

Moving from Destination Marketing to Destination Management: Exploring the Meaning of Sustainable Destination Management

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Abstract

This paper provides a case study of how a tourism organisation has interpreted the change from a 'marketing' to a 'management' approach in destination development. It begins by looking at what the literature has said about destination management as an approach for organisations responsible for tourism destination development. Unfortunately, while there are many papers and texts extolling the virtues of a sustainable approach to the management of destinations there is very little research identifying how this is being implemented 'on the ground'. This paper draws on the experiences of Tourism Sunshine Coast (TSC) a Regional Tourism Organisation in Queensland, Australia to demonstrate how one organisation attempts to operationalise the concept. This case was chosen because senior tourism executives in both public and private agencies have indicated in various forums that TSC is one the leaders in this area. The analysis demonstrates how multifaceted and complex the implementation of this approach really is. Hopefully this will not deter others from attempting to adopt it as we all grapple with our common goal of the long term sustainability of tourism and particularly the regions where it occurs most frequently.

Introduction

Richardson and Fluker (2008) have described a destination as the "fundamental unit" of tourism, the focal point where the development and delivery of tourism products occurs. This paper takes this as a starting point, notwithstanding the debate that appears in the literature about what we mean by the term destination (Davidson and Maitland, 1997; Smith, 1995). What is generally accepted is that a destination is a complex phenomenon, something that cannot be equated with a 'product' or 'commodity'. Rather, it is a place where people live, work and play (Hall, 2000: 162). This complexity is also reflected in the fact that we can look at a destination at various scales (from national down to even the site level), and that the boundaries themselves are often perceptual rather than real. This paper focusses on the regional scale, which in Australia is between the level of local and state government, and is generally the level at which both service providers and potential tourists think.

Although tourism is managed in most developed countries in terms of destinations, there has been very little detailed analysis of the nature of that management. Indeed, in Australia, most commentators would suggest that tourism organisations responsible for a destination (at whatever scale) are primarily Destination Marketing organisations, not Destination Management Organisations (Richardson and Fluker, 2008). To date, their primary role has been to attract visitors to the destination through various promotional activities, either alone or through joint marketing with operators in their area. Most don't even extend their area of concern to those aspects that marketers in other industries would take for granted. That is, there is very little evidence of many initiating or implementing policies around product development, packaging, pricing, distribution channels or any of the other 'Ps' usually associated with a marketing perspective (Kotler et. al. 2006).

Clearly this 'marketing' approach may be successful in certain situations, particularly in the short term. However, to achieve destination sustainability a much broader set of functions is required. While these are often labelled 'destination management' functions, there is no clear understanding of what these actually are. This paper seeks to describe how at least one organisation that is widely recognised as adopting a 'destination management' approach has interpreted its meaning.