Sustainable Destination Management and the Marketing-Planning Gap: Collaborative Networks and New Organizational Forms

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Abstract

A traditional and widely held view is that a sustainable approach to destination planning and management ideally requires that marketing and product development are undertaken in an integrated manner. However, if we take just two activities to demonstrate our point, "destination marketing" and "product development" are often conducted by very different organizations located within and outside the tourism destination, at different times, and by different stakeholders with different agendas, values and ideas. This co-ordination problem has been recognized by several authors, referring specifically to the gap between destination marketing activities and tourism planning (i.e. the "marketing-planning gap"). Jamal and Jamrozy (2006), among others, have argued that this gap would need to be bridged in any effort to achieve an integrated and sustainable tourism destination. The messy world of policy, driven largely by critical and social constructionist analyses of policy-making (Provan & Kenis, 2008) and the realization that politics cannot be separated from policy (Bell, 2004), have inspired research that has sought more nuanced understandings of the relational characteristics of stakeholders (Healey, 2006) and governance structures and capacities (de Leon & Varda, 2009). The emergence of network analysis in addition to stakeholder collaboration research offer new avenues for examining this "gap". Undertaking this challenge in our paper also enables us to explore the under-studied relationship between networks and collaborations in sustainable destination management.

In tourism planning, consider for a moment the range of agencies, individuals and groups that might operate in any local destination (from national to state to local levels) and the breadth of activities they undertake and which impact upon a destination's development. For example, local government, as a single agency operating at the local destination level, undertakes a range of activities including infrastructure provision, land use planning, traffic management, environmental protection, recreation planning and tourism marketing. Yet it is only one of many organizations involved in shaping a destination's environment, its product development, and ultimately, the tourist experience. The problem is also evident when one examines the role and functions of tourist organizations, which are primarily involved in the marketing and promotion of tourist destinations and destination image. Tourist organizations may be public, semi-public or private organizations,

and may be funded from a mix of public and private revenues. As a result, they can be driven by quite different objectives. The blending of these multisectoral and multiagency interests introduces the possibility of clashes in values, issues of trust and reciprocity and power imbalances (among other things), which may in turn impeded sustainable destination planning and management. Clearly, the challenges to ensure sustainable and integrated destination development and management are immense, and the "marketing-planning gap" referred to above has become a much more complex terrain. Pursuing a sustainable destination requires a mongrel form of management wherein the potential of collaboration (e.g. Jamal & Getz, 1999), partnerships (e.g. Bramwell, 2004) and networks (e.g. Dredge, 2006) are increasingly mooted.

This collaborative challenge has been recognized previously. Almost twenty years ago, Heath and Wall (1992) recognized the need to close the gap between development of tourism resources and the marketing of the destination. Advocating cooperation with administrative and other bodies involved with tourism in the area, Heath and Wall (1992:170) suggest that problems with cooperation and coordination with other tourism related sectors can be overcome or minimized "by applying a participatory management approach where consensus is reached on a participatory basis with regard to a mission statement, objectives, and strategies in the region." Such formal objectives would require the structuring of formal processes and procedures, enabled by "collaborative" planning and problem-solving initiatives. In the tourism literature, networks have come to the attention of researchers interested in exploring options for sustainable destination management. However, research tends to adopt a relatively uncritical perspective advocating networks as a means of addressing problems including information sharing, problem solving and decision-making. Moreover, network research tends to examine networks aligned to a particular issue or a particular organization (e.g. marketing networks). Little attention has been given to tourism's multi-organizational context and the challenge of collaborating in a multi-organizational network setting.

This paper addresses this gap. Inspiration is drawn from the seminal work of Gray (1989), who argued that collaborative problem solving can be attempted under the following conditions: (i) when problems are bigger than any single organization can solve (ii) limitations exist to traditional adversarial methods of resolving conflict (iii) under increasing environmental turbulence, where self-regulation through collaboration can reduce the turbulence without being repressive or fragmenting (Trist 1983). However, as Gray (1989) notes, collaboration may not succeed when: (a) conflict is rooted in ideological differences; (b) one stakeholder has power for unilateral action; c) constitutional issues are involved or legal precedents sought; and (d) a legitimate convenor cannot be sought.

Networks can provide a conduit for this collaboration. Networks are not necessarily hierarchical or formalized; they provide fluid, rapid channels of communication which travel through social space and not between institutional figures (Trist 1983:280). Brown (1991) describes social networks as "interorganizational forms that can link many individuals and organizations", are autonomous from any common hierarchy and can enable exchange of resources and information without compromising the independence of its members (Brown 1991). He discusses four kinds of bridging organizations i.e. "agencies that span social gaps among organizations and constituencies to enable co-ordinated action":

i) an interorganizational network.

ii) an association of organizations and networks

iii) an inter-sectoral partnership

iv) a social movement and related coalition - these may be loose networks or formal coalitions

By drawing together and building upon collaborative planning and networks literature, this paper (i) seeks to develop a set of hypotheses for collaborative network development, and (ii) drawing upon case studies in the United States, Canada and Australia, and the collective accumulated knowledge of the authors, the 'fit' between these hypotheses and the authors' practice knowledge will be assessed. In essence this approach represents a grounded form of theory building that employs reiterative reflection between theory and the authors' collective extensive case study experience. The question that provides the focus is what new organizational forms and structures are needed to address multi-organisational sustainable tourism management context? Our presentation provides a "critical" look at destination management, and the destination marketing-planning "gap". Examples of collaborative planning and community-based networks in tourism destinations are presented and examined in our critique.

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