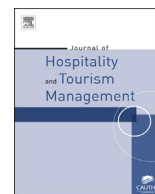




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Power in tourism stakeholder collaborations: Power types and power holders



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ABSTRACT

Stakeholder collaboration is acknowledged as an important part of tourism destination planning and management. However, not all destination stakeholders have the same level of power and influence in collaborative activities or decision-making, with some groups able to exert more influence over the process. The purpose of this study was to identify and categorise the various types of power that influence stakeholder collaborations in tourism destination planning and management and determine which stakeholder groups hold these powers. A case study approach was adopted and data was collected from publicly available secondary resources. The study results show that four different types of power (coercive, legitimate, induced and competent power) were evident in stakeholder collaborations. Coercive power was mainly held by government and public sector agencies while DMOs and large private organisations were found to hold strong legitimate power. Induced power was exerted by federal, state and local governments; educational institutions and consulting firms tended to possess competent power.

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1. Introduction

Neither a function of government alone, nor a single powerful tourism organisation can develop a successful tourism destination; instead, it is recognised that a variety of public and private sector stakeholders must collaborate in tourism destination planning, decision-making and management (Bornhorst, Brent, & Sheehan, 2010). Effective collaboration not only helps to build strong networks among various stakeholders (Beritelli, 2010), but it also enables those stakeholders to access the necessary resources to achieve their objectives (Ford, Wang, & Vestal, 2012); both of which are crucial for sustainable tourism development (McComb, Boyd, & Boluk, 2016).

Collaboration occurs “when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain” (Wood & Gray, 1991a, p. 146). However, stakeholder collaboration is usually complex and there are numerous factors that can hinder the process. These factors may include different and competing interests of stakeholders, various

or contradicting viewpoints, complex relationships and interdependency with other stakeholders in the destination, as well as different communication styles and networks, among others (Waayers, Lee, & Newsome, 2012; Waligo, Clarke, & Hawkins, 2013).

Previous research suggests that successful stakeholder collaboration is largely dependent upon understanding stakeholder salience (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005). The power relationships that underpin and influence collaborative processes are central in addressing stakeholder salience, that is, “the degree to which managers give priority to competing stakeholder claims” so as to effectively develop strategies to achieve shared goals (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997, p. 854). Indeed, power is recognised as a key influence in stakeholder collaborations (Shaw & Williams, 2002; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005), and can be a major determinant in the success or otherwise of collaborative arrangements. In a tourism destination context, the positions of stakeholders, their relationships with other stakeholders, and the groups or clusters of organisations in the various sub-sectors of the destination will all impact on the power dynamics that can influence or impede the success of the process (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011).

The study of power in tourism stakeholder relationships and collaboration is not new (e.g., Marzano & Scott, 2009; Reed, 1997; Ryan, 2002). However, less attention has been paid to examining

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how a stakeholder, or an alliance of stakeholders, exerts their power and influence in order to achieve the shared objectives of a tourism destination (Marzano & Scott, 2009). Furthermore, while previous research has discussed the various types of power that can influence a collaborative process (Tiew, Holmes, & Bussy, 2015), there is a lack of consensus and empirical evidence as to what power types are actually involved in tourism destination stakeholder collaborations (Marzano & Scott, 2009) and who (i.e., what organisations) actually hold those powers.

Given these research gaps, the objective of this study was to identify and understand the types of power that occur in organisational level stakeholder collaborations in a tourism destination management context. It explores which stakeholders actually hold power and in what contexts such power might be exerted on other stakeholders. This study adopts a case study approach and uses a focal organisation, Tourism Event Queensland (TEQ), a state level tourism destination management organisation in Queensland, Australia to identify the types of stakeholder power that exist and the organisations that have power in these collaborations. This was explored through a content analysis of secondary sources (i.e., policy and planning documents, the minutes of meetings (government bodies and departments, and TEQ), newspapers, brochures and advertising materials, and annual reports). This paper aims to offer insights into the complexity of power in stakeholder collaborations by exploring the different types of power that can influence a collaborative process and those organisations within a tourism destination that can exert their power to influence destination planning and management.

2. Literature review

2.1. Stakeholder collaboration

Stakeholder collaboration embraces the participative processes recognised as a core principle of sustainable development, particularly when a wide and representative range of stakeholders from the destination community are able to play an active role and strive together to meet common objectives (Beritelli, 2010; Dredge, 2006). Achieving a reasonable degree of consensus on desired directions for tourism development is considered an important ingredient for the long-term success of a destination (McComb et al., 2016), and as a tourism destination encompasses multiple, interdependent stakeholders who often hold divergent views on tourism development, collaboration theory is useful for managing tourism related issues at the destination level (Jamal & Getz, 1995; Reed, 1999).

Collaboration is defined as “working with partners to leverage existing resources to provide maximum strategic benefit” (Hardy, Phillips, & Lawrence, 2003, p. 325). Stakeholder collaboration normally occurs “when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain” (Wood & Gray, 1991b, p. 146). Here stakeholders can be defined as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives” (Freeman, 1984, p. 46). They are “entities which can and are making their actual stakes known (sometimes called ‘voice’), and, on the other end, by those which are or might be influenced by, or are or potentially are influencers of, some organisation or another, whether or not this influence is perceived or known” (Strarik, 1994, p. 90). In a tourism destination, stakeholders can include: the government (international, national, regional and local); government departments with links to tourism; international, national, regional and local tourism organisations; tourism developers and entrepreneurs, tourism industry operators; non-tourism business

practitioners, and the community including local community groups, Indigenous people’s groups and local residents.

As destination areas grow and the associated problems with this increase, government leaders, resource planners and entrepreneurs will be incapable of dealing with problems if each acts in isolation (Waayers et al., 2012). According to Getz and Jamal (1994), stakeholder collaboration can facilitate a dynamic and flexible process, which provides a framework for joint decision-making through multi-stakeholder involvement within a temporary or longer-term structure. The process requires direct dialogue among participating stakeholders and recognising their interdependence, with the objective of generating a collective vision, shared decision-making and consensus-building about planning, goals and actions for a tourist destination (Richins, 2009; Waayers et al., 2012). Indeed, it is claimed that the ‘go-it-alone’ policies of the past are giving way, as government and public agencies in many developed countries endorse stronger cooperation and collaboration in tourism planning (Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Getz & Jamal, 1994; Jamal & Getz, 1995). Yet the success of stakeholder collaborations is largely dependent on coordinating the voice of stakeholders and to do so it is necessary to understand their salience in a collaborative process (Kennedy & Augustyn, 2014; Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005). Identifying stakeholder salience helps effective stakeholder coordination, inclusion or exclusion of stakeholders in cooperative actions, and categorisation of their roles in certain projects (Boatright, 2002; Jamal & Getz, 2000; Medeiros de Araujo & Bramwell, 1999). Mitchell et al. (1997) developed a stakeholder salience model. In this model, the authors suggest that one of the attributes to effectively identify stakeholder salience is the notion of power, which certain stakeholders will possess and use to influence others in a collaborative process.

2.2. Power in stakeholder collaboration

Power can be defined as an “ability to impose one’s will or advance one’s own interest” (Reed, 1997, p. 567). It exists in “a relationship among social actors in which one social actor, A, can get another social actor, B, to do something that B would not otherwise have done” (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 3). Importantly, clarification of the explicit and hidden power influences amongst stakeholders must be acknowledged (Kennedy & Augustyn, 2014; Tiew et al., 2015). This is important in terms of mitigating potential disputes (Sundaramurthy, 2000; Westphal, 1999), and creating favourable conditions to plan for successful destination development (Fyall & Garrod, 2005).

In a tourism destination, power can be exerted to organise stakeholders as well as to mediate disputes or prevent potential conflicts (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011). For instance, Marzano and Scott (2009) examined stakeholder power relationships in a tourism destination branding process in Australia. They found that powerful stakeholders sought to impose their own interests in the destination branding process by exercising different forms of power including persuasion and authority. Everett and Jamal (2004) also identified different types of power which they termed surface and deep-structure power in their study of power roles and conflict in Canadian park management. Beritelli and Laesser (2011) examined the power perceptions held by stakeholders in an Austrian alpine tourist destination. They identified that neither coercive, persuasive nor resource power play an important role in stakeholder governance processes; however, knowledge (e.g., knowledge in certain products or areas of business operation) and process power (e.g., control and management of mechanisms or systems in inter-organisational collaboration) were stronger influences on stakeholder relationships (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011).

More recently, Kennedy and Augustyn (2014) examined power

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