Chapter XI
The Development of Knowledge and Information Networks in Tourism Destinations

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks to analyse new paradigms in the relationship between public and private organisations towards tourism destinations. It proposes new approaches for increased performance both at the competitive and the organisational level. Based on the literature review, this chapter suggests new organisational forms of being and interaction directed at increased customer needs and growing competitiveness on the tourism industry. The development of public-private partnerships and knowledge networking in destinations and in organisations are issues also addressed. Furthermore, the implementation of inter-organisational networks in a cooperative environment is important in developing and maintaining an adequate environment with shared objectives and practices in tourist destinations.

INTRODUCTION

Globalisation has had a decisive impact on the changing environment and one in which nowadays economies are facing. This fact has stimulated growing interest from researchers who have turned their attention to issues of globalisation, the digital era, innovation and Knowledge Management.

The rise of the so-called New Digital Economy, characterised by the spread of new information and communication technologies, has provoked over recent years a revolution in the world of business and more specifically in tourism, causing changes in corporate strategies and organisational structures.

For the majority of countries, the tourism sector represents an important service industry, socio-

economically significant for hosting regions. This is not only related to dynamic sector growth but also to the multiple effects generated by globalisation to other sectors of the economy.

Nowadays, tourism organisations face a dynamic and uncertain environment that require flexible and fast results essential to changing businesses. This, linked to the need for cooperation between the various actors in the value chain of the tourist destination, has generated the onset and development of several inter-organisational networks, aimed at improving competitiveness of destinations and involved organisations.

Developing a climate of cooperation in tourist destinations implies firstly that actors are aware that they belong to a chain where their performance complements and contributes to the value of the tourist experience. The introduction of programmes and integrated projects, common visions, cooperative agreements and collaboration between public and private entities based on the pursuit of greater global objectives, is a networking reality for tourism destinations.

The interactive process of close and coherent collaboration between all actors and organisations, public and private, at the regional, national and even international scale, is of central importance for competitiveness in tourist destinations. This creates synergies for networking providers and allows the development of a common vision towards tourism building based on concerted efforts from involved parties.

Based on the review of the literature focused on the concepts of tourism destination and virtual knowledge and information networks, the paper intends to discuss, in theoretical terms, the benefits of the establishment of partnerships and cooperation networks between public and private tourism organisations, contributing for the development and implementation of improvement competitiveness strategies in tourism destinations.

To the effect, the paper begins by clarifying the tourism destination concept and characterizing the kind of consumption product that consubstantiates

the tourism experience. Than, it discusses the need for new approaches in terms of tourism destination management, assuming that the main objective of the Destination Management Organisations is to maximize the synergies of the value chain, ensuring high levels of satisfaction for tourists as much as stakeholders. Finally, it suggests that the constitution of partnerships and the sharing of knowledge and information between the tourism sector organisations is a strategic issue for the competitiveness of the tourism destinations and, in that sense, it must be an object of the greatest attention from the Destination Management Organisations intending to succeed in terms of performance.

TOURISM DESTINATION

Tourism destination is closely linked to new experiences and associated memories. Although a composite unit representing a region's supply, it is considered a paradigmatic example of virtual organisation.

As a setting comprising economic, cultural and social activities, the tourism destination has come to be understood as a product on offer, and thus the public institutions responsible for that destination and the regional tourism organisations operating within that destination see themselves as obliged to establish a set of facilities and actions that ensure the best possible positioning in a highly competitive market when it comes to attracting tourists (Beerli & Martin, 2004)

The studies carried out by Butler (1980), Gunn (1993), Laws (1995) and Pearce (1989) regard tourism destination as a system containing a number of components such as attractions, accommodation, transport and other services and facilities. The tourism destination generally comprises different types of complementary and competing organisations, multiple sectors, facilities and an array of public/private linkages that

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