



DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM DESTINATIONS

An Integrated Multilevel Perspective

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Abstract: Research on destination development is fragmented. Some studies focus primarily on one or a few selected areas of destination development, paying limited attention to multilevel issues and theoretical integration, while others take a more holistic, phenomena-driven view, making theoretical delimitation difficult. We lack theoretical approaches to guide us in the question of how destinations can be developed from an integrated multilevel perspective. We mitigate this challenge by developing a theoretical framework highlighting three specific areas impacting destination development. These are: destination capabilities, coordination at the destination level, and inter-destination bridge ties. The three areas will each have a direct impact on destination development, and furthermore, the areas are interrelated and thereby impact destination development indirectly. **Keywords:** destination development, resources, coordination, bridge ties. © 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism destinations can be considered as complex networks that involve a large number of co-producing actors delivering a variety of products, and services (Gunn, 1994; Pearce, 1989; Hu & Brent Ritchie, 1993; Ramirez, 1999; Buhalis, 2000; Murphy, Pritchard, & Smith, 2000; Silkoset, 2004). While tourists perceive the destination as a unit, offering an integrated experience or a destination product (Buhalis, 2000; Murphy et al., 2000), this experience or product is still produced and

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composed by the individual actors. The success of individual actors, as well as the success of the entire destination, is dependent on efficient coordination and integration of individual companies' resources, products, and services (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2007; Rodríguez-Díaz & Espino-Rodríguez, 2008).

The importance of treating the destination as a unit has resulted in a large body of research focusing on different issues related to destination development. It is acknowledged that the destination is an important unit affecting the competitiveness of both the destination and individual actors. Existing research has paid attention to a large number of issues such as, for example, strategic destination planning (Formica & Kothari, 2008), dynamic destination management (Sainaghi, 2006), destination competitiveness (Mazanec, Wöber, & Zins, 2007), collaboration in tourism policymaking (de Araujo & Bramwell, 2002; Bramwell & Sharman, 1999), collaboration and community-based tourism planning (Jamal & Getz, 1995), collaborative destination marketing (Wang & Xiang, 2007), destination marketing organizations (DMOs) (Gretzel, Fesenmaier, Formica, & O'Leary, 2006), and destination governance (Beritelli et al., 2007). This research has produced both management-oriented models and in-depth theoretical understandings of destination development.

However, this past research has also left some gaps. First, previous research has not fully taken into account the challenges of developing strategies across multiple actor boundaries. Destinations are complex co-producing networks, and destination development needs to take into account the challenges of developing strategies involving a large number of firms and other actors such as, for example, local and regional authorities. We use the term *integrated* to signal the need for strategies spanning individual actor boundaries. Second, destination development is a *multilevel* phenomenon as it requires attention to issues at the level of the individual actor, the level of the destination (inter-firm or inter-actor), and the level of a larger geographic or regional area (inter-destination). This article seeks to fill this void in the literature by simultaneously addressing these two issues. We take the view that destination development needs to encompass strategies across multiple actor boundaries and across multiple actor levels, and we refer to these as *integrated multilevel* strategies.

The purpose of this article is to develop a theoretical framework for destination development emphasizing the requirements for integration and multilevel considerations. The framework aims at capturing this complexity by incorporating three major parts: (1) destination capabilities, (2) coordination at the destination level, and (3) inter-destination bridge ties. First, the utilization of distributed resources to achieve a common goal is crucial for any tourism destination. Therefore, destinations need to develop capabilities enabling continuous configuration and reconfiguration of dispersed resources into destination-level products and services. Second, individual actors at the destinations need to act in a coherent manner. This requires the implementation of coordination or integration mechanisms among the actors. We take the view that the underlying interorganizational

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