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Editorial

Governance and sustainable tourism: What is the role of trust, power and social capital?

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ABSTRACT

This editorial introduction to the special issue posits that governance and sustainable tourism research will benefit from a joint treatise of trust and other key governance concepts such as power and social capital. It introduces the concept of governance in the context of sustainable tourism development. The discussion then delves into the theoretical perspectives on trust, power, and social capital and exemplifies their contributions to tourism governance and sustainable tourism. A typology of social capital potentially useful in sustainable tourism research is developed. The typology emphasizes on the positive aspects of social capital and the challenges the concept presents for governance and sustainability. Good governance and sustainable tourism research arguably has privileged the concept of power to the detriment of trust in social relationships. The collection of papers of this special issue is situated within these debates. An agenda for further research in this area is presented by way of conclusion.

1. Introduction

Having its origin in the sustainable development concept popularized by the Bruntland Report published in 1987, sustainable tourism has been a dominant paradigm in tourism studies (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Ruhanen, Weiler, Moyle, & McLennan, 2015). The term has influenced how tourism research is conducted and how government and practitioners formulate tourism policies. In both spheres, this has meant adopting a more balanced view of tourism development, recognizing the adverse consequences of the industry alongside the positives ones. Despite the critiques leveled against the concept of sustainable tourism (see for e.g. Liu, 2003), research in the field has progressed both theoretically and methodologically, and findings have shaped and led to an improved understanding of tourism development. Among the six trends identified in sustainable tourism research by Bramwell, Hingham, Lane, and Miller (2017), governance features as an emerging theme. As they note, ‘governance is a relatively new conceptualisation in tourism research, representing a broad view of how societies and social action are steered, mobilised and regulated. Governance systems and regimes can steer societal relations, including social rules and values’ (Bramwell et al., 2017 p. 3). The connection between tourism and governance has been discussed in a number of recent studies (e.g. Valente, Dredge, & Lohman, 2015; van der Zee, Gerrets & Vanneste, 2017; Keyim, 2017; Presenza, Del Chiappa, & Sheehan, 2013).

Bramwell et al. (2017) urge tourism researchers and scholars to adopt a broad view of sustainable tourism and its challenges, noting that ‘we need to be able to demonstrate that our research is connecting with the key challenges facing society, and doing so in a way that adds to the public debate on these topics’ (p. 4). Declining trust in government and its institutions is a common feature of contemporary societies (van Ham, Thomassen, Aarts & Andeweg, 2017), posing significant challenges to power relationships, governance, and sustainable tourism in destinations. Governance and sustainable tourism research will arguably benefit from considerations of trust and its relationships with other key governance concepts such as power and social capital. These concepts are intrinsically connected. Trust is a dimension of social capital (Newton, 2001; Park, Nunkoo, & Yoon, 2015), but merits a discussion on its own. It is shaped by power relations in a social network and vice-versa (Farrell, 2004; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012; Nunkoo & Smith, 2013). These concepts are inherent to social networks and constitute the basis for successful collaboration, good governance, and sustainable tourism. While power relations in good governance and sustainable tourism have received considerable research attention, less is known on how trust and social capital shapes governance processes and sustainable tourism policies and the intricate relationships among them.

This special issue of the *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management* attempts to bridge this gap by bringing together a

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collection of papers that investigates the concepts of trust, power and social capital in the context of good governance and sustainable tourism. It endeavors to do justice to the notion of trust in tourism development. The structure of this introductory editorial is as follows. First, the governance concept is introduced and analyzes its contributions to sustainable tourism. The discussion then delves into the theoretical perspectives on trust, power, and social capital, exemplifying their contributions to good tourism governance and sustainable tourism. This discussion leads on to the development of a typology of social capital useful to analyze governance processes and sustainable tourism. The positive and potential adverse contributions of social capital to tourism development are presented. Research on good governance and sustainable tourism arguably has privileged the concept of power at the detriment of such concepts as trust. Within these discourses, the collection of papers that make up this special issue is discussed.

2. Governance and sustainable tourism

Despite the wide use of the word governance by policy-makers and researchers, there is as yet no consensus on its definition. *Jessop (2003, p. 101)* defines governance as ‘the reflective self-organization of actors involved in complex relations of reciprocal inter-dependence, with such self-organization being based on continuing dialogue and resource-sharing to develop mutually beneficial joint projects and to manage the contradictions and dilemmas inevitably involved in such situations’. For *Hall (2011a)*, governance is simply the act of governing. Although *Bramwell and Lane (2011)* note that the word governance is used less frequently than such terms as tourism politics, policy and policy making, and destination management, recent years have seen lively discussions on its role in sustainable tourism (*Hall, 2011a, 2011b; Keyim, 2017*). This trend reflects the shift in approach to tourism policy from the notion of government to that of governance. This shift, *Hall (2011a)* argues, has important implications for sustainable tourism as it influences the relationship between tourism actors, the nature of tourism policies, the capacities of the actors to act, and even the ways in which policy problems are defined. Prevalence of good governance is a necessary pre-condition for sustainable tourism (*Bramwell & Lane, 2011*).

Governance implies a pluralistic approach to policy-making, with increasing role for non-state actors which deemphasizes the power of the state in the social network (*Hezri & Dovers, 2006*). Governance therefore refers to the inter-relationships among stakeholders and how they interact with one another (*Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2010*). In contrast to neoclassical theory which focuses on and is limited to market relationships, good governance principles acknowledge the role of non-market forces such as the local communities and civil societies in the development process. Governance mechanisms provide the impetus for local communities and civil societies which are often marginalized in tourism policy-making to become legitimate partners in tourism planning. This facilitates cooperative behavior which is a condition for sustainable development (*Beritelli, 2011*). Considering the multiple stakeholders in destination management, *Baggio et al. (2010)* note that ‘the interaction of these stakeholders is complex, dynamic, and subject to external shocks. The basic premise of tourism destination management is that through cooperative planning and organizational activities, the effectiveness of these joint interactions can be improved to the benefit of individual stakeholders’ (p. 51). Governance emphasizes stakeholder involvement and interactions, irrespective of their level of power, thereby promoting sustainable tourism (*Baggio et al., 2010; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011a, 2011b*). Governance also requires destinations to adopt appropriate institutions, procedures, and decision-making rules. However, these do not always imply full consensus because potential conflicts may arise as each actor attempts to advance their own objectives (*Bramwell & Lane, 2011*). Trust, power, and social capital are inherent to social relations and are therefore useful in

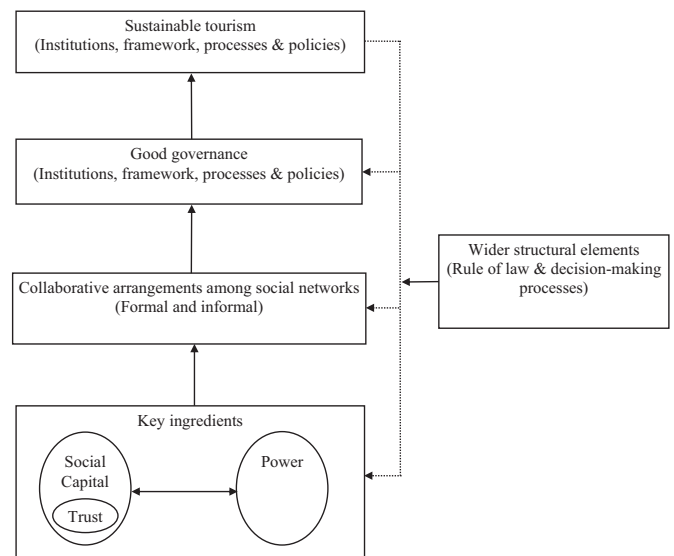


Fig. 1. Inter-relationship between trust, social capital, power, and sustainable tourism.

reducing conflicts, facilitating collaboration and partnerships, and thus, furthering the objectives of good governance and sustainable. This process is illustrated in Fig. 1. The figure embeds a top-down approach, suggesting that sustainability and governance policies, institutions, and framework shape collaboration, power relations, trust, and social capital among social actors. This whole process is influenced by wider structural elements such as the rule of law, decision-making rules, and the political environment of the destination.

2.1. Trust matters

Trust is a relational construct (*Markova, Linell, & Gillespie, 2008*). Its fundamental role in the emergence of healthy relationships among social actors has been discussed in seminal studies like *Blau (1964)* and proven empirically in several recent studies carried out across various contexts (e.g. *Schnackenberg & Tomlinson, 2016; Wheeler, MacDonald, & Boxall, 2017*). However, trust is a complex construct that is difficult to define and operationalize (*Nunkoo & Smith, 2015; Robbins, 2016*). Consequently, it has remained an elusive term in the social science literature and has often been used in different and not always compatible ways (*Robbins, 2016*). Research has generally measured trust in specific partners and relationships (e.g. *Du & Williams, 2017; Poppo, Zhou, & Li, 2016*). From this perspective, trust is a psychological state or orientation of an actor (the truster) toward a specific partner (the trustee) with whom the actor is in some way interdependent to attain valued outcomes or resources (*Holmes & Rempel, 1989*). Defining trust uniquely from a psychological perspective however, is insufficient in explaining the concept because there is the danger of definitions becoming narrowly too cognitive, ignoring the emotional and social influences on trust decisions (*Kramer, 1999*). Consequently, it is more appropriate to define trust in terms of individuals' choice behavior in various trust dilemma situations (*Miller, 1992*). An advantage of conceptualizing trust as a choice behavior is that decisions become observable behaviors (*March, 1994*). Such an approach to defining trust is relevant to our discussion here as it enables us to understand how it influences actors' behaviors and actions in sustainable tourism development.

Because human and social life requires trust to sustain, trust underlies the functioning of formal and informal institutions, their decision-making processes, and social, political, and community relations (*Robbins, 2016; Stein & Harper, 2003*). Regardless of the field, the role of trust cannot be disputed. For example, in sociology, *Robbins (2016, p.972–973)* argues that trust is ‘an emergent property of social life

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