



Structured inter-network collaboration: Public participation in tourism planning in Southern China



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HIGHLIGHTS

- A case study of a tourism destination in Jiao Chang Wei, Shenzhen, China was conducted.
- A structured inter-network collaboration led-by government organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) was found to be the dominant paradigm of public participation in the case study area.
- The model might have potential to apply in a political context which is framed by a strong central power.
- Three main contributions to knowledge were discussed.

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ABSTRACT

Public participation is considered a cornerstone of sustainable tourism planning. Although this process is well established and tested in western democracies, there is an emerging trend of developing it within the liberalizing Chinese tourism economy. Using a qualitative research strategy, this paper applies the theoretical construction of community participation in tourism planning to the analysis of the planning process of a tourism destination in Jiao Chang Wei, Shenzhen, China. The paper finds that: 1) public participation has played a significant role in the formulation and implementation of the tourism destination plan in the case study area. 2) Structuralized inter-network collaboration led-by government organized non-governmental organizations has the potential to become dominant paradigm of public participation in tourism planning in China in the future. The paper concludes with the contributions of this research to wider theory.

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1. Introduction

In tourism research and in the academic planning literature, the significance of participation in tourism planning has become increasingly prominent. Arising from the concerns from both the personal interests of host communities and of the broader interests of the society, scholars propose the involvement of various stakeholder to address the need for a better informed tourism planning strategy which is more effective, equitable and legitimate (Murphy, 1988; Simmons, 1994). The goals are to protect local communities from tourism's adverse impacts (Jurowski, Uysal, & Williams, 1997) and to help them benefit from tourism development. This

transformation in tourism planning corresponds with the communicative or collaborative turn in planning thought that has attempts to operationalize communication among stakeholders. Underpinned by various planning models, a growing number of authors within the tourism planning literature are highlighting the importance of involving diverse stakeholders in participatory processes of consensus-building and partnership formation. Notwithstanding the above ideals, the effective implementation of the collaborative paradigm is still a matter of concern (lorio & Corsale, 2013). Flyvbjerg (1998) postulates that collaborative planning entails an idealized notion of democracy – a notion that presumes civil society to be non-political with no inherent conflicts. We need a more critical understanding of the process of collaborative planning practices. Specifically, we must clarify who has been involved and why, and how those different stakeholders are involved in participation in the planning process.

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In China, public participation in tourism planning has drawn increasing academic attention since the 1990s. Particular attention has been paid to addressing normative elements with a particular focus on developing tools and techniques for participation, and providing constructive suggestions on the management of the engagement processes (e.g., Bao & Sun, 2003; Wang & Zhou, 2003; Ye, 2012; Zhang & Wu, 2002). Recent case studies, however, demonstrate that state-centric, top-down participative decision-making has not gained wide acceptance in practice. Instead, various forms of bottom-up (pro) active involvement of local communities and economic (private) operators are becoming evident, no matter whether it is around the organization of mega-events (e.g., Lamberti, Noci, Guo, & Zhu, 2011), promoting rural tourism (Ying & Zhou, 2007), or demonstrating distinctive Chinese characteristics (Li & Zhao, 2001). Such practices are commonly characterized by dynamic, multi-actor interactions, complex power differentials and uneven exchanges of resources and information between actors and agencies. Although these features have been partially investigated (e.g., Lin & Bao, 2015), there remains the need for further exploration of the nature and effectiveness of public participation by destination stakeholders in formulating and implementing tourism planning within the contemporary Chinese social, economic and political context (Wang, Yang, Chen, Yang, & Li, 2010; Ying, Jiang, & Zhou, 2015).

Our case-study of Jiaochangwei is emblematic of issues cited above. Jiaochangwei Bed and Breakfast Destination (JCW) is located on the Dapeng Peninsula, which is approximately 50 km away from Shenzhen city center in southern China. Covering an area of 54 ha, this destination is the only well-preserved indigenous coastal village on the city's Peninsula. As of the end of April 2015, there were a total of more than 350 re-decorated local inns, accommodating approximately 15 million annual tourist arrivals. The JCW has now become Shenzhen's favored B & B destination and will become an important part of the proposed 'Long Qi Bay' 5A-level scenic attractions. The success of the JCW has been regarded by many as the result of the JCW Bed and Breakfast Tourism Destination Plan (JTDP), which was officially launched by the Shenzhen Municipal Government in September 2013. In contrast to traditional top-down planning processes, this plan has been widely regarded as a bottom-up planning process supported by the active participation of local people.

This paper's objectives are therefore threefold: (1) to provide theoretical explanations of public participation in tourism planning in China through an examination of the formulation and implementation process of the JTDP; (2) to reflect on what the JTDP case reveals about the nature for public participation in tourism planning in China; and (3) to discuss more broadly how the Chinese case contributes to the theory of participatory planning in tourism. The development and implementation of the JTDP reflects the use of public participation to support both the formulation and implementation of an official tourism plan. Rather than simply read the case of JTDP as an example of the exercise of public participation in tourism planning, we suggest that the form it took reflects a more nuanced story about the uneven distribution of both the power of individual stakeholders involved and networks in planning and policy processes.

This paper is structured as follows. We begin by reviewing recent debates and literature in stakeholder theory, social network theory, and governance theory to establish an analytical framework through which to understand the nature of participation in tourism planning. We then move on to the JTDP case study in Shenzhen, China. Our analysis commences with a brief introduction to the participatory processes of the JTDP in respect of its origins, rationales and outcomes. We analyze the stakeholders involved in the planning process and identify how they relate to each other. In

particular, we demonstrate how the JTDP has been formulated and implemented through structuralized inter-organizational collaboration. The paper concludes by reflecting on this study's key findings, contributions to knowledge, and implications for future research.

2. Theory

2.1. Sustainable tourism and collaborative planning: the engagement of stakeholders in tourism development

In response to the well socialized concept of "sustainable development" in the wake of the report, Our Common Future (Brundtland & World Commission, 1987), sustainable tourism can be seen as "linked with the preservation of ecosystems, the promotion of human welfare, inter- and intra-generational equity, and public participation in decision-making" (Bramwell, 2015, p. 204). The concept of sustainable tourism covers a broad spectrum, from "light green" variants of sustainability to "dark green" sustainable tourism (Harris, Griffin, & Williams, 2002). These various descriptions of different commitments to sustainable tourism supports the broad recognition of the concept as an attractive notion emphasizing balanced development which covers ecological, social and economic sustainability.

Attempts to move sustainable tourism from ideology to implementation have called for practices that pay more attention to justice, equity and democracy in planning and policymaking (Dredge, 2006, p. 562). Planning has played a significant role in tourism development at destinations due to its abilities to integrate tourism and other sectors, shape and control physical patterns of development, conserve significant resources and even provide frameworks for "selling" destinations (Williams, 1998). For a considerable length of time, tourism planning followed the elite dominant, linear, and rational planning paradigm (Williams, 1998), which ignores value differentiations among stakeholders. The implementation of sustainable tourism however compels acknowledgement of these various values and searches for suitable ways of balancing their interests in the planning of tourism destinations. Among these endeavors, stakeholder participation and empowerment in planning are regarded as crucial elements within all planning stages including the identification of problems, decision-making and implementation (Araujo & Bramwell, 1999; Murphy, 1988; Simmons, 1994). This in turn is argued to enhance their ability to manage and respond to unpredictable circumstances (Jurowski et al., 1997), and support the broader objectives of sustainable tourism (France, 1998).

Public participation in decision-making has been widely discussed in the planning literature. In her typology of participation, Arnstein (1969) indicates three levels of citizens' involvement: non-participation (Manipulation & Therapy), tokenism (Informing, Consultation & Placation) and citizen power (Partnership, Delegated Power & Citizen Control). These three levels of participation were further developed into five stages by IAP2 in 2000, identified as: informing, consulting, engaging, collaborating, and empowering (IAP2, 2000). In line with research on community participation in the field of development studies, Tosun proposes three different forms of public participation in tourism planning (1999): pseudo-community participation, passive community participation, and spontaneous community participation. For Tosun (1999), collaborative planning, which is based on the work of Habermas (1984), is an effective public participation process that make the tourism planning process more effective, equitable and legitimate.

Over time, collaborative planning has gained increasing attention within tourism research and practice (e.g., Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Jamal & Getz, 1995). In a

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