

Obstacles to achieving cross-border tourism governance: A multi-scalar approach focusing on the German-Czech borderlands



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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to identify distinctive obstacles to the establishment of tourism destination governance in both transnational and within-country borderlands. Analysis of the German-Czech borderlands, a region also incorporating within-country borders between three German federal states, indicates the multi-scalar and political contestations of cross-border tourism collaboration. Local tourism projects are generally successful, both on a transnational German-Czech level and between the German states of Bavaria, Saxony and Thuringia. However, structural cross-border destination management does not exist because of (transnational) multi-scalar institutional alignment problems and (internal) tourism-specific destination-level power contestations. Understanding destination management processes in borderlands, therefore, requires: (i) explicit multi-scalar analysis; (ii) recognition of both transnational and within-country contexts; (iii) more cross-pollination between tourism planning and cross-border governance research.

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Introduction

Tourism can function as a viable strategy for transboundary regions to overcome border-related barriers that otherwise inhibit socio-economic development and political cooperation (Prokkola, 2007; Timothy, 2001). Observers have established that structural governance and planning processes are fundamental when utilizing tourism to achieve regional development aims in such areas (Blasco, Guia, & Prats, 2014). Through inclusive and participative stakeholder contact, governance processes could empower all tourism-related stakeholders so that the positive and negative impacts of tourism development are socially and spatially balanced throughout the destination (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016). However, previous research in cross-border settings has indicated that the creation of tourism governance structures has generally been unsuccessful (Blasco et al., 2014) with potentially adverse effects. Absence of participative cross-border cooperation leads to growing competition between neighbouring areas, duplication of efforts in marketing or infrastructure development, and faltering regional innovation due to weak knowledge transfer (Ilbery & Saxena, 2011; Ioannides, Nielsen, & Billing, 2006; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2017; Weidenfeld, 2013). Such situations weaken bottom-up support for projects (Lim, 2016), thus undermining long-term stability of the borderlands as attractive destinations.

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Several research gaps exist when it comes to explaining the noted lack of success in attempts to establish tourism governance in borderlands. First, the tourism planning literature covers borders only implicitly by reflecting on territorial limitations of decision-making power. Second, studies on cross-border tourism generally concentrate on the transnational level, ignoring the fact that territorial delimitations ranging from municipal and regional boundaries to national borders all pose management complexities (Lovelock & Boyd, 2006; Timothy, 2001). Third, both cross-border governance research and cross-border tourism studies have paid sparse attention to power relations. Yet, tourism planning scholars have widely acknowledged that destination-level governance is highly politicized and involves power relations among different stakeholders, who aim at shaping the tourism system in their favour. They have shown that the distribution and use of power is key toward understanding the development direction of tourism in destinations and for deducing who profits from these processes (Farmaki, Altinay, Botterill, & Hilke, 2015). Intrinsic contestations between tourism stakeholders, resulting from the composite and global-local characteristics of the present-day tourism sector, may limit the success of destination governance in reaching intended regional development outcomes (Farmaki, 2015). Flexible ways of network governance have been identified to counter this tendency, yet evidence relating to their higher empowering capacity is sketchy (Bramwell & Meyer, 2007; Saxena & Ilbery, 2008).

These research gaps lead us to ask three questions. First, how do multi-scalar power processes in larger cross-border governance structures influence tourism destination management in borderlands? Second, in what way does the inherently

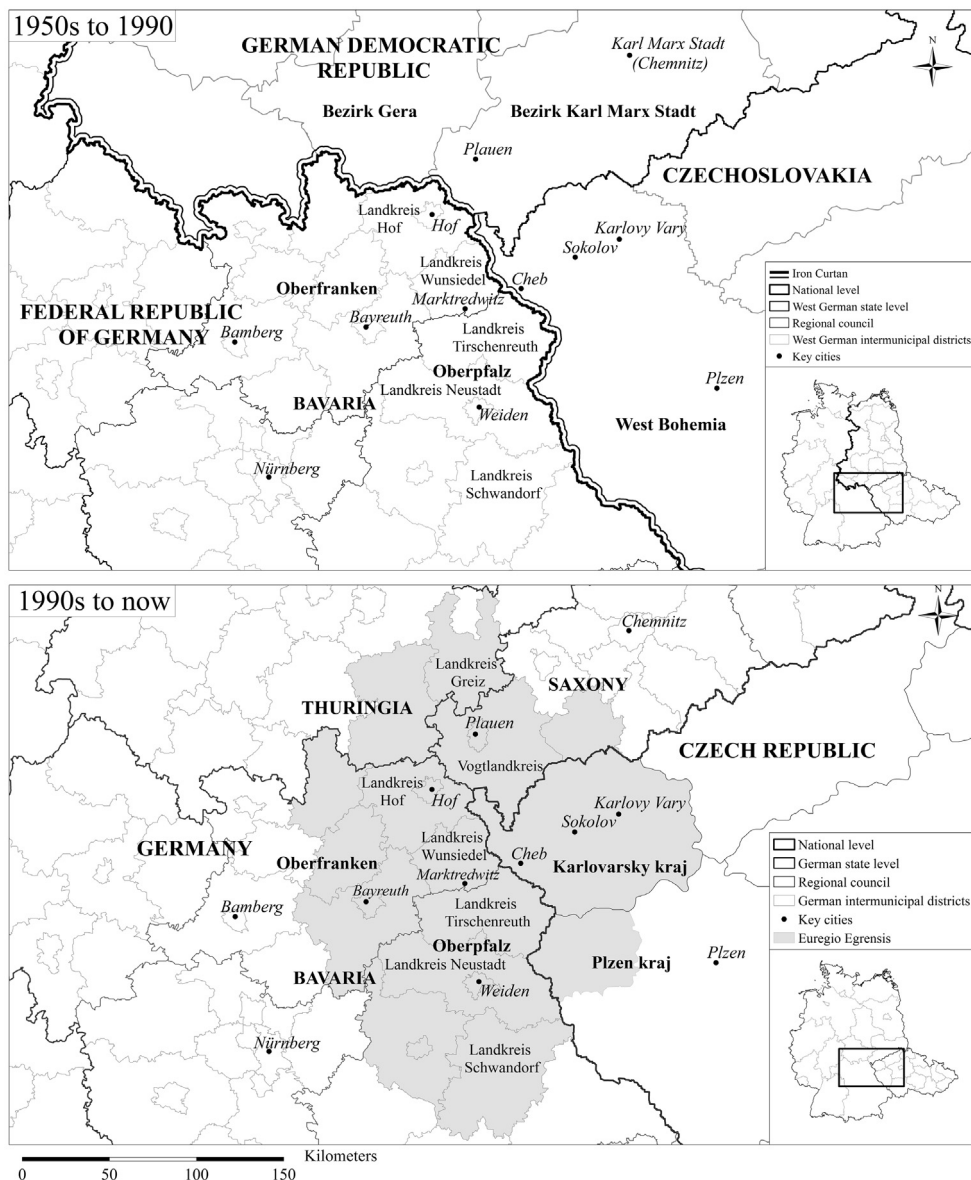


Fig. 1. Evolution of the administrative delineation of the German-Czech borderlands.

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