



Cross-border knowledge transfer and innovation in the European neighbourhood: Tourism cooperation at the Finnish-Russian border

Teemu Makkonen ^{a, b, *}, Allan M. Williams ^c, Adi Weidenfeld ^d, Virpi Kaisto ^e

^a University of Tampere, Institute for Advanced Social Research, Ratapihankatu 55, Tampere, FI-33014, Finland

^b University of Southern Denmark, Department of Business and Economics, Alsion 2, Sønderborg, DK-6400, Denmark

^c University of Surrey, School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, AP Building, Guildford, GU2 7XH, UK

^d Coventry University, Business School, Priory St., Coventry, CV1 5FB, UK

^e University of Eastern Finland, Karelian Institute, Yliopistokatu 2, Joensuu, FI-80101, Finland

HIGHLIGHTS

- Cross-border funding is of paramount importance for innovation related goals.
- Language and legislative issues are barriers for practical cross-border cooperation.
- Differences in culture and technology facilitate cross-border knowledge transfer.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 April 2017

Received in revised form

23 January 2018

Accepted 6 March 2018

Keywords:

Cross-border region
European neighbourhood
Finland
Innovation
Knowledge transfer
Russia
Tourism

ABSTRACT

Knowledge transfer and innovation cooperation between the EU and its neighbours has remained weakly developed. To promote this cooperation, the EU has set up initiatives for the European neighbourhood. The issue has, however, received very limited scholarly attention in the field of tourism. This research gap is addressed here via interview data collected from participants in tourism related EU-funded projects in the Finnish-Russian cross-border region. These underline the importance of EU-funding in facilitating knowledge transfer and innovation between Finland and Russia. While language issues, and differences in business culture and administrative/legislative systems between the two countries, constitute barriers for practical cross-border cooperation, it is cross-border differences in culture and technological capabilities that drive cross-border knowledge transfer and innovation in the cross-border region. The paper concludes with policy recommendations for promoting future cross-border cooperation in innovation and tourism.

© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) has clear goals of becoming the world's leading tourism destination via, for example, promoting sustainable tourism, developing innovation in the tourism sector and cross-border tourism initiatives. It has been recognised that cross-border tourism can potentially address issues of peripherality, and enable transnational synergies, leading to promotional- and profile-enhancing gains for the tourism sector of the EU as a

whole (European Commission, 2010). Therefore, the EU has produced best practice guidance for tourism innovation (CSES, 2013) and has funded the development of sustainable transnational tourism products through several programmes and initiatives (European Commission, 2016a). At the same time, the EU has been committed to promoting sustainable socio-economic and socio-cultural development of non-EU regions in order to advance its cohesion and cooperation goals in relation to its neighbours (European Commission, 2012). This cross-border

* Corresponding author. University of Tampere, Institute for Advanced Social Research, Ratapihankatu 55, Tampere, FI-33014, Finland.

E-mail addresses: teemu.makkonen@uta.fi, teemu@sam.sdu.dk (T. Makkonen), allan.williams@surrey.ac.uk (A.M. Williams), ac4959@coventry.ac.uk (A. Weidenfeld), virpi.kaisto@uef.fi (V. Kaisto).

cooperation (CBC) has recently (2007–2013) been funded through the “European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument” (ENPI) – subsequently replaced (2014–2020) by the “European Neighbourhood Instrument” (ENI) – including support for tourism innovation projects (European Commission, 2016b).

One of the EU’s most important borders is with Russia. Russian border regions have implemented programmes, with similar goals to those in the EU, to promote regional social and economic development, to be realised in part via the tourism sector (Saveliev, 2013). Additionally, Russia’s central government has taken a close interest in funding CBC programmes and projects in order to be seen to act as an equal partner to the EU. Thus, while Russian policies for border regions are not framed by structural and cohesion funding policies similar to those in the EU, there is mutual understanding that overcoming economic weaknesses in cross-border regions (CBRs) can harmonise the interests of Russia and the EU (Valuev, 2002). It also seems that the importance placed on CBC has not been affected by the current tense political climate between the EU and Russia (Fritsch, Németh, Piipponen, & Yarovoy, 2015). For example, CBC programmes have not been included in the contemporary sanctions/countersanctions list of either the EU or Russia.

The importance that the EU has attached to tourism-related CBC at its external borders is evident in around 17% of EU-financed CBC projects, in the programme period 2007–2013, being related to tourism according to the KEEP -database.¹ Similarly, CBC in innovation has been deemed pivotal to the economic development of CBRs (Makkonen & Rohde, 2016; Trippi, 2010). It is surprising therefore that little academic attention has been given to the topic, except some case studies in the Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine (Kosinszki & Măran, 2013) and in the Finnish-Russian (Németh, Fritsch, Eskelinen, & Nikiforova, 2014; Petrova & Kolesnikov, 2014) CBRs. However, these studies have mostly concentrated on describing or listing existing tourism-focused ENPI CBC projects, rather than analysing their significance for cross-border knowledge transfer and innovation. The same research lacuna applies to other borders besides the external borders of the EU: whereas the existing literature on cross-border tourism has generally concentrated on development, marketing and governance issues in cross-border destinations (Blasco, Guia, & Prats, 2014; Ioannides, Nielsen, & Billing, 2006; Prokkola, 2010, 2011; Stoffelen, Ioannides, & Vanneste, 2017), the empirical literature on cross-border knowledge transfer and innovation within the tourism sector remains limited (Weidenfeld, 2013). This is a significant omission, given the current challenge of facilitating collaboration across the Finnish-Russian border (Heusala & Koistinen, 2016). Therefore, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the factors that facilitate or act as barriers to cross-border knowledge transfer and innovation in general, and in the context of EU external borders in particular. By means of interviewing 24 participants of tourism related ENPI funded projects at the Finnish-Russian CBR, the paper will identify the role of the Finnish-Russian ENPI CBC projects in facilitating cross-border knowledge transfer and innovation in tourism. Based on these analyses, policy recommendations are suggested in order to promote successful CBC.

2. Literature review

2.1. Knowledge transfer, innovation and tourism

Knowledge flows are an important element in the performance, competitiveness and innovativeness of tourism organisations (Shaw & Williams, 2009; Weidenfeld et al., 2010). These knowledge flows can basically be divided into two categories based on the actors’ stance on sharing knowledge; knowledge can flow either intentionally through (managed) “knowledge transfer” or unintentionally through “knowledge spillovers”. In this paper, we are interested in intentional knowledge sharing mechanisms potentially leading to cross-border tourism innovation and therefore mostly focus on the concept of knowledge transfer.

Knowledge transfer is closely linked to the concept of innovation. There are many different conceptual understandings of innovation, but it has been commonly defined as a new or an improved product or process that is successfully implemented in an organisation or introduced into the market (Lorenz, 2010). Innovations have been labelled according to their novelty value as being either radically new products, services or processes, or incremental (continuous) improvements to existing ones (Garcia & Calantone, 2002). A further distinction can be made between the development of innovations (new-to-the-world), and the diffusion or adaptation of innovations (new-to-the-country; new-to-the-region; new-to-the-firm) (Edquist, Luukkonen, & Sotarauta, 2009). The innovativeness of CBC projects is commonly related to knowledge transfer characterised by innovation diffusion, whereby existing technologies, products, services and best practices are transmitted from one side of the border to the other (Knippschild & Vock, 2017; Liuhto, 2011). Therefore, even though there is no theoretical basis to exclude CBC innovations from being radical and new-to-the-world (Lundquist & Trippi, 2013), in reality – and particularly in the EU’s cross-border programmes – these commonly resemble the (diffusion of) best practices (Knippschild & Vock, 2017) associated more with new-to-the-country or new-to-the-region (incremental) improvements. Successful innovations and best practices do of course need to be fine-tuned to local conditions: what works in one regional setting might not work when transferred to and implemented in another (Tödtling & Trippi, 2005). Innovations (and innovation policies) do not maintain their shape intact as they move between places but change according to their specific contexts (Peck & Theodore, 2015).

Similarly, innovations in the tourism sector are strongly linked to other sectors, i.e. tourism firms and other tourism organisations tend to adapt and implement innovations produced elsewhere (Makkonen & Hokkanen, 2013; Weidenfeld et al., 2010): linkages within the tourism sector are likely to result in incremental process innovations, whereas those between tourism and non-tourism sectors are more likely to create new knowledge and lead to (radical) product innovations (Weidenfeld, 2018). However, there is still an element of co-production of the innovation even if only in the process of adjustment during implementation in the tourism sector. Nevertheless, radical new-to-the-world innovations produced purely, or even largely, within the tourism industry are rare (Brooker & Joppe, 2014; Mayer, 2009). Consequently, analyses of tourism innovation have mostly focussed on incremental and imitated improvements (Souto, 2015). For example, Hjalager (2015) has summarised an extensive list of innovations – many of which have been originally developed in other industries or did not specifically target tourism – that, when adapted within the sector, have consequently transformed the tourism

¹ The Keep -database (<http://www.keep.eu/keep/>) is a source for information on projects and partners of CBC and territorial cooperation programmes such as INTERREG and ENPI. The database is maintained by the INTERACT programme (<http://www.interact-eu.net/>) and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7420791>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7420791>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)