A multiple identification approach to emerging tourism destination networks - A case study of a young DMO network

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Introduction

Tourism destinations, typically with a destination management organisation (DMO) as a management unit at their core, can be described as networks consisting of various tourism actors (private service providers and public policy makers) defining the network. Destination managers, eager to develop synergistic relations and community building amongst the fragmented nature of the tourism industry, aim to foster and sustain relationships amongst those actors who make up the destination offering.

Drawing on Social Identity Theory and Identity Theory this research introduces Multiple Social Identification, the psychological feeling of oneness with a collective to drive destination development. Social identification is an acknowledged driver of cooperative behaviour and therefore introduced as a governing tool to foster relationships that benefit the DMO-led network.

RESEARCH AIMS

“To investigate DMO member’s multiple identification targets and their interrelationships to enhance identification with the DMO, as well as considering the contribution of social networks on identification and pro-behavioural intentions”

- To investigate multiple identification targets of DMO members in a tourism destination context
- To examine identification target interrelationships and possible pathways to organisational identification and pro-behavior, combined with network position attributes
- To understand the relationship between identification and DMO member’s position in networks, combined with group level and whole network properties

Methodology

Multi-phase mixed method case study design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Participants &amp; Details</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews with key informants</td>
<td>n = 2, case information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group structured interview with tourism actors</td>
<td>n = 34, identification targets, tie content</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal interviews with tourism actors</td>
<td>n = 4, identification targets, tie content</td>
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</table>
| Field observations at destination level | 2.5 years of ethnographic research:
local networks, casual conversations with local residents and tourism actors, influence of media, communication, regional economic structure |
| Survey part 1 Identification | n = 127 (50% response rate)
• Multiple identification targets with multi-dimensional identification measurement scale
• Strategic approach (micro/macro)
• Behavioural intentions (collective)
• DMO satisfaction, DMO performance, DMO contact |
| Survey part 2 Network - ties | n = 137
• Personal and organisational data
network relationships: social, information sharing, current and future cooperative ties |

Findings from in-depth interviews, observations and field notes:

Five context-related identification targets, consisting of nested and cross-cutting structure

1) Place-related identification targets: municipality → region → (destination)
2) Work-related identification targets: professional category → tourist service provider → DMO association Weinberger Tal

Primary identification targets: municipality & professional category (cross-cutting)

Lower order targets = proximate & high salience, higher order targets = psychologically distant and less salient

Integration of lower order identification targets must be accounted for in the formulation of more overarching targets vs overtaking them, as identities central to self are difficult to change due to identity importance caused by clear content and tenure

Structure and relationships amongst multiple nested and cross-cutting identification targets and moderators

The paper aims to offer a novel set of propositions on our understanding of the relationship of social identification, network structure and collective behaviour by examining how tourism actors’ multiple social identities influence their position in a destination network. Measures of social identification will be combined with network analysis techniques to explore their association with network positions, along with a range of group level as well as whole network properties.

Node attributes data:

- Low, medium & high identifiers (self-definition/self-investment) towards 5 identification targets
- Stakeholder group categories
- Organisational data (size, family run, number of generations, performance against competitors)
- Location / geographical distance

Ties (based on qualitative findings):

- Awareness network (cognitive)
- Acquaintanceship network (social relation)
- Information network (informal cooperation)
- Referral network (informal cooperation)
- Formal cooperation network (existing)
- Desired cooperative network (future)

Case Study – DMO ‘Weinsberger Tal’

DMO ‘Weinberger Tal’, South-West Germany

- Emerging destination management association founded 05/2013, early stages in destination life cycle
- Formal membership of private & public tourism actors
- 105 formal members (127 current network) 65% of local potential
- 8 municipalities in wine region Waartemberg
- 8 professional categories (gastronomy, wineries etc.)
- Association financed by municipalities and membership fee
- Destination and DMO-led network in identity formation process
- Challenges to enhance network interaction and collective action to provide tourists with a coherent product

Paper 1 | Structure of Multiple Identification Targets

Paper 2 | Multiple Identification Paths

Paper 3 | Identification and Network Structure Network