

Chapter 5

Managing Knowledge at Tourism Destinations: Conceptual Foundations and Research Issues

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ABSTRACT

Today, knowledge has become a pivotal tool of implementing strategies and approaches to achieve desired results. During the recent past, researches on knowledge management have grown rapidly in the management literature and tourism is no exception in this context. Moreover, the recent developments in tourism and hospitality marketplace have recognised knowledge as a key competitive tool and a determinant for socio-economic growth at destinations. Thus, it is obvious that if a tourism destination/nation/organisation is to remain competitive in the volatile tourism business environment, the application of knowledge management approach has become fundamental to transform tourism knowledge into capabilities for the survival, sustain and growth of tourism sector. The aim of this chapter is to conceptualize the application of knowledge concept and suggest further research issues in this area to develop a knowledge networks. Overall this chapter demonstrates the considerable utility of managing knowledge for tourism in delivering destination competitiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge is necessary for the success of tourism networks. “In an economy where the only certainty is uncertainty, the one source of lasting competitive advantage is knowledge” (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). There are numerous definitions, trying to explain the concept of knowledge. Knowledge indicates all know-how and skills individuals use

to solve problems (Probst, Raub & Romhardt, 1999). It “is created by combining related pieces of information over a period of time” (Lathi & Beyerlein, 2000) and it is personal and therefore always related to the individual. Knowledge “is based on the beliefs, values and commitment of the individuals involved. It can be viewed as a type of “intellectual capital” that has the ability to change how individuals and organizations view

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and create the world around them” (Lathi & Beyerlein, 2000). Therefore, knowledge management is focusing on the identification, generation, use, transfer and preservation of knowledge within an organization or within a network. According to Skyrme (1999) a knowledge network helps to respond quickly and more flexible to challenges and needs of the market, to develop core competences based on the combination of common knowledge and other resources and to use the core competences of other network members in a systematic manner. Concisely, knowledge management involves all the viewpoints and activities needed in an organization, to understand, accumulate, make use of and profit from capital in the form of organizational knowledge (Lathi & Beyerlein, 2000). Knowledge management is not a simple, one-dimensional static construct, but it consists of many dynamic elements integrated to four interrelated key components: knowledge generation, knowledge representation, knowledge accessibility and knowledge transfer. Knowledge generation is focusing on the identification of new and valuable information and the conversion of this information into knowledge. Knowledge representation and accessibility are dealing with the translation of knowledge so that a benefit for the whole organization can be achieved and the accessibility of organizational knowledge, thus, the availability to all members of the organization or the network. Knowledge management was initially defined as the process of applying a systematic approach to the capture, structuring, management, and dissemination of knowledge throughout an organization to work faster, reuse best practices, and reduce costly rework from project to project (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Pasternack & Viscio 1998; Pfeffer & Sutton, 1999; Ruggles & Holtschouse, 1999). Knowledge Management, (KM) is a concept and a term that arose approximately two decades ago, roughly in 1990. Quite simply one might say that it means organizing an organization’s information and knowledge holistically, but

that sounds a bit wooly, and surprisingly enough, even though it sounds overbroad, it is not the whole picture. Very early on in the KM movement, Davenport (1994) offered the still widely quoted definition: “Knowledge management is the process of capturing, distributing, and effectively using knowledge.” This definition has the virtue of being simple, stark, and to the point. A few years later, the Gartner Group created another second definition of KM, which is perhaps the most frequently cited one (Duhon, 1998): “Knowledge management is a discipline that promotes an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving, and sharing all of an enterprise’s information assets. These assets may include databases, documents, policies, procedures, and previously un-captured expertise and experience in individual workers.” Both definitions share a very organizational, a very corporate orientation. KM, historically at least, is primarily about managing the knowledge of and in organizations. The operational origin of KM, as the term is understood today, arose within the consulting community and from there the principles of KM were rather rapidly spread by the consulting organizations to other disciplines. The consulting firms quickly realized the potential of the Intranet flavour of the Internet for linking together their own geographically dispersed and knowledge-based organizations. Once having gained expertise in how to take advantage of intranets to connect across their organizations and to share and manage information and knowledge, they then understood that the expertise they had gained was a product that could be sold to other organizations. A new product of course needed a name, and the name chosen, or at least arrived at, was Knowledge Management. The timing was propitious, as the enthusiasm for intellectual capital in the 1980s, had primed the pump for the recognition of information and knowledge as essential assets for any organization. Perhaps the most central thrust in KM is to capture and make available, so it can be used by others in the

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