11 Governance and Neolocalism: Guiding the Creative Process

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Abstract

The political economy is immensely influential in the way tourism is produced, marketed, and consumed. Governance, and the resulting policy formation and implementation, must be rooted in the locality if it is to support neolocal development. This chapter highlights four case studies from the literature to showcase the role of policy in facilitating or stifling neolocalism within the tourism reality. Examples include national policy (Qatar), regional policy (Kanazawa, Japan), destination marketing and management (Denmark), and the lack of coherent local involvement in policy (Linhares da Beira, Portugal). While some of these policies were not designed with tourism in mind, the chapter supports the role of good governance, specifically the inclusion of local voices and the development of social and human capital, as prerequisites for successful neolocalism.

Introduction

Neolocalism involves the crafting of the tourism product that reflects the culture, history, and value system inherent in a destination. Neolocalism is defined as 'the reaction of individuals and groups to consciously attempt to establish, rebuild, and cultivate local ties, local identities and local economies' (Shortridge, 1996: 10). In other words, neolocalism is the

localised pursuit of renewed sense of place through revitalisation and restoration. Flack (1997) recognises this phenomenon as an attempt to reassert the 'distinctively local' (p. 38) in response to a landscape increasingly devoid of the unique, while Brain (2011) highlights the potential of neolocalism in mediating globalisation.

It has been argued that neolocalism can encourage local sourcing, influence environmentally-friendly production techniques and consumption patterns, and encourage support for local causes and charities (Graefe et al., 2018). Evidence suggests that local production can boost the use of local products within the production process, increasing the indirect and induced impacts of tourism. It is not surprising that local products and experiences have become a cornerstone of tourism marketing (Holtkamp et al., 2016) and are increasingly being addressed in tourism policy documentation.

While scant research exists on neolocalism, the focus of limited literature has centred on small businesses, such as breweries, the products they craft, and the growing consumer movement surrounding local consumption (Mathews & Patton, 2016; Murray & Kline, 2015). To date, there has been no specific study that has looked at overall destination development framed by neolocalism. Therefore, this chapter will highlight examples from literature to show how neolocalism is prevalent in destination management (even if not explicitly outlined in such a way) and the strategies needed to successfully fashion destination narratives. In turn, it is hoped that future research will test the conclusions drawn in this chapter and empirically examine the hypothesis that neolocalism is influencing policy implementation and overall destination governance.

Governance

All development occurs within regulated systems of governance. The primary role of governance in tourism is to control growth, sustain communities and environments, and ensure a quality tourism product or experience (Slocum & Curtis, 2017). These objectives are generally addressed through an overarching tourism policy and then implemented at the local level through destination marketing and management organisations or regional tourism boards. Therefore, governance is the leadership structure that coordinates economies, public/private partnerships, and reform objectives designed to pursue collective interests (Slocum & Backman, 2011). Governance can be equated with strategic

leadership and includes two primary tasks, government interventions (policy) and managerial tasks (administration), which determine future development paths.

Good governance implies effective policy development that achieves desired outcomes. Agencies have a responsibility to meet the needs of the general public, as opposed to select groups or individuals, and should ensure that power-holders are held to the same standards as the general public. Good governance also implies transparency throughout the policy development process (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). It should be participatory in nature, allow for the equitable distribution of benefits and inclusive decision-making. Dinica (2016) prompts that 'whenever key governance elements are changed, new opportunities and threats emerge; existing unsustainable patterns of development may be reversed or accelerated, and new ones may emerge' (p. 3). Therefore, having local actors intrinsically involved in tourism development is essential to navigate changes to the tourism system and to provide resiliency within a destination.

The reality is that governance agencies are not always effective when developing policy, specifically in the realm of sustainable development. Economic challenges have reduced fiscal support for governing agencies, resulting in more emphasis on industry to lead development agendas (Coles et al., 2012) and find solutions to sustainability issues. As governing agencies transform the role of governance to a role of management and rely on local organisations to fine tune the tourism product, they become more distanced from on-the-ground tourism realities (Pechlaner et al., 2012). Management becomes an avenue to improve destination competitiveness where 'tourism destinations can be regarded as strategic business units' and 'universal solutions may be viewed with scepticism' (Pechlaner et al., 2012: 154-155).

The transformations that are occurring in tourism governance provide new avenues to explore destination competitiveness and the role of local actors in the development process. Hence, as local stakeholders become empowered, they have the ability to influence tourism development in a way that celebrates locality. In other words, they can move from being the object of tourism to the subject of tourism, sometimes known as community-based tourism (CBT) (Lekaota, 2015). CBT puts community at the centre of tourism development, and the way a community responds to tourism development can influence the way policy is implemented, thus, how tourism is managed.