Why stakeholders’ perceptions matter in tourism sustainable development and evolution?
An exploratory study using Delphi technique

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1. **Background:** Role of stakeholders in tourism destination evolution

2. **Objective:** To analyse community involvement phenomena from stakeholders’ perspective

3. **Study area:** The Ebro Delta (Catalonia, Spain)

4. **Methodology:** Case study applying Delphi technique

5. **Results:** Limitations and opportunities for stakeholders involvement in the Ebro Delta

6. **Concluding remarks**
Background

Tourism destination evolution

Complex path- and place-dependent process
that is determined by the interaction and relations of destination stakeholders
and their ability to adapt (path plasticity – incremental changes)
or creating new development paths (path creation – radical changes)

(Baggio, 2008; Boschma & Martin, 2010; Garud & Karnoe, 2001;
Li & Bathelt, 2011; Martin, 2010; Strambach & Storz, 2008)
Objective

To analyse community involvement phenomena from stakeholders’ perspective

With the aim to assess policies to improve tourism destination sustainability and competitiveness
Study Area (1): The Ebro Delta

Catalonia
180 km south of Barcelona
General information

- Second largest wetland area in the western Mediterranean region (32,000 ha)
- Natural Park (7,802 ha) and other protection figures
- 7 municipalities
- 64,000 inhabitants (2011)
- Economy based on primary sector (rice production: 125,000T/year in 25,000 ha) and growing tourism activity
Tourism context

- Products: Natural Park and beaches
- Number of visitors in the Natural Park (2011): 137,000
- Main markets (2011): Catalan (46%), Spanish (29%), French (13%)
- Number of accommodation establishments increase (1986 - 2011): 75% (5,750 new beds)
  - 8 campsites (65% beds)
  - 31 hotels (31% beds)
  - 36 Rural guesthouses (4% beds)
Study Area (4): Justification

70s: Municipalities independence

1983 - 1986: Natural Park creation

2000 – nowadays: River Ebro defence

2007 – nowadays: European Charter for Sustainable Tourism

2009: Stakeholders have driven destination evolution through successive stages of path creation and path plasticity
Methodology (1): Delphi technique

Qualitative research method that elicits judgments of a panel of experts on highly subjective and complex issues (Garrod & Fyall, 2005)

- Anonymity
- Iteration
- Controlled feedback
- Statistical aggregation of group response

Delphi in tourism research (from the 80s)

- Event & demand forecasting
  - (Liu, 1988; Lloyd et al., 2000)

- Impact & sustainability assessment
  - (Green et al., 1990; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006)

- Management studies
  - (Monfort, 2000; Landeta, 2006)

- Policy evaluation
  - (Pulido, 2007; Beas, 2009)

Community involvement from stakeholders’ perspective
Methodology (2): Procedure

Experts selection → Scoping round → Convergence round

Questionnaire design → Statistical analysis → Statistical analysis

Results
Methodology (3): Experts selection

- **Number of experts**
  - 15 experts

- **Selection criteria**
  - **Reputation method:**
    Agents with a prominent role in tourism development and valuable knowledge or experience
  - **Balance & representativeness:**
    Public sector (6), private sector (6) and civil society (3)

| PUBLIC SECTOR       | • Catalan Government (territorial representative)  
|                     | • Tarragona Province Government Tourist Board (Manager)  
|                     | • Ebro Delta Natural Park (Director)  
|                     | • Baix Ebre Territorial Government (Tourism technician)  
|                     | • Montsià Territorial Government (Tourism technician)  
| PRIVATE SECTOR      | • Tourist Companies & Activities Association (President)  
|                     | • Rural Tourism Association (President)  
|                     | • Nautical Tourism Association (Manager)  
|                     | • Entrepreneur of the accommodation sector  
|                     | • Entrepreneur of tourism activities sector  
|                     | • Entrepreneur of the restaurant sector  
| CIVIL SOCIETY       | • SEO/Birdlife (representative)  
|                     | • Farmers Association (representative)  
|                     | • Productive sector (representative)  |
Methodology (4): Questionnaire design

- **Selection of issues**
  - Literature review
  - Preliminary interviews

- **Formulation of questions**
  - Issues: 4
  - Items: 60
  - Type:
    - 1 to 7 Likert scale affirmations
    - Chance to argue responses
  - Criteria:
    - Clarity and precision
    - Adaptation to stakeholders’ language and knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Examples of items</th>
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</table>
| Social context                  | • The Ebro Delta has a singular territorial identity  
|                                 | • Population of the Ebro Delta have strong feelings of belonging                  |
| Expectations towards collaboration | • Collaboration among destination stakeholders make easier to obtain funding for tourism development |
| Relations among agents          | • Destination stakeholders have a fluent and frequent communication  
|                                 | • Destination stakeholders distrust each other                                        |
| Roles of agents                 | • The presence of a Natural Park in the area has been crucial for the development of tourism  
|                                 | • The national government was the first who believe in the potential of the area as a tourism destination |
Methodology (5): Interviews

- Scoping round
  - Face-to-face interviews (1h 30min)
  - Structured questionnaires
  - Additional information (experts’ arguments and justifications)

- Convergence round
  - E-mail questionnaires (100% response rate)
  - Structured questionnaire with aggregate group judgements
  - Additional information (experts’ arguments and justifications)

Time between rounds: 1 month
Methodology (6): Statistical analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic measures</th>
<th>Justification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opinion of experts</td>
<td>Central tendency: Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary: Minimum &amp; Maximum values</td>
<td>Least robust but show extreme opinions to respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of consensus</td>
<td>Dispersion: Inter-quartile range</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of consensus</th>
<th>Inter-quartile range</th>
<th>Scoping round % items</th>
<th>Convergence round % items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unanimity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,57</td>
<td>3,15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus</td>
<td>1 i 2</td>
<td>74,80</td>
<td>83,46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Differences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18,90</td>
<td>13,39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreement</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4,72</td>
<td>0,00</td>
</tr>
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Results (1):
Community involvement in the Ebro Delta

- Need to improve relations among stakeholders
- Disagreement with roles of stakeholders
- Shared identity & belonging
- Natural area protection & tourism project
- Positive expectations towards collaboration

Limitations to enhance

Opportunities to reinforce
Results (2):
Limitations for community involvement

- Need to improve relations among stakeholders
  - Division between public and private sector (communication, trust, support, collaboration)
  - Public administrations not coordinated
  - Relations among members of private sector in an early stage

- Disagreement with roles of stakeholders
  - Different perceptions of who was the driving force behind tourism development
  - Distribution of functions and authority not clear
Results (3):
Opportunities for community involvement

Shared identity & belonging
- Strong territorial and tourism identity
- Emergent systemic consciousness

Natural area protection & tourism project
- Natural Park as the driving force of tourism development
- European Charter for Sustainable Tourism as a common vision and strategy

Positive expectations towards collaboration
- Trust in benefits of collaboration
- Motivations to collaborate:
  1. Prestige, innovation and attract visitors
  2. Funding and influence in policy planning
  3. Information transfer and visitors experience
Concluding remarks

Tourism destination evolution is a path dependent and socially-constructed process.

Stakeholders’ involvement in tourism development can be better understood by analysing stakeholders’ perspective.

Results of Delphi method are valuable inputs to assess policies aimed to improve tourism destination sustainability and competitiveness.
Concluding remarks

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Thanks for your attention!

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References

References