



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Journal of Destination Marketing & Management

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jdmm

Conference Communication

The 2016 St. Gallen Consensus on Advances in Destination Management

Stephan Reinhold*, Christian Laesser, Pietro Beritelli

University of St. Gallen, Institute for Systemic Management and Public Governance (IMP-HSG), Dufourstrasse 40a, CH-9000 St. Gallen, Switzerland

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Destination management
Consensus
Research
Practice
Agenda

ABSTRACT

This article communicates the main insights of the third Biennial Forum on Advances in Destination Management (ADM), held in Vail, Colorado (USA). The substance of scholars' and practitioners' discussions can be divided into five topical domains: (1) relevance of experiences to the destination concept, (2) destination strategy and resilience, (3) the future of DMOs, (4) tourism taxation and regulation, and (5) big data and visitor management. For each domain, a goal-centered research agenda is offered, built on conference participants' collective sense-making efforts during the three-day conference, followed by a dedicated consensus session.

1. Introduction

The Advances in Destination Management (ADM) forum has been seeking to integrate disparate research and innovation efforts on destination management since the *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* published its first double issue in 2012. Every two years, ADM brings together engaged scholars and practitioners looking for theoretical answers and practical solutions to address the complex challenges of managing and marketing tourist destinations. Results of the first two forums were summarized in previous editions of the St. Gallen Consensus on Destination Management (Laesser & Beritelli, 2013; Reinhold, Laesser, & Beritelli, 2015). The third ADM forum crossed the Atlantic and assembled an international group of tourism professionals and researchers from June 17–19, 2016 in Vail, Colorado. Like its predecessors, the 2016 St. Gallen Consensus on Advances Destination Management summarizes the main insights and results of this conference.

Based on consensus discourse methodology (Reinhold, Laesser, & Beritelli, 2015), five topical domains were identified that dominated sense making and discussion among conference attendees: (1) relevance of experiences to the destination concept, (2) destination strategy and resilience, (3) the future of DMOs, (4) tourism taxation and regulation, and (5) big data and visitor management. The subsequent sections contribute discussion points and avenues for future inquiry to the community of practitioners and researchers working on prospects for tourist destinations. In the spirit of ADM, we hope to inspire results relevant to both the practical and scholarly communities.

2. Methodology

The conference results covered draw on consensus discourse

methodology developed in 2014 (Reinhold et al., 2015). Its five-step methodological procedure (cf. Table 1) is characterized by three key strengths: first, it establishes an active discourse among conference attendees on the conference's main subjects; second, it continuously records sense-making in response to formal presentations, keynotes, and informal discussions; and finally, it establishes agreement on the main conference insights in a research agenda, which seeks to inspire future contributions to the field based on collective interdisciplinary expertise of destination management scholars and tourism professionals.

In total, 79 notes were collected across seven sessions, written by 22 actively contributing conference participants. In common with previous forums, about 15% of ADM participants were tourism professionals and the overall group mostly represented institutions from Australia, Europe, and North America. A full list of participants who contributed to this consensus is included in the acknowledgement section of this article.

Discussions in the approximately 165-min consensus session centered on seven key issues, which we summarized to form the specified five topical domains. Consultation on the first consensus draft resulted in adding seven publication references and six amendments qualifying or elaborating on statements in the initial draft. As a result, all participants elected to support the consensus in its final form.

3. Structure

The subsequent sections represent the five domains around which the ADM forum's discussions and contributions evolved: (1) relevance of experiences to the destination concept, (2) destination strategy and resilience, (3) the future of DMOs, (4) tourism taxation and regulation, and (5) big data and visitor management.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: stephan.reinhold@unisg.ch (S. Reinhold).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2017.03.001>

Received 1 November 2016; Received in revised form 8 March 2017; Accepted 13 March 2017
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Table 1
Consensus discourse methodology.

Step	Action	Purpose
1	Record critical thoughts, propositions, and intermediate conclusions on cards and pin boards	Record sense-making throughout the conference Support attendees' recall Avoid overemphasizing contents and discussion toward the end of the conference
2	Interpretive content analysis	Discern the domains that preoccupied conference attendees throughout the conference Identify topical clusters that transcend the individual conference sessions Stimulate vivid and critical discussion on the state-of-the-art of destination management research
3	Consensus discussion with real-time commented transcript	Discussion and substantiation of identified topical clusters in terms of collective interpretation and research avenues Identification of links among topical clusters and matters discussed Expression of approval or dissent on written formulation
4	Ex-post consultation on written consensus	Collect afterthoughts, publications references, and recommendations Qualification of and elaboration on first written draft of consensus based on attendee's expertise in different domains
5	Vote on final consensus	Expression of overall solidarity in sentiment and belief with the statements presented in the consensus on advances in destination management.

To structure the discourse in these domains, their content was operationalized in the form of lead questions. The *first* domain focused on tourist experiences: what are the roles of experiences in understanding the destination as sensory impressions and stories retold* The *second* domain centered on the role of strategies and strategy documents in shaping the future of destinations: what are realistic traits of strategic behavior and paradigms of strategic planning in destination settings* The *third* domain contemplated the future of DMOs and asks: what are the new activities and structures of destination management and how do they affect individuals working for DMOs* The *fourth* domain addressed tourism taxation and regulation as a research subject: what are reasonable principles of taxation and are they feasible in the light of innovation and competitiveness concerns* The *fifth* domain dealt with big data as a way to draw new insights from spatial behavior and to optimize visitor management: how can we use big data and other practices to better understand and influence travel behavior and decision making*

Every section is divided into discussion and implications. While the word count of individual sections roughly corresponds to the richness and duration of discussions, it does not adequately reflect their vividness. This article concludes with a brief comparison between this consensus and its two predecessors.

4. Domain 1: the role of experience

4.1. Discussion

At the two previous ADM forums, ontological discussions dominated sessions on the destination as a theoretical concept. Conference attendees attempted to come up with – and agree on – a new definition to improve understanding of the fundamental nature of destinations (Laesser & Beritelli, 2013; Reinhold et al., 2015). This year, however, conference attendees no longer questioned the nature of destinations. Instead, they enthusiastically discussed the role of *experiences* in our understanding of destinations.

Conference attendees agreed that experiences are key to understanding tourist behavior (Gunn, 1972). Experiences explain why destinations attract certain spatial behaviors and provide a key to understanding the heterogeneous and multifaceted nature of the destination concept (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2014; Larsen, 2007). Research subjects traditionally scrutinized, such as traveler needs, tourist services and infrastructures for accommodation and food are, in most cases, derived from other destination experiences that motivate and drive tourist behavior (Rickly-Boyd, 2009; Sternberg, 1997).

To deepen the discussion about the relevance of tourist experiences

to advancing the marketing and management of destinations, a group of conference attendees pointed out that there are two meanings associated with the English term 'experience' in the German language: *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*. The former refers to the procedural aspects of experiences and the momentary sensory impressions gained by engaging in certain (tourist) activities. The latter connotation refers to the more static notion of a memory retained of the specific activities. In principle, the dual notion of experience is nothing new. It was put forward by Larsen (2007) and connects tourist behavior to pre-trip expectations, on-site events and post-trip memories. The observation that destination marketing and management scholars at the conference were not really aware of how far the conceptual discussion on tourist experiences has progressed may indicate that there is a potential for integration across research streams.

In the attempt to connect experiences to actionable advice for destination marketing and management, conference attendees turned to the relevance of storytelling (cf. Rickly-Boyd, 2009). Stories allow tourists to structure and communicate their experiences (Escalas, 1998). This comes naturally, as significant parts of human memory are organized in terms of actors (who*) and activities (did what*) (Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Schank & Abelson, 1995) and is reflected in research conceptualizing destinations as storyscapes (Chronis, 2005; Rickly-Boyd, 2009). Conference attendees agreed that destinations can, potentially, tell many different experience-based stories for a variety of visitor groups. Marketing efforts should, therefore, focus on enabling storytelling ('setting the stage') and identify individuals who can act as multipliers of stories in different demand networks (e.g. market mavens, Feick & Price, 1987).

4.2. Implications

Based on the above considerations, conference attendees arrived at two primary conclusions with relevance for future research on destination contexts experiences: first, how tourism supply can create a positive frame of conditions for experiences ('storyscape') in community-type destination settings (Chronis, 2005; Rickly-Boyd, 2009), although this premise is still under-researched. While there has been progress in understanding how individual memorable stories relate to tourist experiences (e.g. Park & Santos, 2017; Uriely, 2005) and their design (e.g. Tussyadiah, 2014), it is theoretically and practically interesting to identify what is conducive to tourists retelling stories peer-to-peer to influence future travel and buying decisions in demand networks. This includes the characteristics of those individuals most likely to act as multipliers in these networks: sometimes referred to as market mavens (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005).

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