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Research Paper

Inter-destination cooperation: Forms, facilitators and inhibitors – The case of Poland



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ABSTRACT

Destination stakeholder cooperation might be regarded as an unquestionable factor enhancing destination competitiveness. This realization has been acknowledged by more and more destinations that implement this idea with varying results. Destinations aspiring to be the market leaders must therefore look for other sources of competitive advantage as efficient stakeholder cooperation may not always be successful. One such potential source of competitive advantage in the contemporary tourism market may be implementation of cooperation between destinations with evidence in existence that this is happening. However, the topic of inter-destination cooperation has not been fully developed. To fill this gap, this paper aims to outline several examples focusing on the Polish tourism market. Four cases from Poland are presented and the final outcome of the discussion is an outline of four factors influencing inter-destination cooperation that highlight the most important strengths and weaknesses of the options presented. Due to the introductory nature of the text, it is recommended that future, in-depth research, including case study research, should be undertaken to further develop this body of knowledge.

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1. Introduction

The international tourism market is becoming more and more competitive and, as a consequence, growing interest in the concept of competitiveness in tourism can also be observed. The notion of tourism destination competitiveness lies at the heart of this concept. That is because of the specific features of competition in the tourism market where competition between companies has a secondary character to the competition between destinations (Go & Govers, 2000) as tourists tend to choose their destination first and then look for suitable services and goods. Another significant concept with regards to tourism destinations is networking. Tourism is a typical network industry and non-competitive relations between particular entities play a crucial role in the process of building competitive advantage in tourism. Stakeholders' cooperation inside a destination has been recognized as one of the most important factors for success (Beritelli, 2011; Fyall & Garrod, 2005). However, as marketing knowledge is still developing and new solutions are sought, innovative tools and ideas are necessary to keep an advantage over competitors. Efficient cooperation of destination stakeholders cannot guarantee such an advantage any more. Instead, it should be treated as a necessity to not stay behind other competing destinations. One of the

potential sources of competitive advantage in the contemporary tourism market might be the implementation of cooperation between destinations. Tourism destinations being networks themselves also participate in network cooperation. This phenomenon can be observed on the tourism market but has not been sufficiently analyzed in the tourism literature (Fyall, Garrod, & Wang, 2012). This paper aims then to discuss the possibilities of inter-destinations collaboration. According to Fyall et al. (2012, p. 20) 'inter-destination collaboration might include neighboring destinations as well as more distant ones and the connection is then on the basis of a shared form of niche tourism such as gastronomic tourism or a linear geographical feature such as a historic trading route or a major river'. In this paper, the scope of analysis is limited to neighboring destinations as they can form together common tourism regions perceived by tourists. Using the case study approach, examples from the Polish tourism market are presented. Similarities and differences between particular cases are highlighted to understand the most important factors to be considered when planning such collaboration. Finally, four factors influencing inter-destination cooperation are offered as an outcome of the discussion. The paper starts with a theoretical review of destination competitiveness and stakeholder cooperation. Then the notion of inter-destination cooperation is discussed. Four case studies from southern Poland reflecting contemporary practices that may be labeled as inter-destination cooperation or having potential for starting such cooperation are then analyzed. The paper closes with some cross-cases analyses remarks and conclusions.

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2. Destination competitiveness

Destination competitiveness has become one of the critical topics in the wider tourism literature. A few years ago, three special issues in leading tourism journals (*Tourism*, 47 (4) (1999); *Tourism Management*, 21 (1) (2000); *Tourism Economics*, 11 (1) (2005)) and also the first book (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003) devoted to the topic were published. There are a few interesting and sophisticated models examining what tourism destinations competitiveness is (i.e. Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Heath, 2003; Mazanec, Wöber, & Zins, 2007; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003) as well as reviews of their usefulness (Gomezelj & Mihalić, 2008; Vanhove, 2006). Despite that, tourism destination competitiveness remains an ill-defined term. There are many different ways of interpreting the notion and several definitions that are not in accordance with one another. Partially, it is because similar challenges exist with understanding the term competitiveness in a general context (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Spence & Hazard, 1988).

The concept of tourism destination competitiveness is often developed in an approach typical for regional economics and is connected with the ability to create a competitive offer or, even more broadly, to develop tourism in a sustainable way (Zemła, 2010a, p. 249). Still, it is not the only approach to this concept. Due to the fierce competition the tourism market calls for a more entrepreneurial approach. Often, tourism destination is not defined as a distinguishable spatial area but rather as a metaphor for a company or a network of companies (Bieger, 1998; Flagestad & Hope, 2001; Wang & Xiang, 2007). In such an approach, the fruits of business management science may be applied to the management process tourism sector and the term “destination competitiveness” becomes much more linked with success in the tourism market (d’Hauterres, 2000). In such an approach most researchers implement the outcome of well-established schools of strategic management, namely Industrial Organization (IO) and Resource Based View (RBV) (Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Flagestad & Hope, 2001; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). However, for several years, the main paradigms of those two schools have been questioned by supporters of a new competitiveness paradigm based on inter-organizational relations (IR) (Gulati, Nohria, & Zaheer, 2000). According to IO, a company competes for profits with competitors as well as with customers and deliverers. Porter’s model of 5 competitive forces (Porter, 1980, 1998) presents a situation in which a company is able to maximize its profits when it has the power to capture more value by selling a product than its partners in a value system. Competitive relations connect them not only with competitors but also cooperators. RBV has not radically changed this hostile perception of environment underlying the competition between companies for access to valuable, rare, inimitable and well-organized resources (Barney, 1991). IR changes this view completely by highlighting the importance of non-competitive relations, also, in some cases, with competitors. ‘However, up until now, IR has not stood for a new, clear competitive advantage paradigm as the concept is not fully cohesive, covering a wide variety of approaches developed by different disciplines, mainly in business management, economics and sociology’ (Zemła, 2010a, p. 253).

Justification for using the IR theory when analyzing destination competitiveness can be found in the statement that tourism might be described as a network industry par excellence (Scott, Cooper, & Baggio, 2011). Support for this claim is found in the definition of tourism as a system where interdependence is essential (Björk & Virtanen, 2005) and collaboration between different organizations within a tourism destination creates the tourism product (Fyall & Garrod, 2005; Pechlaner, Abfalter, & Raich, 2002). In this way, local alliances, agreements and other formal and informal governance structures help to compensate for the fragmented nature of a tourism destination (Scott et al., 2011). Networking theories have

been suggested as a way to better understand ongoing marketing activities and processes aiming to develop a business (von Friedrichs Grängsjö, 2007). Buhalis (2000) states that most destinations consist of networks of tourism suppliers. ‘Another reason for study of networks as a central part of tourism is that they form a basis for collective action. In tourism, many of the main resources of a tourism destination are community “owned” that are used jointly to attract tourists’ (Zemła, 2010a, p. 254). Collective action does not necessarily require a network organization but in the situation with a general lack of resources and where decisions related to tourism are not often seen within the government mandate, the response is often a network of interested stakeholders (Scott et al., 2011). Special approaches that might be suitable for development of tourism destinations are Cluster and Triple and Quadruple Helix concepts. A cluster was defined by Porter as ‘geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialized suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions (for example, universities, standards agencies and trade associations) in particular fields that compete but also cooperate’ (Porter, 1998, p. 197). However, since the 1990s, understanding of this concept has been extended and cooperation between companies in clusters has been underlined even more strongly than it had been by Porter. Especially through highlighting the importance of cooperation, opportunities are created to introduce a very wide use of the cluster concept in tourism, especially for tourism destinations (Bernini, 2009; da Cunha & da Cunha, 2005; Hawkins, 2004; Jackson & Murphy, 2006; Nordin, 2003; Novelli, Schmitz, & Spencer, 2006; Weiermair & Steinhauser, 2003). Also following the cluster concept, Triple and Quadruple Helix concepts treat the ideas of innovations and creativity as central factors to development (Afonso, Monteiro, & Thompson, 2010; Carayannis & Campbell, 2010; Lindberg, Danilda, & Torstensson, 2012). Triple Helix is based on the relation between academia, companies and government (Afonso et al., 2010; Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000). The Quadruple Helix concept extends the scope by adding civil society (Carayannis & Campbell, 2009, 2010; Lindberg et al., 2012), which seems to be more appropriate in describing tourism destinations and their stakeholders.

The complex nature of a destination product leads not only to the necessity of cooperation of companies and other bodies, including those from the public sector delivering supplementary services and goods, but also non-competitive relations between competitors are unavoidable. The paradoxical relationship that emerges when two or more firms cooperate in some activities, such as in a strategic alliance, and at the same time compete with each other in other activities was called “coopetition” (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000). Coopetition has to do with the co-existence of competition and cooperation (Dagnino & Rocco, 2009; Mariani, 2007) which leads to value creation within extensive, multiple organizational networks that go beyond the boundaries of an individual firm. As a consequence, it is becoming more valuable than ever to explore the recent developments and approaches within the coopetition strategy research field (Kylänen & Mariani, 2013). It was argued by Bengtsson and Kock (2000, p. 413) ‘that it must be regarded as the most advantageous business relation, when companies in some respect help each other and to some extent force each other towards, for example, more innovative performance’. Coopetition is particularly important in tourism destinations where relevant public stakeholders, such as Destination Management Organizations (DMOs), support a collaborative attitude and practice among tourism businesses as it is the base for creation of a successful tourism product (Kylänen & Mariani, 2013).

The need for collaborative actions of destination stakeholders, especially in tourism destinations marketing, is widely acknowledged (Buhalis & Cooper, 1998; Fyall & Garrod, 2005; Henderson, 2001a;

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