

PUBLIC PRIVATE COOPERATION IN TOURISM DESTINATIONS PROMOTION: THE METHODOLOGY OF SOCIAL NETWORK ANALYSIS

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Over recent years, the promotion of tourism destinations and the role assumed by different stakeholders involved in the process (i.e. level of public and private sector participation, new co-finance methods) has changed significantly. In general, it can be observed that tourism destinations have moved from a position where the public sector had full and sole responsibility for public wellbeing and where the private sector's only objective was the pursue of increasing benefits, to another state where success depends on the community interest among the public and private sector as well as the civil society. In Spain, where tourism promotion has always been in the hands of the central government, the situation is changing. Nowadays, the National Tourism Organization in Spain is taking first steps in cooperating with the private sector in the field of promotion. Furthermore, all public organizations are making an effort in working together on how to finance tourism promotion and how public and private partnerships might improve efficiency in promotion. Given the revolution of these management functions, governance has become a central issue in destination management and is considered a key competitiveness factor. This has occurred as a result of the need to govern in the best interests of all stakeholders involved in the tourism activities of a destination.

The creation of networks that generate relational capital which support joint promotional processes is one of the basic features of new forms of governance. The public tourism administration should not impose its promotional policies but must look for a consensus between public and private stakeholders. In this new relational framework, the public sector must reinvent itself focusing its role from a more strategic viewpoint. Its usual activities should be substituted with others that promote the creation of relational capital and trust among the stakeholders within a tourism system.

Given the importance of cooperation among stakeholders, it is necessary to incorporate a methodology that offers the instruments, which allow to measure the relational factors in a tourism destination as well as the capacity of the latter to provide relational capital through public-private partnerships (PPP) in the area of promotion.

The methodology proposed in this article is Social Networks Analysis (SNA) through which destinations will know whether they are producing the necessary links in the area of promotion to create relational capital. The objective is to measure if enough relational capital exists to foster tourism growth and development. From this point, destinations will know not only about the competitive advantages or their tangible resources but also about the advantages that result from collaborative management in promotion. The realization of the SNA could be structured in the following steps or phases: (i) Identification of relevant stakeholders in the promotion of a tourism destination, (ii) Creation of a matrix of stakeholder relations. In this phase, a matrix should be built that reflects the relations between the stakeholders in the field of promotion and (iii) Interpretation of network characteristics and those of its stakeholders through the use of indicators. The SNA methodology offers a set of indicators that measure the relational structure of a tourism network, its cohesion or the position of each stakeholder within the network.

This paper proposes an assumption to better understand the application of SNA methodology and to reflect the way in which tourism destinations can identify the level of cooperation between stakeholders in the area of promotion. This assumption classifies and categorizes relevant stakeholders and shows SNA indicators to analyze, measure and control these relations, and will thus enforce the decision making process in promotion.

Consequently, the SNA methodology results highly relevant to the decision making process in tourism promotion. It allows classifying the stakeholders in order to their direct and indirect links with the promotional tourism activity. Moreover, the SNA offers a set of indicators to measure the relational structure in a destination, the level of cohesion and the position of the stakeholders in the network.