

Chapter 28

Shaping and Re-Shaping Tourism Areas: A Network Approach

Vincenzo Asero

University of Catania, Italy

Simona Gozzo

University of Catania, Italy

Venera Tomaselli

University of Catania, Italy

ABSTRACT

Defining the boundaries of tourism destinations has been long recognised as a problem in tourism research. The authors aim to define the spatial configuration of tourism areas including different destinations within a same region. Tourist mobility is employed as a methodological criterion to reveal the network relationships among destinations and explain how tourism areas are being shaped and reshaped. The study combines Network Analysis methods and multinomial logistic regression models, in an approach to processing the data of a sampling survey, carried out in Sicily. The results show that the network structures among destinations affect the shape and dimension of tourism areas. Useful evidence for the spatial planning of tourism regions and destination management strategies are derived.

INTRODUCTION

A tourism destination is a specific geographical area within which tourists enjoy different types of holiday. According to Pike (2008), the destination is the spatial unit of analysis in any modelling of a tourism system. Many scholars highlight the fact that destination is a problematic concept (e.g., Framke, 2002; Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011), one which can be used in different ways and across a varying range of spatial scale (e.g., Beaumont & Dredge, 2010; Saarinen, 2014). Others recognise that destinations are

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-2469-5.ch028

complex dynamic systems (Baggio, 2008, 2014; Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2010). Bieger et al. (2009) noticed that the size of a destination influences the Destination Management Organization (DMO) functions, activities and budgeting. More recently, Pearce (2014) observed that the conceptualization of destinations has practical implications for destination management, since viewing a destination as an open or a closed system, instead of as an entity complete in itself, affects DMO actions. The geographical dimension of tourism destinations is often associated with blurred boundaries, since they can encompass either a single location or a network of different places (Dredge, 1999). In this regard, Richie and Crouch (2003) distinguished different levels and types of destinations, where the biggest are countries and macro-regions, and the smallest are cities and single places (e.g., theme parks). Wall (1997) suggested a classification in terms of points, lines and areas based on spatial characteristics. Following Porter (1998), a destination can be considered as a tourism cluster, since it encompasses a geographical concentration of interconnected firms and institutions. By contrast, in the perspective of Massey (1994), destinations are networks of social relations instead of areas with boundaries. The spatial dimension of a destination can therefore be defined according to cooperation among different locations or strategic partnerships among firms and public entities, instead of administrative conditions.

Buhalis (2000) noted that a destination is also a subjective concept, perceived by tourists on the basis of different elements such as their travel itineraries. Similarly, Jenkins et al. (2011) observed that tourists are more likely to define a destination in relation to their journey, specifically in terms of attractions, services, travel time and entry and departure points. Klepers and Rozite (2010) found that tourists, while travelling, do not notice administrative boundaries.

There is a debate in tourism literature over whether the geographic boundaries of a destination are functional or administrative, fixed or fluid (Pearce & Schänzel, 2013). Recently, Beritelli, Bieger, and Laesser (2014) proposed a dynamic viewpoint, affirming that a destination is a space of 'variable geometry', since it is the playground of different supply networks activated by tourist movements. The analysis of the spatial distribution of tourists, therefore, could be an evaluation criterion of the interconnections among various destinations within an area, defining a tourism system (Carlsen, 1999; Cross, Borgatti, & Parker, 2002). As Burnes and Novelli (2008) observed, understanding tourist mobility among multiple localities could explain how destinations are being shaped and re-shaped. As a consequence, the mapping and modelling of tourists' movements are suitable for understanding the dimension of a tourism system.

Defining the boundaries of tourism destinations and regions is recognised as an important issue in tourism research, since space affects the way an economic system works (Capello, 2009). The spatial configuration of tourism areas, indeed, is crucial for policy makers, firms and destination managers to plan and implement coordinated actions of DMO. In this view, destinations and tourism regions require the evaluation and revision of the boundaries of tourism areas they contain, in order to increase market competition, and to meet globalizing tourism markets. There is, therefore, a need for methods and approaches useful to delimit and understand the structure of network areas, which includes identifying the 'central' or 'peripheral' role of destinations.

Following the concept of 'variable geometry' (Beritelli et al., 2014), this study proposes a holistic approach to define the spatial configuration of tourism areas, employing a demand and supply perspective. Tourist mobility has been considered as a methodological criterion to reveal the network relationships among destinations. With this aim in mind, Network Analysis (NA) methods are combined with regression models to assess the shaping and re-shaping of tourism areas including different destinations within a same region. This procedure shows its effectiveness in drawing up the boundaries of destination areas, overcoming one limitation of NA methods that have been employed in tourism research (Ahmed,

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