

## THE TOURISM CLUSTER OF A CULTURAL DESTINATION IN MEXICO: ITS LIFE CYCLE AND THE NETWORK OF ACTORS

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A central component of the cluster formation is the degree of consolidation of the relations between the actors that participate within. For that reason, in this work social networks are analyzed to determine in which stage of the cluster cycle it is established. The proposed hypothesis in this particular destination is that it is found at its initial stage of development, due to the lack of interaction of the actors that make up the cluster.

The tourism cluster is defined as, “a form of organizing and articulating touristic activity of a region and its various local actors (population, entrepreneurs, government, and non-governmental organizations) and being able to get them to interact, collaborate, and that they are learning and generating knowledge among each other. They emerge as an alternative to provide a socioeconomic development at a local level. (Mancildo, Rejame y Segre, 2010:820). The tourism cluster consists of three basic dimensions: geographically proximate, the network between enterprises, agencies, governmental and educational institutions. (Toledo, Quelopana y Castroman 2006; Cuervo, Montoro y Romero, 2009; Iordache et al. 2010).

The cycle of the tourism cluster refers to the interaction between industrial and regional components (Crespo, 2011:2030). It is stated that, the cycle of activity will affect the cycle of the cluster, but it is not prompt. For example, in a deteriorated activity or situation there could be a cluster declining while others improve and transform in order to begin a new growth cycle. In the example, it is demonstrated that two different cycles within the same activity can lead to different pathways at the same time.

A way to identify the stage of the cluster in a point of the cycle is the relations that are able to promote and established. A network is defined as a group of wide explicit relations, with distinguished preferential patterns which occur in a group of companies and institutions after additional advantages and market relations, having as the main goal the static reduction and the dynamic of the uncertainty (García y Lara, 2004:150).

Eisingerich et al., (2010:241) it is mentioned that the social networks are important for the clusters, where if the relation is strong, it will facilitate the transference and assimilation of knowledge within the groups, and opens access to networks which lead members of the cluster to new knowledge and ways to operate.

According to Santos (2010), the two fundamental aspects of social networks are the structure and the content. The structure refers to the patterns that emerge from the social bond with the actors. Two important properties in the structure of the social network is the centrality, a central-actor can have better access to the information than a peripheral actors, given that they possess social and structural cohesion strategies which provide better conditions when sharing information. On the other hand, content is referred as a type of social-relation that connects an actor with a social network (friendship, kinship, professional relationship). The type of social relationship can determine the resources that circulate in the network.

The analyses of social network allow to measure network properties such as density, which refers to the mass of interconnection and it is form by effectively existent proportions over the total connections possible. The centrality demonstrates in a genetic form the existence of members that occupy certain position and that vary according to the degree of centrality. Also, it could be shown by using the mass of connection for each member (Vivas, 2001). The index of centralization is a special case; the actor plays clearly a central role where he/she is connected with all its form. In order to be able to connect with others the actor has to pass through the central mode before reaching the stage of interconnection. The degree of coming close, is the ability of being able to reach other actors in the network (Velásquez y Aguilar, 2005).

The methodology in this essay is based on Merino and Pulido's work (2009) which states the importance of relationships among tourist actors of a particular territory. This approach centers on identifying the actors that participate in the process and evaluates the relations that have been established with one another. In order to gather data, interviews were carrying out to actors of the government sector, educational institutions, associations and tourist associations. Also, surveys were carrying out to tourist service lenders. The data was analyze using the program for Windows Ucinet 6 version 6.232 (Borgatti, Everett and Freeman, 2002) with the same program a test was conducted on social networks of tourism cluster.

The results indicate that the main reasons that entrepreneurs of different areas of the tourism destination of Oaxaca City associate is to form packages (between companies of different areas). The reasons to associate with companies within the same sector are: solve problems, government support, information about occupancy rate and sales. The objective of having a connection with the government is to find ways of promoting its company and training. Educational institutions are connected by professional practices, research support and sponsorship (place students in events that they may encounter). With associations the main objective is to look for representatives in the tourism sector and the community of Oaxaca City.

In terms of tourist entrepreneurs and the relations they established, 56% associate with companies in the same sector (hotelier-hotelier, restaurateur-restaurateur). Associating with different sectors other than its own, decreases its percentage (48%) (Hotelier-restaurateur-

travel agency). A 48% of the entrepreneurs link with different areas of state and municipal government, with educational institutions a relation is established at a rate of 32 %.

Regarding the network cooperation, and tourist associations, the density is 20.2% (very low) and it is made up of subgroups that consist of each group. Tourist associations in the network of cooperation are fundamental in connection with the government and the tourist entrepreneur and contribute in the participation of the companies that are in training courses and promotion management. As well as, being able to participate in different competitions given by the state or municipal government. Also, it works as links to establish agreements with educational institutions. In this way, the academy will link with the tourist-business sector. It is noticeable that the interviewed organizations conceive a view of lack of engagement from part of the government, which affects the trust among each other.

The main actors found in the cooperation network of government institutions are; tourist administration at a state level, training and advertising area of the municipal tourist administration. The other areas play a less important role. In this cooperation network, entrepreneurs participate from all different tourist sectors. The network's density from government institutions is 11.9% (very low).

In networks of educational institutions, local and foreign schools collaborate. The network that emerged in the analysis is 3.2% it has a very low density. More than 20 educational institutions participate in it. Each one works together with a small number of actors. The principal relation is established through professional practices (where the student interacts with the workplace). Also by providing information on how to carry out research, and a few are the ones who actually get involved on research based on company needs.

Furthermore, the centrality of the destination network consists of six basic actors: the secretary of tourism and economic development within the state government (68%), the secretary of tourism in a municipal level (57%), Mexican association of hotels and motels (AMHMO) 34%, Hotel Azul de Oaxaca (28%), Cathedral Restaurant (22%), Hostelería de Alcalá (20%), this shows how important the role of the government in the destination really is, as well as, the participation of the Mexican association of hotels and motels with other actors. The role of the companies is a major component when establishing the cooperation network. In general, the degree of centrality is of 4.13% (very low), this data is important since it indicates that the strength of the network is not set on a single actor.

Moreover, the ten most important actors within the scheme of networks: state secretary of tourism and economic growth, municipal secretary of tourism, AMHMO, Restaurante Catedral, training, Restaurante Hostelería de Alcalá, Hotel Parador San Agustín, Hotel Casas de las Frailes, Hotel Posada del Centro, Hotel Cantera Real, with the list mentioned above the government role is present, as well as the role of associations, and companies that have a significant weight on the network.

In order to reach a closer degree, meaning that the government, two tourist associations, an educational institution and four service providers, together they have a better possibility of reaching the rest of actors. The following list will indicate what has been mentioned above: the secretary of tourism and economic growth, training municipal secretary of tourism, AMHMO, Hotel Azul de Oaxaca, Restaurante Catedral, Hotel Casa Catrina, ITO, Hotel Los Frailes and CANIRAC.

In a brief summary, the relation between the density of the social network and the tourist destination in Oaxaca City indicate that there is a low density. Meaning that in all the relations that could be established only 4.4% are effective.

As a result, with the information mention previously, two things can be concluded: first, the cluster of the tourist destination in Oaxaca City it is at its initial stage. Proving the proposed hypothesis, the companies have emerging links and they are taking advantage of only the cultural attractions of the destination. Secondly, the analysis of social networks is a tool to consider in the tourism cluster analysis. Since it allows acknowledge additional elements and not just the ones provided by the quantitative information.

As for the cluster cycle, its development is not a linear process, since you can find components of the different stages in other stages. For instance, if in the analysis it indicates that the cluster in Oaxaca City is at an emergency stage; its image is consolidated in the tourist's mind, which corresponds to elements found in the expansion stage. In the initial stage, a based element as a non-existent is the critical mass, however, in this destination the critical mass exist, consisting by the presence of specialize tourist actors, which corresponds to the stage of expansion.