Chapter 8
Complexity of Tourism Destination Governance:
A Smart Network Approach

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ABSTRACT

Tourism destinations can be considered as complex systems of interrelated and interdependent stakeholders. The complexity and limited power of influencing the number of stakeholders resulted in network approach to tourism destination governance. This approach is considered both theoretically and practically as a tool for strengthening its sustainable competitiveness, fostering innovation and knowledge sharing. Although the network analysis of tourism destinations has gained a significant attention in recent years, the complex understanding of its contribution to smart development is still missing. The aim of this chapter is to create a framework for smart approach in destination governance using the network science perspective. The chapter provides insights in using network analysis for strengthening the tourism destination governance. The chapter uses a case study methodology on two mature tourism destinations, providing an example of the use of network analysis for destination governance strengthening.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism destinations are complex adaptive systems of interrelated and independent stakeholders (Baggio, 2008; Pearce, 2014) where tourism demand meets the supply. Due to the changing conditions on the tourism market, the need for flexibility and dynamics in co-ordination of the tourism destination and lack of authority in management of destinations, destination management organizations have difficulties in performance of the tasks of the destination management (Pechlaner, Beritelli, Pichler, Peters, &

Scott, 2015). These difficulties had impact on the view of destinations and the concept of the governance applied to tourism started to be discussed. As Beritelli, Bieger and Laesser (2007) stress, the concept of destination governance consists of setting and developing the rules and mechanism for a policy, as well as business strategies, by involving all the institutions and individuals. Moreover, the complexity and limited power of influencing the number of stakeholders resulted in network approach to tourism destination governance (Valeri & Baggio, 2020b; 2021; van der Zee, Gerrets, & Vanneste, 2017). This approach is considered as a tool for strengthening the sustainable competitiveness of destinations (Van der Zee & Vanneste, 2015), fostering innovation (Gajdošík, Gajdošíková, Maráková, & Borseková, 2017) and knowledge sharing (Raisi, Baggio, Barratt-Pugh, & Willson, 2020).

The dynamic environment, in which DMOs now operate (Reinhold, Beritelli, & Grünig, 2019), pushes forward a new model of governance. Tourism literature stresses the crucial role of knowledge management and information and communication technologies (ICTs) in destination governance (Micera, Presenza, Splendiani, & Del Chiappa, 2013; Valeri and Baggio, 2020c). ICTs are seen as a source of knowledge generation and dissemination which can help DMOs to manage and reinforce their network value (Fortezza & Pencarelli, 2018; Fuchs, Höpken, & Lexhagen, 2014). Therefore applying the developments arising from the application of smart tourism concept (Sheehan, Vargas-Sánchez, Presenza, & Abbate, 2016) is welcomed. This concept creates opportunities for better data collection and analysis. Although, the smart ecosystem has been considered in a few studies dealing with network science in tourism destinations (see e.g. Baggio and Del Chiappa 2014; Raisi et al. 2018; Williams et al. 2017), the profound understanding of the potential of the smart initiative within this domain is still missing.

The Smart Approach in Destination Governance

Smart tourism describes the current stage of tourism development influenced by the evolution of information technologies. It is a step in the evolution of information technologies in tourism in which the physical and governance dimensions of tourism are entering the digital playing field and new levels of intelligence are achieved (Gretzel, 2011). Smart tourism is also connected with implementing new technology-based models of governance and planning (Lalicic & önder, 2018).

Although technological resources are in the structure of smart destinations, social capital and governance are the key factors for success of tourism destinations (dos Santos Júnior, Mendes Filho, Almeida García, & Simoes, 2017). Moreover, based on the smart city literature, governance is frequently mentioned as an instrumental layer of smart destinations (Gretzel, Ham, & Koo, 2018). In this sense, smart governance is defined as a sociotechnical approach, which aligns technological potential with novel forms of collaboration between local government and citizens with the aim of tackling urban issues based on the principles of sustainability (Tomor, Meijer, Michels, & Geertman, 2019).

Starting from the smart city concept that address the urban challenges, smart approach in destination governance includes structures and processes that are required for ensuring the commitment and effective coordination and integration of businesses, government and communities towards a holistic smart-oriented development plan for the tourism destination (Errichiello & Micera, 2015). Gretzel and Scarpino (2018) highlight that smart governance is also transparent, accountable, collaborative and participatory. Further, Gretzel et al. (2018) indicate, the role of smart destination is to lobby and partly sponsor the development of smart technology infrastructure and applications. This is done to curate and manage big data in a destination, in order to support the development and use of smart experiences by tourists and finally to link smart tourism with overall quality of life and sustainability in a destination.

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