

Regional Tourism Cooperation

Factors influencing the performance of regional tourism cooperation in China

Summary

Tourism cooperation at a Chinese regional level is a new phenomenon that has received much governmental and scholarly attention in recent years. This thesis examines regional tourism cooperation in China from a governance perspective. The research objective was formulated as *identifying factors in international literature to explain the Chinese situation: identify a set of factors of particular importance for the effectiveness of regional tourism cooperation in China.*

A theoretical framework is formulated, with eight factors, which are identified in international governance and tourism literature and are of particular importance for the effectiveness of regional tourism cooperation in China. The first four factors (political-economic features of tourism, commitment, leadership and motives) are related to the pre-cooperation process. We argue that practitioners of cooperation can face failure if they ignore these four factors while engaging immediately in cooperation. The last four factors (representation of stakeholders, involvement mechanisms, areas of cooperation and implementation structure) are related to the during-cooperation process. We argued that during cooperation, these four factors should be kept in mind to secure effective performance of regional tourism cooperation in China. In combination, we consider the above-mentioned eight factors as the most important factors influencing the effectiveness of regional tourism cooperation in China. Furthermore, the collective actions of these eight factors lead either to positive or negative cooperative outputs, such as the increase or decrease in the number of regional tourists.

The theoretical framework was applied to three typical cases of tourism cooperation in the Yangtze River Delta Region: the Tourism City Summit of the Yangtze River Delta region, the Zhedongnan Tourism Alliance, and the projects catalysed by the Shanghai World EXPO 2010, each reflecting one prominent regional tourism cooperative modality in China (e.g. the long-term conference, long-term alliance and short-term

project modalities). The empirical studies modified the eight factors identified in the literature with new explanations in the Chinese context. The thesis shows that these eight factors with the ‘new explanations’ are essential to the effectiveness of regional tourism cooperation in China, including: 1) the consistency between the goal of cooperation and the operational capacity or the political communication power of involved tourism bureaus; 2) more detailed actual commitment of primary stakeholders’ engagement; 3) a mechanism to secure the attendant equality of less-power primary stakeholders to access the cooperative resources; 4) collective motives of cooperation to be more quantitative, short-term response, and oriented to optimize the individual interests; 5) the representation of small or medium-sized travel agencies, economic chains or single hotels, and regional based tourism attractions (if they are defined by the cooperation as the primary stakeholders) in the decision-making process; 6) the consultative mechanism to incorporate opinions of secondary stakeholders into those of primary stakeholders in the decision-making process; 7) more priorities of cooperation, which incorporate clear action plans and explicit task descriptions; and 8) a stable attendance record of stakeholders, an institutionalized daily operational office, more qualitative indicators to evaluate the performance of cooperation, and a stable internal funding mechanism to secure the daily operations.

The study is based on the Chinese context, which may limit its application to the case studies outside China. Importantly, however, this does not imply that the generalization and application of this research is problematic. The study can trigger research initiatives of other academics if their future studies require the incorporation of theories in a local context. In addition, the research findings are not rigidly confined to the tourism sector. It may be also applicable to other sectors concerning public-private partnerships at different spatial levels.

In the future more studies weighing the importance of the identified factors for the effectiveness of regional tourism cooperation in China can be expected. The relevance of other factors such as social, psychological and communication factors to the effectiveness of regional tourism cooperation in China may also be identified; or tests whether the current theoretical framework developed based on experiences in China would also work in Europe and other developed countries.