

BUSINESS NETWORKS IN TOURISM AND SERVICE SECTORS FOR COMPETITIVENESS IMPROVEMENT IN CIUDAD JUAREZ, CHIHUAHUA, MEXICO. A CASE STUDY: CENTRAL PARK HERMANOS ESCOBAR AND SURROUNDING SME'S

Jesús Alberto Urrutia de la Garza

Tomás Jesús Cuevas Contreras

Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, México
jesus.urrutia@uacj.mx, tecunam@gmail.com

This document shows existing cooperation and relationships between tourism and service sectors small and medium enterprises (SME's) surrounding Central Park Hermanos Escobar (CPHE) in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (CJS), and their collaboration with it. In this research, the derived relations from business and actors in the zone are highlighted, because nowadays, globalization and technological advances have given place to new and better tendencies in productive structures, which dynamics can be observed moving into major dynamism and interaction between enterprises and productive sectors, allowing to achieve bigger levels of efficiency, productivity and competitiveness, being this last concept the focus of study, along with SME's, because of their number and their remarkable contribution to employment and Internal Gross Product (IGP) of the countries, as well for cities and regional development. In the case of Mexico, most of the SME's show low growth, or in the worst of scenarios, a tendency to disappear in a short time from its creation, because of different factors which are not being properly managed and which have not been over taken accordingly.

This article present a review of network approaches, with the purpose to enrich the vision of the service sector enterprise and of the participant businessmen in this type of business. Networks are an option for competitiveness improvement, giving origin to multiple relationships, internal as well as external, which will constitute its strength or its weakness, depending on the way of leading and direct them into the benefit of all stakeholders, especially in matters of innovation. Thus, according to the obtained information, the relevance of the present study in the previously mentioned businesses is demonstrated, because of their location and space in which they are developing.

In this context raises the problem for the SME's surrounding this park, which they show competitive disadvantages, regarding all economic, geographical, social, and tech-

nological necessities from the city, and from this very important zone of it. Along to the above mentioned, this businesses located in the surroundings of PCHE acquire major relevance, because is the only place of this type in the city. Therefore, this document has its principal objective to examine if cooperation and collaboration variables in this enterprises represent a determinant factor to the competitiveness of the zone; as well to identify the enterprises' will to develop of a formal collaboration network; interpreting it as an opportunity to obtain competitive advantages. In this way came the questions: Are cooperation and collaboration variables in this type of enterprises determinant to their growth and expansion? Is the infrastructure of the PCHE zone a reticulated factor for SME's competitiveness? Are the SME's located in the zone of access to the park more competitive than the ones located in the zones of no access? In this sense, it is desirable to remark that this approach to the phenomenon will be not only from the administrative angle, but as well from the sociocultural and economic considerations angel.

In reference to the research method, this project is a first start to an investigation which presents a window of opportunity for improvement, through a quanti-qualitative study. It is divided into two sections: 1) Literature review as a conceptual foundation, 2) Field work. The first part shows a literature review of the backgrounds of the terms of associativity, business networks and alliances between SME's: while the second part, contains two geographical maps of the PCHE, with a perimeter of 500 meters all around, which show and analyze eight tourism sector and services SME's, as well three franchise hotels and one public museum, in respect to their location in the zone and the relationships between them. For that purpose, cooperation and collaboration variables in these enterprises were taken as measurement factors, analyzing their will to work all together, as well as their location in respect to PCHE as a competitive advantage. This article bases its primary information from an instrument applied to businessmen and managers of the different enterprises surrounding this public space, taking under consideration cooperation, collaboration or association conditions between actors, as well as the existing relationships in pursuit of new possibilities of achieving competitive levels capable of guarantying success of a network in this sector.

The results present the existing informal network, as well as the network that could be generated if these enterprises would work under cooperation, collaboration and information interchange conditions, between all involved actors. Is to remark the entrepreneurial initiative on the creation of a network which could formalize the relationships, but also shows a lack of a leadership to direct it and a sense of awayness from government. Nevertheless, opportunities are perceived to potentiate learning and innovation capabilities, to reproduce successful entrepreneurial initiatives and the conformation of networks, distributed in two sections: I) a perception of influence of PCHE to the tourism and service sectors SME's located in its surroundings, II) associativity and cooperation to create business networks. At first instance, is to remark the results of the questionnaire application, which afterwards present the will of businessmen to work all together. As it is mentioned on the method, this document show an examination of the relationships between the SME's part of this study's sample.

The questionnaire made reference to the relations between the visits to the park and the surrounding enterprises, the perceptions of the businessmen in reference to the influence

of PCHE over their businesses; and also tried to determine the relationship between businessmen and managers of the surrounding enterprises with the PCHE administrator. Information was obtained in respect to collaboration between business managers and PCHE activities, so it could be demonstrated that, independently of the knowledge they have about the environment or the correlation between visitors, a great percentage of these enterprises have never participated in any way with the PCHE activities. On other hand, they were questioned about their will to economically participate with PCHE, and what are the activities in which they are willing to participate in the park, with the purpose of working in a network with all the decision makers, which not only will be beneficial in matter of customers, but as well by opening the panorama a bit more regarding possible strategies to follow in order to achieve improvement in the zone's competitiveness.

It is to mention, there is a good will and intention to work all together, but only a lack of leadership is perceived, among the apathy of all businessmen to lead the network. Also, the instrument left in sight a bad attitude from all businessmen towards government, whom pretend that the park will solve most of their problems.

In the last part of the documents, is explained its exploratory character, demonstrating that, indeed it was not the purpose to profound in the subject of competitiveness inside the SME's surrounding PCHE, it was pretended to examine them from a network point of view. Its purpose was a first approach into the management of associativity and its natural link with competitiveness and the present factors in this zone of the city.

A first conclusion was reached, showing that development and improvement in in this zone's SME's is compromised due to a series of factors, highlighting the lack of communication and leadership among businessmen, and with the zone's infrastructure and that the dispersion of the SME's not going accordingly to the park's accesses. Results point towards to a better panning for the PCHE visitor's benefit as potential customers; also for the maximum infrastructure utilization.

