Chapter 16

Tourist Cooperation in Mountain Destinations: Concepts, Positions, and Challenges in the Serra da Estrela Natural Park

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ABSTRACT

The business collaboration assumes several types and varies according to the invested resources and the level of commitment of the partners. The stimulus to collaboration lies in the pressures of globalization and increased competitiveness, supported by the development of new communication and information technologies. Tourism is a highly globalized and competitive sector, with specificities and high level of complexity of markets and tourist destinations. The collaboration promotes a strategic and organizational alignment between partners, which in tourism is decisive for the qualification of the destination and its sustainability. In the Serra da Estrela destination, the development of collaborative relationships is valued as a resource for companies and territories as well as a source of competitive advantages. The sharing of knowledge and experience, the association of corporate images, and the willingness to absorb new methods are considered favorable, but they present problems of formalization and communication, which require correction and coordination.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an economic activity where highly collaborative strategies can increase productivity and competitiveness. The interdependence between services and the need to interconnect the various tourist supply components to respond to consumer demands creates a favourable environment for the development of relationships between organisations (private and public) that promote the sharing of activities, resources and services. Along with this interconnection, the possibility for sharing and cooperation

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allows produce development, service innovation and cost reduction that adjusts to demand, increasing customer satisfaction, expanding demand and improving business sustainability.

The technological, cultural and social changes of the last decades have created relevant changes in business organisation and the types of competition between companies. The economic and social contexts in which companies develop their activities have undergone profound changes, with more internationalisation, greater demands on the sophistication of tourism products and services to experience. The collaboration established within a destination induces important changes in the participants – companies, associations, administration, among others – altering perceptions about competition, forms of collaboration and the channels and means to strengthen the services provided.

Interorganisational networks seek, through cooperation, to obtain greater competitiveness without substantially increasing costs, equating different organisational models or changing capacity to adjust to changes in the economic environment and the uncertainties of demand that motivate business collaboration. Economic instability and increasing tourist demands, along with global competition, have encouraged operators to interact with their competitors, suppliers and customers to achieve competitive advantage and ensure economic sustainability.

In this context, cooperation networks are formed to reduce uncertainty and risk by sharing information, coordination and cooperation, while ultimately achieving the maximisation of individual skills when creating integrated and efficient solutions to customer needs.

This study analyses and evaluates the processes of collaboration in the tourism sector in Serra da Estrela, which is geographically supported by the six municipalities that make up the natural park (PNSE), and investigates the strategies and activities that are perceived and desired by tourists. This study seeks to develop guidelines that promote territorial development and sustainability strategies given the constraints revealed for the destination and the necessary sustainable management that cultural and social values tend to require.

The conditions and context costs of mountain destinations generate more collaborative approaches because these efforts are being carried out in territories where there are higher economic costs and the demand changes throughout the year. This suggests the development of differentiated strategies to diversify the tourist products offered, fostering approximations and forms of sustainable cooperation for businesses.

These medium-mountain territories, marked by an agro-pastoral way of life that is currently in transformation, have leveraged tourism, and the consequences have affected the organisation of the territory, its strategies of public management and collaboration between companies. Territorial reorganisation and tourism show resilience to demographic losses, the dismantling of the traditional economy and the development of ‘new’ markets, a process that tends to differentiate, fragment and become less homogeneous, less predictable and more likely to promote the rediscovery of ecocultural values.

At present, cooperation must gain new ecocultural dimensions, promoting collective strategies to enhance the territory, conserve natural resources, support new and growing markets, defend culture and support the identities associated with specific ways of life and greater territorial cohesion.
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