

**Destination Management: A perspective article**

Journal:	<i>Tourism Review</i>
Manuscript ID	TR-07-2019-0311.R2
Manuscript Type:	Literature Review
Keywords:	Destination management, Planning, Policy making, Sustainable development, Technology

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Introduction

Destinations are focal points for tourist activity and thus for the study of tourism. They are, however, notoriously difficult to manage due to the complex systems of stakeholders they possess. Such complexity implies that destinations are driven by a wide range of forces in their internal and external environments. This can bring significant challenges to destinations in terms of their governance, funding, resource management and policy priorities. Destination managers have traditionally focused on the management of resources that enhance destination competitiveness which, in turn, optimizes the tourist experience. More recently, however, the need to achieve balanced economic growth that enriches the tourist experience, protects the natural environment and enhances the wellbeing of the host “resident” community has become an overarching challenge for destination managers. This has recently found new expression in the phenomenon of “overtourism” (Seraphin et al., 2018). Evidence from major European destinations such as Amsterdam, Edinburgh, Venice and Barcelona, highlights the need for destination managers to adopt a greater sense of balance and to ensure that the benefits of tourism are more equitably shared among all of its stakeholder groups. The aim of this perspective paper is to highlight the diversity and depth of the challenges at play in destination management, and in doing so to review the primary contributions in the field.

Past perspective 75 years of developments 1946-2020

As the focal point of the wider tourism system, destinations have been examined from various research angles (Leiper, 1979). Supply- and demand-side orientations are both commonplace. Laesser and Beritelli (2013) argued that from a supply perspective, destinations are essentially understood as local, inbound-oriented, “spatial constructs”, while from a demand perspective, destinations tend to be characterized as open, outbound-oriented, “business fields” (e.g. Vanhove, 2006). This raises the issue of borders, or boundaries, which has consistently been a challenge for those managing destinations (Pike, 2004). Such imperfections and complexities of destination management have been, and continue to be, addressed in practice through collaboration, particularly as more destinations have recognized the need to share their resources in order to deliver a seamless tourist experience (Fyall et al., 2012).

The earliest studies of destination management originated in the field of geography and have adopted a supply-side orientation, focusing primarily on resource use and planning. Gunn’s (1972) seminal work established the foundations for many studies that followed, such as Butler’s (1980) work on conceptualizing tourism and destination planning. Studies on the environmental impacts of destination development followed. Then came studies on the management of destinations in particular contexts, such as urban, coastal and rural destinations. Such studies highlighted the contextual dynamics of the “location” that pose particular challenges in destination management. More recently, the destination research agenda has become more multi-dimensional and complex, with a more nuanced inter- and multi-disciplinary approach in evidence. A case in point is the body of work in the domain of host wellbeing and quality of life (e.g. Kim et al., 2013). Indeed, the lack of focus on destination residents as a legitimate and salient stakeholder group is now recognized to have been a serious omission of past research. The benefits of managing destinations in a more “holistic” manner are thus increasingly being recognized (e.g. Holden, 2005). This more holistic approach to the management of destinations

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3 gained a strong foothold in the early 2000s, with it long being argued that the study of
4 destinations requires a systematic and inter-disciplinary approach. This has inspired more recent
5 research examining the relationships among destination stakeholders, in particular how together
6 their interests can be drawn together to manage the destination “experience” more effectively
7 (Dredge, 2006).
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10 The natural and cultural environments are integral to the success of most forms of tourism. The
11 management of these “resources” has thus been a critical component of destination management.
12 Studies have tended to focus on the environmental impacts of tourism, with many such studies
13 focusing on the development of an environmental agenda and encouraging destination stakeholders
14 to adopt and prioritize it. Many of the earlier studies focused on the use of carrying capacities to
15 control the growth and/or spread of tourism in a destination. While they have their critics,
16 constructs such as carrying capacity and limits of acceptable change nevertheless became central
17 to the study of destination management in the 2000s (e.g. Ahn et al. 2002). It is thus not surprising
18 that destination competitiveness has tended to focus on tangible “natural” resources rather than
19 intangible ones, such as human and social capital.
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22 **Future perspective 75 years 2020-2095**

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25 Looking to the future, four primary areas of research investigation are likely to flourish as evident
26 in Figure 1. First, within the broader domain of the environmental, economic and socio-cultural
27 sustainable management of destination resources, the first research area relates to **climate change**
28 and its implications for the future existence of destinations. It is widely accepted that destinations
29 will need to adopt a range of mitigation and adaptation strategies, many simply to survive (Atzori
30 et al., 2018). Climate change is problematic for destinations, particularly those often identified as
31 “victims” of its effects (Scott, 2011). Ironically, many such destinations can also be depicted as
32 “perpetrators” through their promotion of “bucket-list” or “last-chance” tourism (Eijgelaar et al.,
33 2010). Other researchers have sought to question the extent to which destinations could be held
34 responsible for the contribution of the airline industry to climate change (Becken & Patterson,
35 2006). Weaver (2011), meanwhile, suggests that a disproportionate emphasis on climate-change
36 studies may end up being counterproductive to tourism’s sustainability goals. Climate change
37 tends nevertheless to be portrayed as unequivocally the most pressing challenge for destinations,
38 with authors such as Scott (2011) arguing that it needs to be addressed, and urgently.
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42 ** Figure 1 about here
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51 Second, and related to climate change and the need for a more holistic management of
52 destinations, is the issue of **resilience**. The emergence of destination resilience studies has only
53 recently begun to change the direction of sustainability thinking in the destination context and the
54 scope of its coverage (Becken, 2013). However, with the exponential growth in the number and
55 impact of natural and man-made disasters in many parts of the world, the need to manage
56 destinations as part of a wider and more resilient ecosystem is becoming paramount (Lew, 2014).
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3 The third issue is that of **performance management** and the scrutiny of organizations that exist
4 to manage, and market, destinations more effectively and sustainably. With public funds under
5 constant threat, both in developed and developing destinations, “market intervention” and the
6 concept of “market failure” are now increasingly coming under the research spotlight with
7 destinations looking at alternative forms of governance, funding and organizational resilience to
8 enhance overall destination performance and more sustainable management of the destination
9 (Oklevik et al., 2019).
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12 The fourth research agenda is that of **technology**, which is already ubiquitous across the domains
13 of destination marketing and travel distribution. In the specific context of destination
14 management, technology and technological disruption are particularly influential in developing
15 the current focus on “smart” destinations (see for example Wang et al., 2013) and their
16 contribution to an improved destination experience both for tourists and residents (Neuhofer et
17 al., 2012). For many destinations, the advent of smart tourism (particularly in the context of
18 public transportation, visitor flow, augmented reality and the visitor experience, and visitor
19 safety) has enhanced, and will continue to enhance, their destination competitiveness and their
20 ability to sustain engagement with ever-more demanding tourists (Gretzel et al., 2015). Although
21 the advent of smart tourism is not new to the destination literature, the current research base is
22 limited, with its application and advancement set to grow exponentially in coming decades as
23 destinations come to terms with the availability, implementation and expectation of technology
24 in the development of competitive destinations (e.g. Buhalis et al., 2019). Destinations that fail
25 to adequately prepare, effectively manage, and leverage maximum benefit from their
26 technological resource base (as well as their social and human capital required to underpin such
27 developments), are likely to lose competitiveness as a place to visit as well to live and work
28 (Boes et al., 2016). Technology, and its overall contribution to the future development of
29 destination competitiveness, merely reinforces the call for a more holistic approach to the
30 management of destinations and for destination managers to demonstrate a greater sense of
31 balance so the benefits of tourism truly are more equitably shared among all of its salient
32 stakeholder groups.
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37 **Conclusions**

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40 The study of destinations is an area of active research interest, with the many challenges that arise
41 from within and outside of destinations offering considerable food for thought with respect to their
42 longevity as viable, sustainable and competitive places for tourists to visit. For the future, the need
43 to view destinations as part of a wider system is paramount, implying the need to include debates on
44 urban planning, economic inequality, transportation and housing, as well as the omnipresence of all
45 things “smart”. Such debates need to incorporate both tourists and resident communities as the
46 wellbeing and quality of life of both groups is under threat in many destinations, particularly those
47 with globally important heritage and culture, where the term “overtourism” is increasingly heard.
48 Integrated and holistic forms of destination management are thus the way forward, with the
49 exponential growth of technology, as well as the need to manage the exchange of knowledge and
50 data at the destination level, critical to the sustainability of the competitive destination and
51 maximization of the tourist experience.
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4 **Figure 1: Destination management: Future**
5 **perspectives**
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