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Critical Tourism Studies 2015

10 years CTS: Reflections on the road less travelled and the journey ahead

Tourism and its potential as a social force

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Values of tourism destinations “in the middle of nowhere”

The value discussions and value choices are a significant part of the tourism development, as well in the aims of sustainable and responsible tourism as the development action of the tourism business. Nowadays, responsibility is not only one of the main values of our society, but it has also become one of the main tourism trends in the 21st century. The general aim of responsible tourism is stated in Cape Town Declaration (2002): "Making better places for people to live and better places for people to visit." One way to make a difference between the concepts of sustainability and responsibility is that sustainable society is the aim and responsibility is the process and tool to achieve the aim (Goodwin 2011; Veijola et al. 2013). This definition connect responsible tourism to all social activities. Responsibility in society and tourism can be presented through five dimensions: social, cultural, economic, ecologic and political. Responsibility should see as a lens and tool to develop more sustainable tourism. (Veijola, Edelheim & Ilola 2013.)

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In regional development, tourism is often seen as a mechanism for the economic survival of peripheral areas (Nash & Martin 2003; Knowd 2000) and this is just the main aim of development policy implemented both at the national and regional level in Finland. Finnish Lapland has adopted a region-oriented development approach, and fell resorts are seen as the engines for this development. It is argued in the Lapland Tourism strategies that channeling public support to the resorts is the most effective way to enhance tourism. (Lapland tourism strategy 2015.)

Tourism policy and planning is based on figures and numbers; tourism developers and decision-makers need numbers for decision making. Different tourism economic indicators (overnights, employment and direct tourism income) indicate a steady growth in tourism in Lapland. However, a lot of work is still required for spreading the benefits of resort-oriented tourism. According to Pekka Kauppila (2004), the positive effects have not extended into the areas surrounding the resorts. Despite the challenges, remote communities consistently express a desire for better economic conditions and this desire drives communities into tourism development (Park & Stakowski 2009 914). This fact reinforce the perspective that there is a need for more reflexive approaches to examine the notion and understanding of value(s) in relation to tourism development.

In our study, we highlight the discussions on the values of tourism in relation to the economic, social and cultural aspect of responsible tourism. Our research question is: what do numbers tell about a destination in relation to the economic, social and cultural aspects of responsible tourism. We examine the values of tourism development in a destination by focusing on the economic, social and cultural responsibility of tourism. We are especially interested in critically examining how the tourism numbers are used in guiding decision making processes and practices and how the numbers are connected to local community.

Theoretical and methodological approach

Due to constant changes in the world, public and academic discussions of values are lively nowadays. In the literature review of tourism research, studies were categorized according to research approaches: the main approaches were behavioral, economical and socio-cultural. In the behavioral category, which was the most popular approach, consumer behavior was the main theme and perceived value the most used way to conceptualize value. (García-Rosell et al. 2014). According to the review, on the one hand the concept of value can be left without meaning (García-Rosell et al. 2014). Thus, it can be described even as an empty signifier (see Chandler 2003 74-78). On the other hand, the conceptualization of value can be strongly present in studies even if it has not been explicitly mentioned as a key concept.

In public discussion and in the development context, value or values of tourism are often presented in numbers. Decision-makers in the municipalities, regional councils and the national level request to see tourism development to be presented in numbers, statistics and diagrams. They are interested in, for instance, number of overnights and employees, expenditures, and investment possibilities as well as regional tourism income, employment and tax revenue. Even though numbers are important tool for illustrating tourism development it is challenging to see the values behind numbers. For instance, the infograph of tourism numbers in Lapland (MTI 2013) was produced in the development project 'Foresight as a Competitive Advantage for Tourism in Lapland' in order to help regional tourism actors to tell about the volume and impact of tourism in Finnish Lapland. The infograph illustrates e.g. the growth of tourism industry in Lapland with the help of numbers of revenue of tourism and tourism employment. During this work, several difficulties were faced concerning what and how numbers can be compared with each other so that they provide reliable information and tell something about the real impact of tourism.

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We place value discussions in relation to regional development and a remote tourism destination called Salla in particular. The general problem can be seen as local by contextualizing it to a certain time, place and community. There are global principles for responsible tourism but the local contexts give the frame to define them (Goodwin 2011; Leslie 2012). Thus, we chose case study as our research strategy (Yin 2009). Our empirical data consists of regional strategies (tourism, brand and municipality strategies), other municipal policy documents, previous tourism researches done in the region, and some thematic interviews. Data was chosen in order to take into account different voices and insights to regional development. Different development approaches were found through thematic content analysis. Then we use a thick description of a research object with versatile data and aiming to answer the questions of how and why (Geertz 1973). The analytical transfer of theoretical propositions to other objects or phenomena integrates findings with existent literature and describes how related objects are similar.

Case Salla: destination in the middle of nowhere

The municipality of Salla is located in Finnish Lapland nearby the Russian border about 150 kilometers to the east of the town of Rovaniemi. During the last decades, services have replaced agriculture and forestry as the most important livelihood: 75 percent of workings work in the service sector nowadays. Salla municipality strategy guides the development of the sparsely populated municipality, 4165 inhabitants of Salla are evenly distributed over the municipality. The vision is to be an individual and open-minded municipality which enhances the well-being of residents, supports local entrepreneurship and promotes the enjoyment of tourists. (Salla Municipality Strategy 2015.)

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Although, Salla is one of the smallest ski resorts situated in Finnish Lapland, it has long traditions in tourism: the first slalom competition was held 70 years ago and the official opening to Salla Tourism center was in 1965 (Salla tourism web pages) In 2014, there were about 95 000 registered overnights in Salla (Regional Council of Lapland) and according to Salla Tourism Strategy the aim is to increase not only registered overnights, but also tourism income, tax revenues and customer satisfaction in the future. The strategy lists also which actions and infrastructure are needed to achieve the growth in tourism. (Salla Tourism Strategy 2020.)

For the last years, intense place branding and image marketing projects have been taking place in Salla. The destination has, for instance, been very successful in turning challenges such as remoteness and seasonality into opportunities. Salla's slogan "in the middle of nowhere" and the commercialization of off-season time periods – e.g. Salla's event "nothings happens week" – are good examples of this. Contrary to the municipality and tourism strategies, the brand strategy is available only for local actors and guides the development of tourism and the municipality both. The slogan is widely utilized in communication acts at the municipality level. With the brand strategy, the municipality and tourism entrepreneurs of Salla have put into practice a very unique and value-based development strategy for developing and promoting Salla as a tourism destination.

Discussion

In Salla, the value of tourism is presented in both tourism strategy and municipality strategy but in totally different ways. While the tourism strategy portray the value of tourism mainly in numbers, the municipality strategy presents the value of tourism in terms of general wellbeing. When analyzing strategies with the dimensions of responsibility, we can see that in the context of social responsibility different roles are given to tourism. In municipality strategy tourism means comprehensive well-being and caring for all, especially for local residents, both

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economically and socio-culturally ways. Instead in the tourism strategy, tourism means wellbeing for tourists, quality and tourist's experiences that can be presented in numbers.

Culturally responsible tourism respects the local culture and values of local people and communities and provides meaningful tourism experience through interaction with local people.

Socially responsible tourism means that negative impacts of tourism on local communities and regions are minimized and tourism will provide better well-being for locals and tourists.

(Goodwin 2011; Veijola et al. 2013.) When considering cultural responsibility in the municipality strategy, tourism is understood as a way to sustain independency of the municipality and enhance local culture. In the tourism strategy, tourism is seen as way to create meaningful tourism experiences, even though they talk about only numbers and numbers related to those issues which create possibilities to create the meaningful experiences and not experiences as such.

Economically responsible tourism business is both profitable and respectful of other livelihoods (Goodwin 2011; Veijola et al. 2013). From the perspective of economic responsibility tourism is seen as livelihood and vitality in municipality strategy. In the tourism strategy, tourism is seen mainly as a way to increase the economic welfare of tourism entrepreneurs and its progressive growth is measured with registered overnights, tourism income, tourism tax revenues, the number of beds. In thematic interviews these numbers get a meaning of general well-being of society and regional development

Despite the tourism stakeholders' choice to emphasize values in the tourism brand, the key figures of economic growth are strongly guiding strategic development work. So, the value of tourism is presented in the tourism strategy mainly in numbers, while marketing actions and the municipality strategy extends the conceptualizing of value beyond numbers. Thus, Salla's

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municipality strategy and marketing actions carry a broader value definition of tourism than its tourism strategy created by the industry itself. This challenges to think about the responsibility inside tourism business and industry.

Conclusion

In our study, we explored the world and values behind the numbers used to describe tourism. The study was based first on our assumption that values of tourism are not based only on numbers, and second on our observation that the concept of value can be use in tourism research even as an empty signifier. In this paper, we have discussed tourism numerical indicators, especially related to growth and progressive development, and their connections to the value discussions in regional development. Our aim was to look beyond the numbers to illustrate what the numbers represent - or fail to represent.

In our study, the value of tourism phenomenon was illustrated by examining the municipality and tourism strategy of in Salla. If it was able to read numbers contextually, then the problem of seeing the values beyond the numbers would not occur. In other words, we do not deny the value of numbers in tourism but we want to challenge the value of numbers as such and encourage people to interpret numbers more carefully. This will then decrease misunderstandings and promote better decision-making and actions. The tourism strategy used mainly “traditional” tourism figures in argumentation, whereas value-based developing strategy was realized in marketing actions. The observation of having values present in marketing actions and regional developers speech supports the findings of the literature review: values are implicit present even if they are not explicitly addressed.

Our research offers a contribution to the discussion of values in tourism research and regional development. Our approach offers an alternative to study the value or values of tourism behind

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the numbers. Thus, our study brings out especially the role of responsible tourism in regional development. In future research, we will focus more deeply on the political responsibility.

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