



Collaborative approach for tourism conflict management: A Portuguese case study



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ABSTRACT

Land use planning and tourism development perspectives often lead to the emergence of conflicts and, it is fairly common that the final results are not satisfactory to anyone. Although the collaborative approach seems to be a good strategy to manage those conflicts, there are some important barriers that prevent the effective application of this method. This paper, resulting from a larger research, focuses on the analysis of the viability of a collaborative approach to managing conflicts between tourism development and the land use and natural values conservation (the tourism versus territory conflicts). Two research questions are presented: (R1) What are the barriers hampering the development of a collaborative approach to manage the tourism vs. territory conflicts? and (R2) How to collaboratively manage conflicts between tourism and territory? A case study is presented: the *Troia-Melides Coast* (Portugal), a coastal area, with high natural value, currently under pressure from urban and touristic developers. Over the course of the study, a face-to-face interview was conducted with 26 stakeholders. Proceeding from the theoretical background on collaboration barriers and collaborative models, the conditions to collaboratively manage the tourism vs. territory conflict in the Portuguese context are identified. It can be concluded that the key-factors in the development of a collaborative approach to conflict management in this case of situations are: the collaboration process preparation, communication, trust building, empowerment and the collaborative leadership.

1. Introduction

Considering the positive and negative tourism impacts, widely covered and analysed by numerous authors (Mathieson and Wall, 1982; Elliott, 1997; Swarbrooke, 1999; Mason, 2003), it becomes evident that there is a positive and negative interdependence relationship (cf. Deutsch et al., 2006), between tourism development and the land use and natural values conservation. Contrarily to what it could be expected, there are more areas of common interests and in this case a cooperative negotiation could lead to good results. In fact, objectives with positive interdependence are so intertwined that the probability of one of the parts achieving their objectives increases when the other/s achieve theirs. Thus leading to cooperative negotiation, as it is only possible for one part to achieve their objectives when all other parts involved do so. On the other hand, the negative interdependence means that the probability of one part reaching their objectives decreases when the other parts have reached theirs. Negative interdependence and conflict go hand in hand (Deutsch et al., 2006). This negative interdependence is evident in the tourism versus territory conflict: there

is competition between environmental and economic interests, and between public sector and private sector, and the predominance of differing value systems among stakeholders (Almeida et al., 2017). Having said that, however, are the stakeholders aware of the positive interdependence? Is there room for cooperation?

Based on the analysis of conflict management methods (Moore, 2003; Movius and Susskind, 2009) and strategies (Buller et al., 2000), these authors conclude that the collaborative approach, i.e. negotiating mutual gains through the intervention of a mediating agent, is the most appropriate strategy for resolving this type of conflicts, providing that the decision-making deadlines are not rather tight and that none of the parties has very limited powers.

It is assumed that the collaborative approach (Gray, 1989:5; Thomson and Perry, 2006: 23), whilst not free of constraints and implementation issues (Coglianese, 1997 and 1999; Voogd and Woltjer, 1999; Fainstein, 2000), allows at least for a somewhat more cooperative approach amongst the stakeholders (some commitments and consensus generation), leading to conflict transformation and resolution (Gray, 1989; Healey, 1997; Innes and Booher, 1999; Margerum, 1999; Innes,

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2004; McCool, 2009).

Collaboration, as the best way to manage conflicts, has been widely studied in land use and natural resource conservation (Raitio, 2012; Faehnle and Tyrväinen, 2013; Saarikoski et al., 2013), in coastal protection (Striegnitz, 2006; Prati et al., 2016) and in tourism development (Timothy, 1998; Reed, 1999; Weitzner and Borrás et al., 1999; Jamal and Stronza, 2009; Wong et al., 2011). However, its application to coastal tourism development is limited and considerably more when referring to areas with strong restrictions concerning natural values preservation. The Portuguese case study presented is, in this regard, an interesting example to illustrate this type of approach to conflict resolution.

In this context, this paper focuses on the analysis of the viability of a collaborative approach to managing conflicts between tourism development and land use and natural values conservation (tourism vs. territory conflicts) in coastal areas. For this purpose, two research questions are presented: R1 – What are the main barriers hampering the development of a collaborative approach to manage tourism vs. territory conflicts? and R2 – How to collaboratively manage tourism vs. territory conflicts? That is to say, the feasibility of the collaborative solution depends on the context as well as on the successful overcoming of the identified barriers.

To answer these two research questions, a comprehensive systematization and integration of collaboration barriers (R1) is presented in the literature review section, focused on three distinct topics: collaboration and communicative planning theories and criticisms, collaborative governance, and tourism collaboration practice. Through the collaborative models systematization, a collaborative conflict management model was conceptualized with the aim of answering research question R2.

The research method focuses on a single case study: the *Troia-Melides Coast, Alentejo*, Portugal. This coastal area was chosen because it is subject to a strong urban-tourist pressure and, simultaneously, it has a high natural value, partially integrated into the Natura2000 network, therefore conducive to the emergence of conflicts. In order to assess the feasibility of collaboratively managing tourism vs. territory conflicts, a semi-structured interview was designed. This interview was organized in three main topics: the identification of collaboration main barriers and the limitations in the Portuguese context, to answer the research question R1, as well as the measures to foster collaboration, to answer the research question R2. The results obtained are based on the perceptions of 26 key-stakeholders. These 26 interviewees are responsible for policies and interventions that impact the *Troia-Melides* coastline and include Public Administration Entities (Natural and Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Spatial Planning entities), Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) and Tourist industry developers.

2. Literature review

2.1. Barriers to the development of a collaborative approach to conflict management

The collaboration barriers identification is based on literature review of the required conditions for cooperation development, which extends to different fields of research: collaborative processes (Gray, 1989; Thomson and Perry, 2006), collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008), collaborative advantage (Huxham, 2003), regional cooperation (McKinney and Johnson, 2009), intersectoral collaboration (Bryson et al., 2006) and collaborative tourism planning process (Jamal and Getz, 1995). In this review, it can be noted that there is a set of themes that are invariably referred to: power, trust, interdependence, structure, leadership and institutional-political context. Ensuring the cooperation requirements is the ideal scenario. Unfortunately, the current practice is characterized by a set of barriers that limit the scope of that scenario.

Therefore the barriers to collaboration are added to the review, namely in the criticism context of the theory of communicative planning and the problems associated with collaborative experiences in tourism. This collaboration barriers literature review is systematized in 10 points: A. Values, B. Institutional Context, C. Cultural Context, D. Power, E. Time, F. Interdependence, G. Process Organization, H. Trust and I. Leadership.

2.1.1. Stakeholders' values

Ideological barriers and different risk perceptions curb the development of the collaborative process (Gray, 1989). The lack of a sense of responsibility, ownership and commitment and the stakeholders' low level of involvement and commitment act as deterrents to participation (Williams et al., 1998; Ansell and Gash, 2008; Wong et al., 2011). The willingness of the parts to explore new options and ideas (Field et al., 2010) is only achievable if the stakeholders hold a constructive stance. According to Mintzberg et al. (1996), this constructive stance translates into the stakeholders' ability to trust one another and value each one's particularities.

2.1.2. Political-institutional context

The absence of 'political will' and the government's weak support (Gray, 1989; Weitzner and Borrás et al., 1999; Williams et al., 1998; Wong et al., 2011), the power centralization and the existence of unorganized sectors which lack information and human resources (Timothy, 1998; Lee et al., 2010), as well as the institutional competition (Reed, 1999; Bryson et al., 2006) and the lack of financial resources for the collaborative processes organization (Czernek, 2013) are mentioned in this context.

2.1.3. Cultural context

Gray (1989) and Healey (1998) criticize the predominance of an individualistic culture. The individualistic culture (e.g. the American people) hinders the development of a process which requires a co-operative stance (Gray, 1989) and the crisis of "community volunteering" translates into a tendency of citizens to individualism and thus the development of minimal community relations (Healey, 1998).

Other stakeholders highlight the cultural contrasts. The Latin cultures, whose predominant stance is asserting individual opinions rather than active listening and learning, tend to favour authoritarianism at the expense of democratic policies thus negotiation dominates over the decision (Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones, 2002).

Czernek (2013) points out the problem of distance between authorities and voters. In this context, Fainstein (2000) and Voogd and Woltjer (1999) highlight the cultural differences between the US and Europe, including the fact that in Europe, unlike the US, the power is more centralized. Consequently, Europeans more naturally accept the authoritative state leadership. The difference of interests between stakeholders in different hierarchical positions is not settled through cooperation, in which there is room for the exchange of ideas, and the stakeholders that represent local interests experience greater difficulty in hindering State's initiatives.

2.1.4. Power

The barriers to collaboration mainly concern the following four points:

- (1) **Stakeholders with a strong power of influence**, whose power and interest bear a strong influence on the final decision, whereas the less powerful participants have little or no meaningful influence (Voogd and Woltjer, 1999; Flyvbjerg, 2003; Murray, 2005; Wesley and Pforr, 2010). These stakeholders with "less power" refrain from cooperating (Gray, 1989). In the context of the analysed collaborative practices, Bramwell and Sharman (1999) highlight the fact that the entity that organized the process was the one that defined the work group and the discussion focus. Jamal and Getz (1999)

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