
Introduction to the Special Issue

Managing Experiential Co-creations in Cooperative Networks – Learnings from Tourism

Thomas Bieger and Christian Laesser

Abstract: Tourism is a multidimensional phenomenon that not only represents an important global economic sector, but also influences geographical patterns, social communities, regional economic networks, and political relations. Due to the comprehensive nature and integrative character of the tourism sector, there have always been efforts to analyze this object of investigation based on systemic and cross-disciplinary approaches. One of the main properties of tourism services is the dependence on co-creation, because tourism products consist of various service elements delivered by independent companies and even customers. This special issue features contributions that cover different perspectives on the coordination of the tourism service chain. It also contains articles dealing with important resources with public good character for tourism company networks and destinations such as data and quality of labor markets. Second homes open access to important resources for destinations. The different roles of customers as co-producers, customers, and even investors is a topic covered in the last contribution.

Keywords: tourism, tourism management, service management, networks, customer integration, cooperation, service chain

Deutscher Titel: Management erlebnisorientierter Co-Kreationen in kooperativen Netzwerken – Learnings aus dem Tourismus

Zusammenfassung: *Tourismus ist ein multidimensionales Phänomen, das nicht nur einen wichtigen globalen Wirtschaftssektor darstellt, sondern auch geografische Muster, soziale Gemeinschaften, regionale Wirtschaftsnetzwerke und politische Beziehungen beeinflusst. Aufgrund der umfassenden Natur und des integrativen Charakters des Tourismussektors gab es schon immer Bestrebungen, diesen Untersuchungsgegenstand auf der Grundlage systemischer und disziplinübergreifender Ansätze zu analysieren. Eine der Hauptmerkmale touristischer Dienstleistungen ist die Abhängigkeit von Co-Kreationen, denn touristische Produkte bestehen aus verschiedenen Dienstleistungselementen, die von unabhängigen Unternehmen zusammen mit Kunden erbracht werden. Diese Sonderausgabe enthält Beiträge, die verschiedene Perspektiven auf die Koordination der touristischen Dienstleistungskette abdecken. Es enthält auch Artikel, die sich mit wichtigen Ressourcen mit öffentlichem Gut-Charakter für touristische Unternehmensnetzwerke und Destinationen befassen, wie z.B. Daten und Qualität von Arbeitsmärkten. Zweitwohnungen eröffnen den Zugang zu wichtigen Ressourcen für Destinationen. Die unterschiedlichen Rollen von*

Kunden als Koproduzenten, Kunden und sogar Investoren sind ein Thema, das ebenfalls behandelt wird.

Stichworte: *Tourismus, Tourismusmanagement, Dienstleistungsmanagement, Netzwerke, Kundenintegration, Kooperation, Dienstleistungskette*

Research in Tourism Management is an interesting field of industry related research – quasi a “branch science”. However due to the above-mentioned properties of tourism services and tourism products it is in addition an interesting field to gain insights relevant for disciplinary research like services management, network management or among other topics strategic cooperation management.

Tourism – a multidimensional phenomenon requiring interdisciplinary research

This Special Issue of *Die Unternehmung* deals with managerial issues related to tourism, where tourism is defined as the totality of all phenomena and relationships associated with individuals leaving the usual center of their life – place of work and residence – and spending time at a different location (*Inskeep 1991; Kaspar 1998; World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] 2020*).

Tourism can be operationalized using different criteria based mainly on mobility (*Bieler 2010*). Travel and tourism demand are the results of economic, sociological, and technical conditions and developments. The first “tourists” in Europe were traders (economic reasons), then pilgrims (religion), followed by politicians and warriors (social/cultural) (*Kaspar 1998; Müller 2008*). Tourism destinations are not only economic entities; they are rooted in natural and cultural resources. Tourism activities influence geographical patterns, social communities, regional economic networks and political relations (for example, the opening of borders for tourism is seen as an instrument for creating mutual understanding and relations between different countries and cultures (*Kaspar 1996; Bieler 2010*)). Tourism therefore is not only an economic activity and industry, but also as a multidimensional phenomenon that has gained importance with the emergence of mass travel in the twentieth century. Consequently, *Echtner and Jamal (1997: 868)* note “the study of tourism subsequently evolved during the twentieth century and is currently housed within a diverse range of disciplines”.

In Switzerland, there are still two centers for tourism research at university level that were established in 1942 in order to support the different tourism-related industries after World War II: the former Institute of Tourism and Transport at the University of St. Gallen and the former Institute for Tourism at the University of Bern; both established in 1942. Since its origins in Germany in the early twentieth century, tourism research has been embedded in different disciplines such as geography, sociology, the regional economy, engineering, and management.

Due to the phenomenological setting of the object of investigation, there have always been efforts using systemic and cross-disciplinary approaches to contribute to its analysis/understanding and development of concepts for practice. Today, tourism research is a well-established field of scientific research – and training. In the German-speaking countries, however, the centers of tourism research are increasingly shifting from the universities to the universities of applied sciences, with a tendency to focus on application-oriented research at the expense of foundational research. Internationally, the picture is different: various universities, including top universities, continue to maintain (or even build) tour-

ism and hospitality research centers. However, the increasing convergence between these two types or levels of tertiary educational institutions (particularly at the international level) makes this distinction increasingly irrelevant.

Today, the scientific community is organized in a multitude of global and regional associations, and, with more than 250 journals, has rich outlet options for its research. The oldest scientific organization, AIEST; established in 1951, and the oldest scientific journal, *Tourism Review*, established in 1945, were both established by two scholars from the University of St. Gallen and Bern: Walter Hunziker and Kurt Krapf respectively.

There has been an ongoing discussion about the notion that tourism was potentially even a discipline in its own right. It is heavily disputed whether tourism research can be considered as an independent scientific discipline (*Echtner/Jamal 1997; Tribe 1997* or *Leiper 2000* who coined the phrase in an article “the indiscipline of tourism”). However, tourism research lacks the properties of an independent scientific discipline like a dominant paradigm, a consistent set of theories, or a unique methodology – even as some researchers consider systems theory, which was widely applied in tourism research (*Krippendorf et al. 1989; Kaspar 1996; Bieger 2010*), as kind of dominant methodological framework. Today there is a broad consensus that tourism can be considered an interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary field of research, with research as one of the disciplinary contributors.

Tourism and management research – research for and research by the example of tourism

From its early days, tourism research in the discipline of management intended to support practice, managers of tourism companies and actors in politics and NGOs in charge of development of tourism, tourism organizations, or touristic regions (*Hunziker/Krapf 1942*). This research has been predominantly grouped around different types of tourism-related industries, including, for instance, accommodation, transport (from air transport to cable cars), special leisure-related services such as “adventure” or theme parks, destination management, as well as natural parks management. Researchers stressed early on that tourism products and production are subject to special requirements and conditions which vary in their importance between different sub-branches and require special management practices. Consequently, an impressive number of textbooks are focusing on these “special industry managements” such as the management of ski resorts, management of theme parks, and the like.

Tourism products are service products. Therefore, traditional concepts of service management apply. Among those, the following are of utmost importance:

- Perishability – services cannot be stored. A hotel night that is not sold is lost. This leads to special requirements in capacity and demand management including concepts of dynamic pricing (*Bieger 2007; Lehmann 1996*).
- The uno actu principle (*Bieger 2007; Lehmann 1996*) – the importance of personal contacts. This is of special importance, for instance, with cultural tourism, where cultural exchange is required or adventure products where guiding and instructions are needed.
- Importance of external factor (*Bruhn/Hadwich 2012*) and customer coproduction – customers being part of the product or co-customers being part of the experience. This is of special importance in many tourism concepts like club hotels (for the complete

list of conditions of services management refer to *Bieger 2007; Bruhn/Hadwich 2012; Lemon/Verhoef 2016*.

In addition, tourism products and production are subject to important special conditions such as:

- Tourism products are bundled services delivered by independent suppliers, including companies (for example, providing hospitality or transport services), governmental organizations (providing infrastructure or visa services), but also not-for-profit associations or clubs (for example, golf clubs, ski schools). There is an explicit or implicit cooperation needed along customer-specific (and often customer-activated) service networks (“virtuelles Dienstleistungsunternehmen” in *Bieger/Beritelli 2006; Bieger/Beritelli 2013*).
- As a consequence, tourism demand is a function of complex multi-round decisions on different service elements by customers living in other countries and cultures and guests who consume (meaning, “co-produce” or “co-create”) in an environment outside their normal sphere of life. Therefore, customers are exposed to specific risks (for example, information asymmetry, high involvement due to the irreversibility of decisions). Therefore, research in tourism demand and customer decision making has a strong tradition (*Laesser et al. 2019*).
- In addition, tourism products rely on resources such as local culture or nature and public infrastructures such as inner-city squares. Tourism affects these resources. Critical attitudes of the local population and other stakeholders can occur (see the discussion about “overtourism” in, e.g., *Weber et al. 2019*). Tourism management therefore always includes a political dimension and the implementation of business strategies often includes elements of political management (*Haedrich et al. 1998; Pichler et al. 2000; Pechlaner 2003*).

Regarding management science, the first two properties are of major interest. They are the subject of extensive research and literature, as well as a plethora of scientific journals in tourism management research. Tourism management research has developed concepts for practitioners, and has also laid the foundation to advance management research in general, as illustrated by following examples:

- Research in cooperation, virtual firms, cluster, and, most recently business ecosystems can draw from tourism as a role model. Tourism research and practice can also provide valuable indications to configure complex inter-organizational customer-centered service systems, including logistical and informational layers (*Frey 2002*). Similar systems today are required in other service contexts, from health services to construction.
- Research in complex consumer decisions can also draw from consumer behavior research in tourism. For instance, customer decisions in tourism are multidimensional. They are, in fact, portfolio decisions, and they occur very often in groups, are influenced by reference groups, and are subject to risk – due to lack of familiarity with the decision object. Market research has therefore always been an important pillar of tourism research. Many new methods, such as IT-based customer tracking, have been introduced first in the field of tourism.
- Because of the nature of tourism as an information and distance business, tourism has always been a first- and fast-adopter of new communication and information technolo-

gies. Examples include the early use of telegraphs right from the start of modern tours and tour operating, the early implementation of e-commerce in airline ticketing as well as the latest development of platforms like Airbnb or Uber (Bieger/Beritelli 2018).

In addition, the following topics to which tourism research has contributed are worth mentioning:

- concepts of growth (qualitative growth, sustainable growth);
- application of systems analysis;
- regional clusters and their development.

Contributions to this special edition

The aim of this special issue is to open a window for tourism research whose results have the potential to be transferred to/ are applicable in other areas of management research. As mentioned earlier, one of the main properties of tourism services and the production of tourism products is the dependence on co-creation/co-production. Tourism products consist of various service elements delivered by independent companies and public entities such as communities. The integration of customer-defined and activated service chains out of service networks is the core of all tourism products (see Bieger 2010 for destination level; or Bieger/Beritelli 2006, who see the tourism industry as a virtual service company). Interestingly, all models of integrated tourism delivery (for example integrated tour operation, airlines operating hotel chains) have shown problems, especially in times of disruption and economic crises. Their resilience seems to be limited, as early examples (for example, the Safari Club in Switzerland) and late ones (the bankruptcy of Thomas Cook) seem to suggest.

The coordination of tourism services is important for the success of the tourism product, the role of co-production, and its coordination is crucial (Buhalis/O'Conner 2005). Coordination of the co-creation of tourism services and the individual tourism service chain can be taken over by distributors and distributing systems (e.g. tour operating). It can be organized by the destinations. Or travels can be self-organized by the customers by individual bookings of the different services such as air travel or hotels. Research in customer behavior and buying decision is a strong field of tourism research and the properties there are also mainly linked to the nature of the tourism product, the need of integration of co-products.

This special issue features contributions that cover all three perspectives on the coordination of the tourism service chain. It also contains articles dealing with important resources with public good character for tourism company networks and destinations such as data and quality of labor markets. The behavior of second home owners constitutes an interesting field, where the different roles of customers as co-producers, customers, and even investors comes together, and is a topic covered in the last contribution.

a) Coordination of the tourism service chain from three perspectives

The contributions of Stephan Bingemer and Ralf Vogler (“Evolution of ICT in Airline Distribution – Perspective on co-creation with IATA NCD and One Order”) investigates the perspectives of new distribution standards as an enabler of improvements in coordination of the co-creation role. It investigates the effects of new standards in distribution

on the co-creation of (network) services based on disruptive IT technologies using the example of the aviation industry. As mentioned, tourism and aviation had been among the first movers in adopting IT systems and later online systems (B2C) (Reinhold *et al.* 2020). The drivers include the need to bridge geographical and time boundaries as well as the need to manage limited capacities. Standardization of services (such as the standard hotel room) as well as industry regulation (such as the IATA standards) were enablers of the trends. In their extensive literature review the authors identify five categories of topics related to distribution systems: personalized dynamic pricing, personalized offer creation, distribution concepts and co-creation perspectives. With the latest evolution in airline distributions based on the IATA NDC (new distribution capabilities) standard the authors see new ways to co-create experiences along and across the tourism value chain.

The contribution of *Nanchen et al.* (2020) (“Improving the Orchestration Resilience of a Smart Integrated Tourism Destination – A Case Study in the Swiss Alps”) investigates the role of tourism destinations as integrators of tourism services. Tourism destinations can be differentiated according to the degree of centralization of coordination of the co-creation with company on the one hand and community type of destinations on the other hand as the extremes (*Bieger et al.* 2011). Based on the case study of Swisspeak Resorts, the authors explore the role and effect of a tourism e-market place to create an integrated customer experience in a community type of destination. They propose that a company-type of destination should be created by virtual, IT-supported integration. The study shows that “digital applications... can support the integration of a destination, it is not sufficient to ensure the integration is really functioning and perceived as well by customers.” For a truly integrated customer experience digital trust seems to be of importance.

Laesser and Bieger focus on the role of the customer as the coordinator of their services. They show the limitations of traditional customer behavior theory to explain the complex behavior of tourists on a self-defined customer journey. Most importantly, the interdependence of the various decisions needed to define an individualized service chain partly create an overlap of decision and consumption as well as the co-decision needed. This results in multi-round dynamic decision systems of higher complexity (also because travels very often are conducted in groups and various forms of group decision making takes place) than traditional decision models used in customer decision research imply. Qualitative methods such as ethnography or observation studies therefore play an important role in travel research.

b) Central resources for tourism value networks

There are different levels of competitions in destinations, mainly due to the fragmented structure of the tourism products with many independent service providers. First, there is competition between different providers of the same type of services such as accommodation or adventure. All the service providers in a destination are forming the “virtual company” destination and are part of the destination value network (“Wertschöpfungssysteme” in *Rüegg-Stürm/Grand* 2019). Together they are contributing to the attraction of a destination which itself is in competition with others. A set of destination that forms, for instance, a grand tour, defines the attraction of a country or a region which in itself is in competition with others.

On each level of tourism services (company, destination, or national) there is a combination of competition and cooperation between the different elements of the network. Cooperation is required to generate the joint resources needed to compete at destination or country level. Such resources are, among others, (“Struktur der touristischen Leistung” in *Kaspar 1996*) complementing services and infrastructures (common infrastructure such as transport or tourism-specific infrastructure such as tourism information systems or sport stadiums), intangibles like a common quality standards, reputation, and brand, but also data or a joint labor market. These resources can be considered as public or at least club goods. Destinations have, since the emergence of the first destination management organization in St. Moritz in 1864, for roughly 150 years defined a set of institutions and instruments to cope with the challenge of managing these public goods (*Bieger/Beritelli 2013*). Important elements include institutional arrangements such as tourism boards and association with their role in destination governance or financing mechanism such as tourism taxes to finance tourism marketing or information services (*Pechlaner 2003*).

As mentioned earlier, tourism was one of the first industries to use the internet for information and booking, mostly since it is an information and distance “business”. With the emergence of global platforms not only for services such as accommodation or transport, but also for destinations tourism services such as museum tickets and entrance slots (e.g. “getyourguide”), new actors have entered the playing field. There is a certain tension on a global scale between the role of service providers in the destinations and the global platforms related to margins and price autonomy, and data ownership. The contribution of *Geyer et al.* investigates the imbalance of individual local service providers such as hotels or transport companies compared to global platforms. The authors suggest cooperation on a regional level to allow a common use of data by service providers in within the destination. It discusses the cultural, legal, organizational, and technical issues linked to such a cooperation.

The contribution of *Bohne* investigates a specific form of public good, the quality of the industry or destination labor force its related labor market. In a fragmented SME industry, the single company has an interest in hiring specifically trained workforce. The incentives to invest in a broader or higher training is limited. Because of the size of the companies, the opportunities of internal promotion and job enrichment is limited. The benefits of additional training therefore are very often ramped up by competitors, perhaps even other industries (see the discussion of the cross-industry mobility of workforce in *Bieger et al. 2005*). Together, all companies in a destination or sector have an interest in a flexible and well-trained workforce and an attractive, functioning labor market. For this reason, one finds today for the different branches of the tourism industry a versatile offer of educations and trainings. Tourism colleges, hotel schools and specialized universities of applied science (such as the renowned Ecole Hotelier in Lausanne) are examples. *Bohne* discusses ten different forms of cooperation between industry and institutions of higher education in the hotel sector.

c) The integrated role of customers

Customers play an important role in all service products as “the external factor” and co-producer. In addition, customers design their individual tourism service chain from a value network, and through this play an important role as coordinator. Tourism customers can also have the role of co-owners and investors, for example, as owners of second homes.

Second homes are an important element of most destination concepts, and account, for example in Switzerland, for large chunks of the accommodation capacity. Revenues from selling second homes is an important value-capturing mechanism of investments in destination attractiveness (for business models and value capturing, see *Bieger/Liebrich* 2002). For second home owners their second home and the link to the destination also is an important element of their self-concept (*Weinert* 2010). At the same time, destinations having important celebrities as locked-in guests in the form of second home owners may be an important element of their brand system. Altogether, second home owners are an important example of the overall destination system.

Clumbies in his contribution compares how two Swiss destinations deal with the engagement of second home owners. As second home owners combine the three roles of customer, co-producer, and investor, the study analyzes antecedents and consequences of supplier-induced engagement for a company-type and a community-type destination. The resulting model identifies seven antecedents and seven consequences of engagement for the destination.

Conclusion

Managing tourism services requires the ability to manage a multilayer value network not only of companies and public institutions, but also many resources with the character of public goods and links to customer networks. There are some similarities with other services based on similar value creation systems, such as the health sector or the construction industry. Conclusions of tourism management research therefore has important external validity for other industries. Yet hardly any other industries involve so many different types of resources (such as nature or culture as part of the tourism products) or the involvement of customers and co-customers. Therefore, research in tourism is a fascinating research object in management research. It has an important role in supporting management facing complex realities in the industry. And it is a promising field for developing and applying new concepts of network management, cooperation management, complex customer decision models of importance to other fields.

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Thomas Bieger, Prof. Dr. rer. pol., is Full Professor of Management with a special focus on the Tourist Industry and Director of the Institute for Systemic Management and Public Governance – Research Center for Tourism and Transport

Address: IMP-HSG, University of St. Gallen, Dufourstrasse 40a, CH-9000 St. Gallen,
Phone: +41(71)224–2525, E-Mail: thomas.bieger@unisg.ch

Christian Laesser, Prof. Dr. oec., is Associate Professor for Tourism and Service Management and Director of the Institute for Systemic Management and Public Governance at the University of St. Gallen – Research Center for Tourism and Transport

Address: IMP-HSG, University of St. Gallen, Dufourstrasse 40a, CH-9000 St. Gallen,
Phone: +41(71)224–2525, E-Mail: christian.laesser@unisg.ch