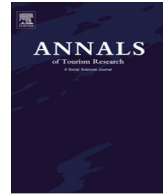




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Emergence of governance in cross-border destinations



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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to describe the processes through which cross-border tourism networks emerge and to identify the main elements that foster the consolidation of shared tourism governance structures. The case study analyses a process that initiates and solidifies cross-border structures in the Cerdanya Valley – Catalan Pyrenees region through a thick description of their evolution. Major findings include five main categories of factors influencing emergence processes of cross-border destination making: institutional similarity, bridging actors, leadership and entrepreneurial capacities, close relationships, and serendipity. Insights for managers and stakeholders involved in cross-border destination development and management are provided in the discussion.

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Introduction

Recent studies suggest that tourism destinations should be delimited on the basis of tourists' consumption patterns (Blasco, Guia, & Prats, 2014; Dredge & Jamal, 2013), instead of on conventional administrative boundaries (Dredge, 1999; Zillinger, 2007). This is particularly relevant in places where local destinations lie on the border of their countries, where there is easy mobility to and from the cross-border neighbouring destinations, and there is added value in the cross-border experience for visitors. In such cases, an integrated governance of the cross-border destination as a whole is highly beneficial (Ioannides, Nielsen, & Billing, 2006; Prokkola, 2010).

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In recent decades, an increasing relaxation of the requirements for crossing borders has been observed in many regions, i.e. visa policies, etc. The most striking case is found in the European Union with the adoption of the Schengen agreement by most EU countries. As a consequence of this agreement foreign visitors only need a single Schengen visa to be able to travel without restriction from one Schengen country to another. Road border controls within the Schengen region have been dismantled and the travel patterns of tourists in Schengen border areas have changed (Jeřábek, 2012; Timothy & Saarinen, 2013). Now tourists can consume these cross-border regions as if there were no borders and therefore the number of new, potentially attractive cross-border destinations has increased enormously.

In addition to the disappearance of these traditional constraints to cross international borders in Europe, border regions in European countries have had considerable EU funding over many years, with the purpose of fostering cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation (Nilsson, Eskilsson, & Ek, 2010). In fact, one of the main targets of the EU policy is to diminish the influence on national borders in favour of equal economic, social and cultural development of the whole territory of the EU. The Interreg Programme has been serving this purpose since 1989 and many border regions in the EU have benefited from its funds. A very large number of Interreg projects have included cross-border tourism as a general target and many of them have also been aimed at the particular development of cross-border destinations (Faby, 2006). These regions have also been increasingly empowered by EU policies (Ilbery & Saxena, 2011), thus partly offsetting the power of the states to stick to the administrative *status quo* (Lovelock & Boyd, 2006; Timothy & Tosum, 2003).

However, despite the elimination of traditional border constraints, the generous access to EU funding and the increasing empowerment of border regions, the literature reveals a lack of success in the many attempts to create cross-border governance structures (Bufon, 2003; Ilbery & Saxena, 2011). Therefore, this demonstrates that even though these factors are pre-requisites for governance structures to emerge, they alone are not sufficient to make effective cross-border governance structures emerge.

Moreover, governance structures in cross-border settings deal with a different type of divide to conventional 'non-cross-border' tourism destinations. In the latter, there is a shared institutional setting and thus governance structures bridge 'sectorial' divides like those between public agencies, private business, local communities, etc. Conversely, in cross-border settings the main divide to be bridged by cross-border governance structures has an institutional nature as both sides of the border are under different institutional regimes. Therefore cross-border destinations need governance structures that deal with both sectorial and institutional types of divides.

Some of the literature has started to tap into the elements that either hinder or foster the creation of effective governance structures in tourism destinations (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2007; Dredge, 2006; Nordin & Svensson, 2005). However when it comes to exploring governance structures in cross-border destinations, there have been very few, limited attempts. Some of them are analysis of unsuccessful cases of cross-border governance, thus, focusing mostly on aspects that hinder the emergence of these structures (Ilbery & Saxena, 2011). Other author's outcomes are inferred from the perception of cross-border stakeholders regarding a hypothetical creation of cross-border governance structures in their regions (Lovelock & Boyd, 2006). With the exceptions of Hartman (2006) and Sofield (2006) no literature is found which explores a case of running cross-border governance structures. Yet, their focus is on the strategies that these cross-border destinations adopt and on the benefits they will produce to the cross-border area. Their approach is not process-based and thus do not explore the dynamics of governance building across the border. Therefore, the actual emergence of the cross-border governance structures is not analysed and somehow is taken for granted.

To fill this gap, the Cerdanya Valley – Catalan Pyrenees region on the border between French and Spanish Catalonia was selected for empirical analysis. After several attempts at initiating cross-border tourism collaboration, this destination has managed to implement a cross-border governance structure. In October 2013 representatives of relevant public and private stakeholders in the Valley signed a formal agreement with the aim of managing the cross-border area as a single destination. This is done on the basis of a new strategic tourism plan for the Valley which emphasises the creation of a joint brand image, cross-border tourism products, promotional materials, and a website. All the participant stakeholders contribute financially to the plan and a Steering Committee has been set up as

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