	Number of interviewees
Experts	10
Firms	6
Educational or scientific stakeholders	3
Intermediary or destination management organizations	4
Non-governmental organizations	5
Policymakers	3
<b>Total<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>25</b>

Source: author's elaboration.

The empirical case of Mitzpe Ramon and Yeruham represents a paradigmatic single-case study (Flyvberg, 2006). The case study is based on a total of 25 semi-structured interviews with experts and stakeholders (Helfferich, 2019) either from the South of Israel or familiar with the development of tourism there (see Table 2).<sup>2</sup> Sampling of interviewees largely followed a “snowball” approach based on recommendations (Goodman, 1961) but was also informed by background material such as reports in Israeli media. Further background material used for familiarization with the context included presentations, brochures, and other texts, in some cases made available by interviewees.

The interviews took place between February 2020 and February 2022. Primarily due to the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted on the phone or through online call services. The interviews resulted in a total of almost 977 minutes of recordings and 190 pages of transcripts.<sup>3</sup> All interviewees consented to recording. The transcripts were analyzed through mixed deductive-inductive coding (Mayring & Fenzl 2019) based on the conceptual framework and informed by the course of the interviews as they were conducted. The MaxQDA data analysis software package (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019) was used for coding.

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<sup>1</sup> Since some interviewees covered more than one category, the added number of interviewees is higher than the total.

<sup>2</sup> This sample partly overlaps with a sample that covered several destinations in the Southern Negev that was analyzed along different research questions elsewhere (Benner, 2021a, 2022) but also includes new interviews.

<sup>3</sup> In one case, the interview transcript was corrected and amended by the interviewee on the interviewee's request. Further, an addition made by an interviewee per e-mail was included in the material.

## *Context<sup>4</sup>*

As air traffic between Israel and the European Union was liberalized in the wake of an aviation agreement signed in 2013 (European Commission 2021; Reich 2015) and supported through a national subsidization policy for foreign airlines and the opening of the new Ramon airport close to the Southern city of Eilat (Ergas and Felsenstein 2012), air traffic and tourism to Israel saw a strong increase in the years before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic (see also Benner et al., 2017).

Under these favorable conditions but starting even before this liberalization era, desert tourism in Israel became increasingly popular, reflecting changes in the symbolic meanings ascribed particularly to the Negev desert in Israel society. Zerubavel (2019) describes the development from ancient Jewish religious narratives such as the Exodus and the modern narrative of the “empty space” of “a ‘national dump’ for undesired, discredited, and dangerous elements from the populated center” (p.7) towards a space whose distance from the country’s crowded urban center is now seen more favorably by framing the Negev desert as a place for spirituality, adventure, calm, nature, recreation, and thus tourism.

The small, peripheral towns of Mitzpe Ramon and Yeruham reflect this changing symbolism. As “development towns” set up to accommodate Jewish immigrants with a lower socio-economic status and often coming from Middle Eastern and North African countries (Gradus et al., 1993; Tzfadia, 2005), both used to suffer from a long-term reputation as being desolate, marginalized, and marked by economic distress (Azaryahu, 2005; Schmidt & Uriely, 2019; Zerubavel, 2019). At the same time, both are characterized by important natural assets due to their location near spectacular desert craters recognized as UNESCO world heritage (Zerubavel, 2019). Mitzpe Ramon in particular saw an upswing in desert tourism during recent decades, fueled by a social transformation that saw both secular and religious newcomers from the center of the country settle there and develop small-scale ecotourism offers in an economic shift from mining to tourism (Schmidt & Uriely, 2019).

Arguably related to the opportunities offered by air-traffic liberalization, the Negev desert is now marketed by tourism policymakers as a “friendly desert” accessible for European tourists

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<sup>4</sup> This sub-section draws on Benner (2022).

(MDPNG & NDA, n.d.), echoing the diversifying symbolic constructions of the desert in the Israeli discourse that are relevant for domestic tourism to the Negev.

### ***Results***<sup>5</sup>

Within the context introduced above, retracing the development of desert tourism in both towns in its entirety is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, the case study focuses on a limited number of selected examples to elucidate how agents interlinked institutional logics to build the legitimacy of new paths.

Following Schmidt and Uriely (2019), the opening in 2011 of a landmark high-end luxury hotel in a spectacular location above the crater and operated by a national hotel chain established a path of investment-driven luxury tourism in Mitzpe Ramon. While this path is consistent with imaginaries about the desert that foreground aspects of relaxation, pristine nature, and isolation (Benner, 2022; Zerubavel, 2019), Schmidt and Uriely find that this path evolved at some distance from the community-based tourism patterns in the rest of the town and is reinforced by plans for further luxury hotels. However, given the limited benefit of this path for community-based tourism and its environmental impact, the legitimacy of the rapid development of Mitzpe Ramon including large-scale, mostly self-contained luxury tourism during the past decade is challenged as “the ability of the town to accommodate external investment without compromising its unique character and singular natural habitat” (p.821) is questioned and worries about a loss of Mitzpe Ramon’s authenticity have surfaced (Schmidt & Uriely, 2019).

However, while the limited local impact of the luxury hotel on tourism development in Mitzpe Ramon was addressed in the interviews, some interviewees assessed the impact of the luxury tourism path more favorably. For instance, it was highlighted that the hotel brought tourists willing to pay for stargazing tours:

“[The luxury hotel] started bringing tourists from a luxury level that usually didn’t come to Mitzpe Ramon, and that kind of tourism also has the money to pay for private stargazing activities and private tours.” (interview #7, 2020)

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<sup>5</sup> Where needed, the language of quotes taken from the interviews was slightly modified and corrected for the sake of readability.

As described by Benner (2022), the path of stargazing tourism in Mitzpe Ramon started with non-profit and scientific initiatives such as Tel Aviv University's Wise observatory located in Ramon crater and its student astronomy club initiating a stargazing festival but later spilled over to tour guides who came to see an economic opportunity to diversify into stargazing tours:

“You can definitely point at the involvement of non-profit organizations that actually have an educational agenda or scientific agenda that started these events out of their own interests and created the traffic. They created the interest, the media interest, and then eventually the public interest.” (interview #7, 2020)

“Around 2010 or something like this, (...) companies that gave stargazing tourism started to pop up (...) basically, the observatory started this there at the beginning of the millennium and then people saw that (...) you can make a living out of this, so they started to (...) buy telescopes and (...) host groups for payment.” (interview #19, 2022)

With the development of stargazing tourism, the motivation changed. As the city took over the stargazing festival, “it became more a commercial thing, now since [the astronomy] students are less interested in commercial [issues], more interested in volunteering, they took a step back” (interview #19, 2022).

Driven by the Israel Nature and Parks Authority's (NPA) motivation to protect wildlife from light pollution, Ramon crater was declared a dark-sky reserve by the International Dark-Sky Association in 2017 and the municipality invested in less polluting street lighting (Benner, 2022). However, while the latter measure was useful for stargazing, it was at least to some degree due to economic considerations:

“The move by the municipality to reduce light pollution wasn't originally motivated from a need to reduce light pollution. It (...) originated in a need to reduce the electric bill and to reduce energy costs for the town.” (interview #7, 2020)

The application for the recognition as a dark-sky reserve combined the NPA's motivation of protecting the nature and creating a national precedence for combating light pollution with the opportunity behind the growing interest in stargazing in Ramon crater. By integrating the

stargazing aspect into the rationale, the NPA found it relatively easy to gather local support for the dark-sky application, including by the municipality and the observatory. Still, it took several years to convince policymakers of the importance of combating light pollution while the observatory had an interest in the town's light pollution being limited. In this way, framing the dark-sky reserve application in terms of stargazing and thus linking the issue to Mitzpe Ramon's growing recognition "as the astronomy capital of Israel" (interview #18, 2022) and its growing stargazing tourism arguably helped in aligning different agents' interests. Today, Ramon crater has developed into a destination for astronomy tourism that has met particular interest by domestic tourists during the Covid-19 pandemic, for example during a festival celebrating the Perseid meteor shower in Summer. Moreover, a group of volunteers from diverse fields of science education and technology established a research station to simulate life on Mars ("D-Mars") in Ramon crater, offering educational programs for teenagers to promote interest in space exploration as well as professional space exploration training. In addition, this initiative offers visits for tourists and cooperates with stargazing tour providers.<sup>6</sup>

Another path that developed in Mitzpe Ramon is the music scene around the city's well-known jazz club. This club started in a gradual process by amateur musicians who formed a jazz band. As this band became more well known nationally, the municipality furnished a venue for the band to rehearse that over time involved into a jazz club and hosted bands from other places.<sup>7</sup> This dynamic arguably facilitated the setup of a creative music school whose activities reinforced the emerging music scene and the establishment of more music venues:

"When the school started (...), young musicians (...) practiced jazz and practiced music and they (...) brought their friends and they developed this way (...). Now

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<sup>6</sup> However, tourism in Ramon crater engenders contradictions with the original nature and wildlife conservation motivation behind the dark-sky application due to noise and light emissions of events or camping, thus implying long-term inconsistencies emerging after legitimation and new path development. Nonetheless, the designation of the dark-sky reserve did apparently lead to stargazing tourism moving to the crater and away from the observatory, thus generally ensuring the consistency with the scientific motivation of keeping light pollution at a distance from the observatory. Still, problems of light pollution around the observatory seem to have increased during the Covid-19 pandemic as domestic tourism in Ramon crater has become even more popular.

<sup>7</sup> While there were debates about municipal support and licensing requirements for the jazz club that might have endangered its legitimacy, a successful crowdfunding campaign in 2021 to reopen the club after being closed during the Covid-19 pandemic can be seen as a confirmation of legitimacy.

the whole town is full of music all over the place (...), in bars and restaurants, and it's like a small New Orleans.” (interview #15, 2021)

Together with other initiatives like a theater school and a dancing school, this artistic scene affected tourism also through the inflow and outflow of people attending these programs:

“The default was people are coming to do hiking into the desert or to do like extreme sports in the desert or jeep tours, (...) and now it's more of (...) students, friends of students that come for the weekend and people who come for a seminar, for a workshop, people who come to a conference.” (interview #24, 2022)

In the case of Yeruham, the beginning of the tourism path was gradual and can be traced back to separate but eventually complementary developments. The first one was the setup of Midreshet Beyachad, a youth learning center and hostel, as well as the establishment of Atid, a non-governmental organization, and Bamidbar, a community center, which later merged into Atid Bamidbar, during the late 1980s and early 1990s. For example, the “culinary queens” program invites tourists into the homes of women to dine and listen to their stories of immigration and cultural heritage:

“You get into (...) some houses [of families] from Morocco, some houses [of families from Tunisia], (...) and you listen [to] a different story how they get to Israel, and you listen about the story from Morocco and listen to the person. I think this is the most important thing that you listen to (...) different people.” (interview #23, 2022)

These offers follow a motivation to highlight the richness of Jewish (and Bedouin) cultural diversity and at the same time to strengthen the community.

The second development goes back to a political change with the appointment of a national-level politician as Yeruham's mayor by the ministry of interior after the elected mayor was removed from office. The new leadership focused on developing Yeruham through education but realized that new employment opportunities as well as a new sense of pride or identification with the place were needed in the town whose economy had for long relied on mining and manufacturing industries. Both high technology and tourism were identified as promising ways to achieve these goals, and when given a piece of land formerly used as office space as a donation, the municipal

foundation took the initiative to build a four-star boutique hotel for desert tourism that was operated as a social enterprise to fund the foundation's support for education. This mix of community-based and economic motivations, according to one interviewee, makes tourists "want to stay specially in this place because you know they return something to the community (...) [so] you feel [better] to spend money there" (interview #23, 2022). The rationale behind public investment in the social hotel was "to open the horizon for tourism" (interview #17, 2022) by demonstrating its feasibility to the private sector:

"Businesspeople (...) looking for good investments will not come to Yeruham and invest even one dollar unless they will have the feeling, not just a feeling but the fact that it is possible, and therefore there is a need for a public investment."  
(interview #17, 2022)

Hence, the social orientation of the hotel was linked to an ultimately economic motivation to create employment, to support local businesses, and to strengthen the city's tax base:

"The municipality (...) must think economically, how to increase the income of the municipality, how to increase the income of people that live in Yeruham, by small businesses, by a lot of inventions, and people think more as an entrepreneur." (interview#17, 2022)

In parallel and supported by a dedicated donation, a national-level philanthropic organization called Zionism 2000 whose original mission was to strengthen social cohesion and reduce socio-economic disparities after the 1995 assassination of prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and that partners with firms in corporate social responsibility initiatives assigned a manager to Yeruham to develop tourism projects and to create a new economic perspective. The program initially had the objective of educating youth but eventually was redirected towards tourism which was used as a lever "to change deeply (...) the DNA of the place" (interview #23, 2022), and while the program followed primarily an economic motivation, it was based on a wider social vision.

These different paths were complementary and, together with marketing efforts organized by an association set up by local tourism entrepreneurs, succeeded in making Yeruham increasingly perceived as a tourist destination as opposed to its previously dominant reputation of a desolate development town, although these perceptions may still persist to some degree (Benner, 2022). This motivation went beyond purely economic objectives, as the statement of a tourism

entrepreneur that “the sense that we’re doing something that’s not only for our own good but also for the economic and cultural development of Yeruham” (interview #10, 2020) highlights. Currently, plans to diversify tourism offers in Yeruham include, *inter alia*, a glamping site, a luxury hotel, and agritourism venues.

Finally, it is remarkable that in both Mitzpe Ramon and Yeruham, those individuals who were involved in initiating these new paths strikingly often came from other parts of the country and notably from its urbanized center (see also Benner, 2022; Schmidt & Uriely, 2019; Zerubavel, 2019). Indeed, attracting entrepreneurially minded individuals from the outside seems to have been an objective of decisionmakers that intermingled with the development of tourism:

“[Policymakers] were really looking to create the movement of young people to Mitzpe Ramon, they were really worried about demographics and (...) the idea that young people would come to Mitzpe Ramon.” (interview #24, 2022)

“When you start to be attractive and new people and a new community come to live in Yeruham, it changes everything.” (interview #23, 2022)

While exploring this issue in detail is beyond the scope of this article, it raises interesting questions for agency in new path development that merit further research.

### ***Discussion***

In the terminology of the path development literature, during the past decade Mitzpe Ramon has mainly seen path importation of investment-driven luxury tourism as well as path branching (astronomical tourism, music tourism), while Yeruham has so far seen a mixture between path diversification and branching towards different forms of community-based tourism. Table 3 provides a stylized overview of the different institutional logics that were eventually interlinked with the economic logic of promoting tourism for the sake of economic growth, employment creation, income generation, and tax revenue, and that thus provide the institutional basis of the new paths driven by particular visions (Benner, 2022).

Table 3: Institutional logics and visions in new path development in Mitzpe Ramon and Yeruham

Institutional logic	Examples		Vision
	Mitzpe Ramon	Yeruham	
Community logic (including arts, culture, education, civic engagement, religion)	• Jazz club		Enabling diverse musical performances
		• Atid Bamidbar including “culinary queens”	Making the diversity of Jewish tradition visible and promoting social cohesion and empowerment
		• Social hotel	Promoting community development (e.g., through education)
		• Zionism 2000	Strengthening cohesion in Israeli society after the Rabin assassination
Environmental logic	• Nature and Parks Authority		Preserving the desert environment and creating a precedence for limiting light pollution
Scientific logic	• Wise observatory/ Astronomy club  • D-Mars		Advancing and disseminating knowledge and interest in space and astronomy
Economic logic	• Luxury hotels  • Stargazing guides  • Music bars and restaurants  • Municipality	• Social hotel  • “Culinary queens”  • Tourism project development	Creating employment and income, economic growth, and tax revenue; diversifying tourism offers

Source: author’s elaboration drawing on Benner (2022) and Schmidt and Uriely (2019).

In the examples from Yeruham, different expressions of the community logic provide the sources of legitimacy for path diversification and branching in tourism. The social hotel offers a particularly clear example of how community and economic logics are interlinked along the visions of promoting tourism *and* education at the same time. The tourism activities under the roof of Atid Bamidbar, including notably the “culinary queens”, serve to provide an income for parts of the community but are primarily based on the vision of making the diversity of Jewish tradition in Yeruham visible and promoting social cohesion. Similarly, the tourism project

development supported by Zionism 2000 has its roots in the overarching objective of social cohesion.

In Mitzpe Ramon, the path of music tourism around the jazz club that evolved out of an amateur jazz band shows how the legitimacy of the path was initially rooted in the community logic and over time coalesced with the economic logic represented particularly by music bars and restaurants. Given that at the outset, Mitzpe Ramon seemed an unlikely place for such a thriving music scene, this organic evolution provided a degree of normative legitimacy that would presumably have been difficult to achieve through a purely economic logic from the start.

In stargazing tourism, three institutional logics were interlinked and agents mobilized accordingly. Starting with the NPA's environmental logic of nature preservation, the idea of the dark-sky reserve was well consistent with the scientific logic of the Wise observatory whose work would benefit from limiting light pollution, and aligned with the economic logic of promoting tourism that motivated the municipality and tourism businesses such as tour guides, thus enhancing the legitimacy of the stargazing and astronomical tourism path that was eventually reinforced by the setup of D-Mars. As an instance of path branching, this type of tourism stands in a certain contrast to the imported luxury tourism that follows a purely economic logic whose legitimacy is called into question from a community perspective (Schmidt & Uriely, 2019) but also possibly complements it. Interestingly, in the case of astronomical tourism, not only was normative legitimacy initially carried over from the scientific logic to the economic logic, but later was pragmatic legitimacy carried over in the opposite direction because the vision of promoting the economy through stargazing tourism mobilized agents around the NPA's vision of protecting the crater's wildlife from light pollution.

Hence, the empirical cases go beyond the conceptual framework by highlighting that legitimation can work bidirectionally when institutional logics are interlinked. Not only can the economic logic benefit from the legitimacy carried over from community, environmental, or scientific logics, but also *vice versa*. Thus, the original sources of legitimation in regional industrial path development can come from different agents and their different logics, including but not limited to the economic sphere.

## Conclusions

This article has proposed interlinking between institutional logics as a strategy for legitimizing new regional industrial paths and argued that agents use visions as a forward-looking form of imaginaries to interlink different institutional logics as a way of meaning-making. The empirical examples from desert tourism in Mitzpe Ramon and Yeruham demonstrated how different kinds of legitimacy are carried over from one institutional logic to another and how this contributed to new path development.

Nonetheless, different institutional logics and their underlying meanings can engender inconsistencies or contradictions (Bækkelund, 2022; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Suchman, 1995) that can over time provide an impulse for further institutional change in dialectical processes (Seo & Creed, 2002). In contrast to legitimacy spillovers from other industries, sectors, or scales that can turn around the fate of a path (Jolly & Hansen, 2021), these contradictions between the institutional logics involved are endogenous to the path itself. Exploring the role of these contradictions, for example between economic and environmental logics, and their effects on how dialectical processes of institutional change involve changes in legitimacy and their impact on path development merits further research.

The role of individuals who came from other parts of the country to Mitzpe Ramon and Yeruham implies another promising direction of further research towards the role of extra-regional agents in legitimizing path development in a multiscalar perspective (Heiberg et al., 2020), the institutional effects of interregional and international mobility (Saxenian & Sabel, 2008), and regional policy approaches to combine endogenous dynamics and external knowledge sources (Giustolisi et al., forthcoming).

Moreover, the cases demonstrate how paths whose legitimation originally derives from community, scientific, and environmental logics can contribute to forms of tourism that arguably benefit local communities more than previous mining and manufacturing industries (Schmidt & Uriely, 2019). These insights can contribute to further nuancing the debate on the social and environmental consequences of tourism (e.g., Bækkelund, 2022; Koens et al., 2018) while keeping in mind possible contradictions between the institutional logics involved. Legitimizing tourism paths through interlinking might work only up to the point where contradictions begin curtailing legitimacy, consistent with life-cycle models in tourism (Butler, 1980) and their implications for

path development (Benner, 2020b) to which the dimension of legitimacy can be added. Beyond concrete cases, this topic can be relevant for evolutionary perspectives of post-pandemic transformations in tourism (Brouder, 2020). Going beyond tourism, further elucidating the role of legitimacy and its loss in negative path development is an intriguing question. How industries lose legitimacy and how this relates to paths of decline (Blažek et al., 2020) is surprisingly little understood and few studies so far (e.g., Jolly & Hansen, 2021) address the descending course of legitimacy in path development after a certain tipping point. How and why such a tipping point is reached and which social and economic processes are at play hints at a crucial direction of research.

The conceptual framework and the empirical examples described in this article demonstrate that new path development is a complex socio-economic process that goes far beyond regional *industrial* paths but can be related to institutional patterns rooted in other spheres of society such as arts, culture, education, civic engagement, religion, the environment, or science. Hence, the evolution of new paths is necessarily a contextual and contingent process (Bathelt & Glückler, 2003) embedded in a wider socio-institutional context (Granovetter, 1985). More research on the institutional embeddedness of path development will be important to understand how legitimacy and its dynamic evolution affect regional path development. Taking to the heart of the abstract concept of legitimacy, such a research effort could help scholars and policymakers assess which kinds of new regional paths are socially desirable in a given context, under which conditions, and supported by which policies.

### **Acknowledgments**

The author is grateful to Michaela Trippel for advice. Early considerations for this article were presented at the Modul University research colloquium and at the ERSA conference, both online and in 2021, and more advanced insights were presented at the virtual AAG annual meeting in 2022. Comments made by participants are gratefully acknowledged. Of course, all errors and omissions are the author's alone, as are the opinions expressed.

### **Declaration of conflict of interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

### **Funding declaration**

This research was funded in whole, or in part, by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF): M 2992-G.

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**Department of Geography and Regional Research  
University of Vienna**

Contact person: Michaela Trippl  
Universitätsstraße 7/5/A0528, 1010 Vienna, Austria  
Tel.: +43-1-4277-48720  
E-Mail: Michaela.trippel@univie.ac.at  
<https://humangeo.univie.ac.at/>

**Department of Socioeconomics  
Vienna University of Economics and Business**

Contact person: Jürgen Essletzbichler  
Welthandelsplatz 1, 1020 Vienna, Austria  
Tel.: +43-1-31336/4206  
E-Mail: juergen.essletzbichler@wu.ac.at  
<http://www.wu.ac.at/en/department-socioeconomics>

**Institute for Urban and Regional Research  
Austrian Academy of Sciences**

Contact person: Robert Musil  
Postgasse 7/4/2, 1010 Vienna, Austria  
Tel.: +43-1-51581-3520  
E-Mail: robert.musil@oeaw.ac.at  
<https://www.oeaw.ac.at/en/isr/home/>

**Department of Working Life and Innovation  
University of Agder**

Contact person: Arne Isaksen  
Jon Lilletunsvei 3/A161, Grimstad, Norway  
Tel.: +47-37-23-33-53  
E-Mail: arne.isaksen@uia.no  
<https://www.uia.no/en/about-uia/faculties/school-of-business-and-law/department-of-working-life-and-innovation>

**Department of Geography  
Kiel University**

Contact person: Robert Hassink  
Hermann-Rodewald-Str. 9, 24098 Kiel, Germany  
Tel.: +49-431-880-2951  
E-Mail: hassink@geographie.uni-kiel.de  
<https://www.wigeo.uni-kiel.de/en/>