



A rhizomic approach to tourism destination evolution and transformation



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HIGHLIGHTS

- This study illustrates how tourism destinations also grow informally.
- The 100 year evolution of the Waitomo Caves illustrates change as like a rhizome.
- Change occurs anti-hierarchically through spontaneous connectivity.
- Transformation occurs through the local connections which becomes 'volume-filling'.
- Empty space is therefore possibility for knowledge creation through collaboration.

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ABSTRACT

This paper critiques linear models of tourism destination evolution through exploring change as anti-hierarchical, self organising and locally inspired. Based upon the Deleuzian concept of networks as rhizomic, the longitudinal qualitative case study shows 100 years of evolution and transformation. The data demonstrated that through collaboration, network connections could be made in endless and unpredictable ways that then formed complex bundlings of network-based capabilities (multiplicities). These knowledge repositories emerged through the non-linear, heterogeneous and volume-filling connections inspired by the informal activities of everyday life. The data demonstrated that network transformation is a result of collaborative connection, and confirms Deleuze's imperative that all creative possibilities exist and new novelty is limited only by the absence of positive acts.

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1. Introduction

Ten years ago I published a longitudinal study on the evolution and transformation of a tourism destination (Pavlovich, 2003). Yet the static, linear focus of the paper continued to challenge my thinking, spurred by McKercher's (1999) claim that tourism destinations are noted for their non-linear and dynamic complexity. In this current paper, I present an alternative to destination change from an ontological perspective of 'vital' organising that has been abducted from the original data in the 2003 paper. This new

perspective is important as existing research from a supply-side perspective remains primarily focused on functional approaches to destination management. For instance, Bornhorst, Ritchie, and Sheenan (2010) note that most destination management research focus only on one aspect such as planning (e.g. Dwyer, Edwards, Mistilis, Romand, & Scott, 2009), marketing (e.g. Buhalis, 2000), pricing (e.g. Dwyer, Forsyth, & Prasada, 2000; Gomezelja & Mihalic, 2008), product offerings (e.g. Judd, 1995) and quality (Go & Govers, 2000; Gomezelja & Mihalic, 2008). While such studies are important, there is a need for an alternative understanding of the complex and non-linear coordination processes that underlie tourism destination evolution.

A number of premises emerge from network literature that gives a richer understanding of the tourism destination phenomenon. First, we know that network change is enacted by creation and dissolution among the nodal ties (Koka, Madhavan, & Prescott, 2006), creating patterns of change that are not scale-free (Baggio, Scott, &

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Cooper, 2010). That is, any change creates movement throughout the network and those in central positions may not necessarily retain those positions (Gulati, 1999). Network change is therefore not unidirectional; that is, it is *non-linear* (Glückler, 2007). Second, we also know that the diffusion of knowledge occurs through *collaborative* and intense exchanging ties (Baggio et al., 2010; Bell, Tracey, & Heide, 2009; Jack, Drakopoulou Dodd, & Anderson, 2008). The integration of change through growth and innovation can be an explanation for regional growth, stressing the importance of the processes that trigger inter-connection (Weick & Roberts, 1993). Finally, we know that each node or element is unaware of the behaviour of the *whole network* and thus each reacts only to local information (Baggio et al., 2010). This phenomenon is best illustrated through a metaphor whereby, “A flock of birds sweeps across the sky. Like a well-choreographed dance troupe, the birds veer to the left in unison.... The flock is organised without an organiser, coordinated without a coordinator... yet patterns are determined by local interactions among decentralised components” (Resnick, 1997; cited in Urry, 2005, p. 1). Thus, the destination network exhibits collective properties that can indicate its self-organising mechanisms, despite not being observable at the individual level. These three premises (non-linearity, collaboration and wholeness) indicate that the collective patterning form the typology of the network, through its structural and dynamic properties, can influence its overall performance (Baggio et al., 2010).

Attending to critique that network emergence and evolution remains incomplete, this current study offers a novel perspective by viewing tourism destination networks as ‘rhizomic’. Chia (1999) explains that most studies on coordination follow a binary logic where a root-tree has a point and grows linearly in a vertical fixed order. A rhizome however, connects at any point in horizontal collectives that are bulb and tuber-like. That is, these rhizomes are anti-hierarchical in that change can occur unplanned and in any direction. Incorporating and extending the premises noted above, this study seeks to examine the spontaneous and informal properties that create change, and how networks are transformed through this structural connectivity for regional development. This paper therefore uses the longitudinal analysis of the tourism destination from the earlier research (Pavlovich, 2003), and abducts that data to more deeply understand the informal self-organising principles of ‘vital’ transformation. It is important to acknowledge that of course hierarchical, linear and formal processes exist in the management of this destination; but rather that the focus of this research is on the insights that emerge from a non-linear perspective. This research therefore asks a) how does non-linearity create change in tourism destination networks?, b) what role do local interactions play in the transforming process?, and c) how does the typology act to constrain or construct the transformation of the destination?

2. Vital organisation

2.1. Networks and the structure of process

Bergson (1911) long ago identified two forms of organisation: formal and vital. *Formal organisation*, Bergson suggested, is the more familiar mode of research, and methodologically involves the ordering, measuring, abstracting and differentiating of the externalised, objective world. Yet as Galaskiewicz (2007) critiques, these more quantifiable approaches are generally inadequate for analysing networks because of the methodological staticness, nor do they identify the properties underlying spontaneous organisation. The second form, *vital organisation*, is derived from Bergson’s (1911) philosophical work on creative evolution where he argues that there is an informal creative life force (*élan vital*) that permeates all living beings. Organisation, he claims, is a process of transforming

that life force into physical form, a process of ‘actualising’ the variety of possibilities that lie at the heart of human endeavour. This ontological foundation was radicalised by French philosopher, Gilles Deleuze (1991, 1994) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who claim that organisation itself is pure flow and process, and what becomes significant is the creation of concepts, not the acceptance of already formed images. This has significance for conceptualising network change as it brings process, change and fluidity to the fore. Deleuze’s representation of networks as rhizomic (as opposed to stratified hierarchies) brings a new interpretation to networks, most particularly because he posits that they are self-organising and self-determining. Organisation, he claims, emerges spontaneously through the informal habitual activities of everyday life. The unplanned nature of this connectivity is anti-hierarchical in that movement and change can occur in any direction, at any point. The manner in which networks evolve and transform then, require examination of how this informal spontaneous connectivity changes over time. The following review compares and contrasts the formal and vital approaches to network evolution, and offers insights into the effect of on-going change and how it is accomplished. This review focuses on three aspects that inform endogenous change: a) connectivity and anti-hierarchy, b) linear and non-linear flows and c) the implications of plural pathways becoming ‘vital’ in relation to the development of the ‘whole’ network.

2.2. Connectivity and anti-hierarchy

Connectivity is central to networks, and is conventionally examined in the literature through a ‘tie’ focus. Glückler (2007) notes that evolution within networks “looks at the changes that every new tie produces in the existing structure and, conversely, at the impact that the structure imposes on the formation of the next tie” (p. 622). Indeed, there has been a growth of research examining why ties form and the consequences of certain network positions. For instance, Powell, White, Koput, and Owen-Smith (2005) examined how the plural pathways reconfigured a biotechnology cluster over a decade. They found that over time, entrepreneurial activity gave way to increased institutional connectivity with research institutes, government agencies and venture capitalists. Yet these and other ‘tie’ studies (e.g. Baum, Shipilov, & Rowley, 2003; Bell & Zaheer, 2007; Koka et al., 2006; Toms & Filatotchev, 2004) all have an underlying assumption of change as occurring exogenously which then results in a reconfiguration of the network structure. There is a similar focus in tourism studies. For instance, Lee, Choi, Yoo, and Oh (2013) use of quantitative methods to analyse the spatial centralities of rural villages, and Wang and Pizam (2011) edited volume maintain the conversation of ‘how’ to leverage best practice through agents. Such studies perpetuate the outcome focus regarding the ‘what and how’ of network evolution that characterises the methodological approach.

The vital perspective however, views ‘ties’ as *directions in motion*. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) botanical explanation of network organisation as being ‘rhizomic’ implies an entangled mess of mobile connections developing in unpredictable directions, like an underground tuber system that internally ramifies, divides and produces new buds. Being ‘anti-hierarchical’, change is endogenous in that it can emerge from anywhere within the system - without formal planning, without pre-determinism and without order. Thus, the central feature of the network is its undetermined endogenous movement through the nodal tie connections.

2.3. Linearity and non-linearity

Undetermined and non-linear movement is therefore central to change (Deleuze, 1991). However most of the evolution research has

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