The Contribution of Residents to Collaborative Destination Marketing: Opportunities and Challenges

Giulio Pattanaro, PhD[1]

[1] Independent Researcher, Belgium

Abstract: *Collaborative destination marketing is the process whereby different typologies of actors join their forces, efforts and resources to market and promote a tourism destination. Through the analysis of the residents-led experience of three different associations of greeters in Europe, this paper investigates whether and how residents can become actively involved in this collaboration process. Some of the opportunities as well as some the challenges linked to the contribution of residents to collaborative destination marketing will be identified and discussed and further research on the topic will be suggested.*

Keywords: *collaborative destination marketing, residents, tourism experience.*

1. Introduction

A tourism destination can be seen as a combination of actors, each of them contributing, in different ways and to a different extent, to the creation of the final tourism product and experience. Collaborative destination marketing is the process whereby these different typologies of actors join their forces, efforts and resources to market and promote the destination.

While many studies exist on the collaboration between private and public actors and on the factors that make such collaboration more effective, research on the relation between local residents and tourism development has mainly focused on residents' perceptions towards tourism.

Through the analysis of the residents-led experience of three associations of greeters in three different European cities, this paper wants to investigate whether and how residents who do not have a direct stake in tourism (i.e., they do not own or a not employee by a tourism business/authority) can join the other tourism actors and actively contribute to marketing and promoting the place where they live. Some of the opportunities as well as some the challenges linked to the contribution of residents to collaborative destination marketing will be identified and discussed.

2. Literature Review

Although tourism destinations tend to be perceived and consumed by tourists as a unified brand [1], in reality many are the actors and groups (e.g., local authorities, tourism entrepreneurs and local community) who are involved in the tourism development of an area and who have a role to play in the creation of the tourism product and experience [2]. Through collaborative destination marketing, all these actors are cooperating closely with each other in order promote and market the destination [3].

Among the elements leading to this cooperation, it has been frequently mentioned the ever increasing level of competition between destinations and the consequent need for stakeholders to join forces and resources in order for cities and regions to remain appealing at a global level and continue attracting tourists [1; 2]. Furthermore, the active involvement of all the local players and the establishment of multi-actor partnerships are

expected to improve the overall sustainability of the final tourism product [4; 5; 6]. In addition to this, the adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach is very often a requirement of public funding schemes in the area of tourism [7].

Among the factors which facilitate the successful implementation of collaborative destination marketing initiatives, it is worth mentioning: the need to map and analyse the different stakeholders (and networks of stakeholders) at local level, the need to involve all stakeholders from the very beginning of the collaborative destination marketing process, as well as the importance of an accurate preparation and follow-up of the process under the leadership of a convener whose legitimacy, expertise and authority is recognised by all the participants in the process [8; 9].

Although all studies on collaborative destination marketing have highlighted the importance of having the local community and the residents actively involved in the process, also the most recent works on community involvement in tourism development [e.g., see 10; 11] appear to focus more on building trust and acceptance of tourism development among residents rather than on examining how residents can actively provide their own inputs to shaping the tourism development of a given destination. An exception to this are those research works analysing, also in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, those multi-stakeholders private-public partnerships, where local residents who are also owners of small businesses and/or employees of a tourism company/authority are active contributors to the process [12; 13; 14].

With the above considerations, the author does not want to undermine the relevance and importance of the studies and research carried out so far. It is the author's intention to complement what has been already investigated and analysed, with some additional research on the potential contribution to collaborative destination marketing of those residents or locals who, despite not being directly involved in the tourism business, want still to provide their contribution to promoting and marketing a given destination. The main reason for these residents to provide their contribution, without receiving any remuneration, is their genuine passion for promoting the place where they live and the willingness to get in direct contact with visitors and tourists.

3. Methodology

This paper presents the preliminary results of a research activity, which is still ongoing, aiming at analysing the ways and possibilities for residents to actively contribute to collaborative destination marketing, even when they are not directly involved, as owners or employees, in the tourism business.

For the purpose of this research, it was therefore important to identify a residents-led tourism initiative potentially taking place in more than one destination so as to examine and compare whether and how residents are actively taking part, together with all the other tourism stakeholders, in the promotion of the destination itself.

After searching for potential residents-led tourism initiatives to analyse, it was decided to focus on the experience of the greeters. As indicated by the Global Greeter Network Foundation [15], greeters are volunteers who want to show and promote their place to groups of up to six visitors and tourists without asking for any remuneration and in accordance with the principles of sustainable tourism, i.e. by respecting the environment, encouraging a positive socio-economic impact of their activity for the local communities and supporting cultural exchange. As literature underlines, greeters can be seen as actors of the collaborative economy in the area of tourism, who meet the need of tourists for authenticity and genuine experiences [16; 17]. At the time of writing the present paper, according to the Global Greeter Network Foundation, associations of greeters exist in 45 countries, encompassing all continents.

For the purpose of this research, the contribution of the local associations of greeters to the tourism development of three different European cities – Brussels, London, and Paris – was investigated. It was decided to focus on these three cities because of their relevance at European level and because of the familiarity of the author with the language spoken in the three destinations, which has facilitated the collection of data and information.

For each of these cities, the activities of the local association of greeters was analysed and the relation of the association with the other local tourism actors, mainly under the coordination of the local destination management organisation, was investigated. The final purpose of this work has been to understand how the contribution of greeters to the promotion of a given destination complements and integrates the inputs of the other local tourism players.

The main sources of information for this research have been the websites of the associations of greeters for each of the three cities which have been selected as well as the tourism web portal of the local destination management organisation. The latter is considered to be a valid instrument to analyse the way in which several tourism products and services have been combined and presented to external visitors and tourists, a sort of proxy for the collaborative marketing process taking place at destination level. It is in this tourism web portal that visitors and tourists can indeed have an overview of all the services and facilities which are provided for them in a given destination and book one or more of them according to their needs.

4. Findings

In the case of London, the local association of greeters – "London Greeters" [18] – has been actively supported by the local authorities, namely the different boroughs the city is comprised of. "London Greeters" were part of the "London Tourism Action Plan 2009-13", and public authorities have been particularly supportive of the initiative, above all in preparation of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. On that occasion, dedicated courses were also organised to train would-be greeters and the Greenwich Tourist Information Centre was playing a central role in putting visitors in contact with the greeters [19]. "London Greeters" have an easy-to-access website where visitors can directly book their guided tours and residents can apply to become a greeter. However, at the time of writing, no link to the "London Greeters" website, and to the on-demand tours organised by the association, could be found in the city's official tourism web portal – "Visit London" [20] – which is managed by the not-for-profit public-private partnership "London & Partners". Nor is a mention of the "London Greeters" available in the official tourism website – "Visit Greenwich" [21] – of the Borough of Greenwich, where only the tours organised by the "Greenwich Tour Guides Association" are proposed.

In the case of Paris, the association "Parisien d'un jour – Paris Greeters" is a non-profit organisation which can also counts on the support of a wide range of local partners, e.g., the Île de de France Region and the local public transport operator RATP [22; 23]. Just like in the case of "London Greeters", the association has a very easy-to-navigate website, which is available in four languages. Thanks to the website, tourists and visitors can directly book a guided tour and residents can find information on how to become a greeter. The association is mentioned in the official web portal – "Parisinfo" [24] - of the "Paris Conventions and Visitors Bureau", which promotes the guided tours organised "Paris Greeters" next to a wide range of tours organised by professional tour guides. If the visitor wants to book a guided tour by a greeter, the web portal of the Paris Convention and Visitor Bureau provides the e-mail address and the website of the association; a direct booking option through the "Parisinfo" web portal is available only for the tours organised by professional tour guides.

A full integration of the local association of greeters within the official tourism web portal of the city can be observed in the case of Brussels. The "Brussels Greeters" association, its activities and services, and the possibility to book a guided tour with a greeter are promoted directly in the tourism web portal – "visit.brussels" [25] – of the Region of Brussels, which de facto "virtually" hosts the association and is available in six different languages. From the "visit.brussels" portal, visitors and tourists can directly book a walk with the greeters, through a dedicated online registration form. Next to the tours organised by the greeters, through the same web portal, visitors can also book guided tours with professional tour guides as well as other typologies of tours, like, for example, an "Art Nouveau" paid tour organised by an association of Brussels residents who closely watch and examine the public and private urban development projects in the city.

5. Discussion

The three experiences analysed in the context of this paper appear to demonstrate that there is the willingness and possibility for the locals who have not a direct stake in tourism to actively contribute to the marketing of the place they live in. Together with the other tourism actors (local tourism board, hotel owners, tour guides, etc.), residents can play a role in creating that authentic and genuine experience which tourists are more and more looking for.

The experience of the greeters shows that residents of different cities in the world are eager to get in contact with tourists and share with them the things they like of their place of residence. The tourism service that they provide without asking for any remuneration can be combined with the services provided by the other tourism players at local level; they can then play an active role in the so-called collaborative destination marketing process. The other local players – for instance, the local tourism board – can support these residents-led initiatives, by partnering with the associations of greeters, by helping in training new volunteers and by promoting the local association of greeters and the tours they provide in the official tourism web portal of the destination. In terms of benefits provided by greeters to the other tourism players, one might also assume that a global association like the Global Greeter Network Foundation may also contribute, if not through the links provided in the association's website, to attract towards a specific destination those tourists who are in searching for an authentic and local experience. Furthermore, one might assume that, after establishing links and contacts with local people, visitors of a given destination would be more prone to come back and repeat their stay.

At the same time, the three experiences examined also show some issues which might somehow hamper the active involvement of residents in collaborative destination marketing. One issue might be represented by the potential resistance and hence opposition of the tourism professionals at local level to the direct involvement of greeters. It might be, for instance, that official and certified tour guides see initiatives such as that of the greeters as a sort of unfair competition, the same as it is currently happening with hotel owners who are strongly opposing in many destinations to residents' homes/rooms rented as bed&breakfast [26; 27]. It must be reiterated, though, that, in the case of greeters, no remuneration is foreseen for the service they provide. This resistance of local tourism professionals might contribute to explaining – but this is just an assumption of the author, which could not be verified up until now – why in the case of London, for example, no mention of the tours offered by the local association of greeters is made in the official tourism web portal of the city. Another issue might be represented by the actual possibility for locals and residents not owning or being employed in a tourism business to contribute to the definition of the joint marketing strategy for the destination. In the context of this research, it was not possible to collect enough information to assess the level of involvement of the local associations of greeters in the tourism decision-making process of the cities they live in. What is clear, though, is that, as the literature on partnerships in tourism strongly highlights, for a collaborative process to be effective the role of every actor needs to be recognised and the most suitable way and modalities should be identified to get each actor actively involved in the strategic decisions affecting tourism development.

6. Conclusions

This paper wanted to investigate whether and how residents who do not have a direct stake in tourism can team up with the private and public tourism stakeholder and bring their own contribution to collaborative destination marketing initiatives.

The analysis shows that some fruitful cooperation between the residents and the other tourism players at destination level can indeed be established and generate a win-win situation, with internet and the new technologies certainly helping in this regard.

Such cooperation, though, might present some challenges: for instance, how do professional tourism players (e.g., tour guides) perceive the presence and the activities of volunteering initiatives like that of the greeters? Furthermore, to what extent are residents directly involved in the decision-making process which leads to the strategic choices in terms of marketing and promotion of a tourism destination?

It is the author's opinion that the analysis of the challenges and the opportunities of having residents being directly contributing to collaboration destination marketing requires further research. In particular, it is recommended to carry out some qualitative in-depth analysis of the feelings and expectations of the residents involved in such collaborative processes. Furthermore, more experiences should be compared, in order to see, among the other things, whether the legislation in place can have a role to play – as a driver or as barrier – in this regard.

7. References

[1] D. Buhalis, "Marketing the Competitive Destination of the Future," *Tourism Management*, vol. 21(1), pp. 97-116, February 2000.

https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(99)00095-3

[2] A. Fyall, and B. Garrod, *Tourism Marketing: A Collaborative Approach*, 1st ed. Clevedon, U.K.: Channel View Publications, 2005, part 4, pp. 225-322.

[3] Y. Wang, and Z. Xiang. "Towards a Theoretical Framework of Collaborative Destination Marketing," *Journal of Travel Research* , vol. 46(1) , pp. 75–85, August 2007.

https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287507302384

[4] T. Bahaire, and M. Elliott-White, "Community Participation in Tourism Planning and Development in the Historic City of York, England," *Current Issues in Tourism*, vol. 2(2-3), pp. 243-276, July 1999.

https://doi.org/10.1080/13683509908667854

[5] A. Caffyn, "Tourism, Heritage and Urban Regeneration: Community Participation and Power Relationships in the Stirling Initiative," *Environment Papers Series*, vol. 1(3), pp. 25–38, 1998.

[6] M. C. Hall, *Tourism and politics: policy, power and place*, 1st ed. Chichester, U.K.: John Wiley & Sons, 1994.

[7] R. Nash, D. Koyabe, and P. Stansbie, "Impact of EU Funding on Tourism in the Grampian Region," International Journal of Tourism Research, vol. 8(4), pp. 247-261, October 2006.

https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.573

[8] B. Bramwell, and B. Lane, *Tourism Collaboration and Partnerships. Politics, Practice and Sustainability*, 1st ed. Clevedon, U.K.: Channel View Publications, 2000, ch. 1, pp. 1-19.

[9] T. B. Jamal, and D. Getz, (1995) "Collaboration theory and community tourism planning," *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(1), pp. 186-204, 1995.

https://doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(94)00067-3

[10] S. Moghavvemi, K. M. Woosnam, T. Paramanathan, G. Musa, and A. Hamzah, "The effect of residents' personality, emotional solidarity, and community commitment on support for tourism development," *Tourism Management*, vol. 63, pp. 242-254, June 2017.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2017.06.021

[11] R. Nunkoo, and D. Gursoy, "Political trust and residents' support for alternative and mass tourism: an improved structural model," *Tourism Geographies*, vol. 19(3), pp. 318-339, June 2016.

https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2016.1196239

[12] M. M. Augustyn, and T. Knowles, "Performance of tourism partnerships: a focus on York," Tourism Management, vol. 21(4), pp. 341-351, August 2000.

https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(99)00068-0

[13] M. M. Mariani, and M. Kylänen, "The Relevance of Public–Private Partnerships in Coopetition: Empirical Evidence from the Tourism Sector," *International Journal of Business Environment*, vol. 6(1), pp. 106–125, January 2014.

https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBE.2014.058026

[14] R. Scheyvens, G. Banks, and E. Hughes, "The private sector and the SDGs: The need to move beyond 'business as usual'," *Sustainable Development*, vol. 24(6), pp. 371-382, March 2016.

https://doi.org/10.1002/sd.1623

[15] Global Greeter Network Foundation. (March 2018). *Global Greeter Network [Online]*. Available: https://globalgreeternetwork.info/

[16] D. Dredge, and S. Gyimóthy, *Collaborative Economy and Tourism: Perspectives, Politics, Policies and Prospects*, 1st ed. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017, ch. 3, pp. 31-39.

https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-51799-5

[17] D. Kasriel-Alexander, "How is the consumer passion for authenticity impacting holidaying?," *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, vol. 9(6), pp. 627-631, 2017.

https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-09-2017-0046

[18] London Greeters. (March 2018). *London Greeters [Online]*. Available: http://www.londongreeters.org/

[19] VisitEngland. (March 2018). London Greeters Case Study. *VisitEngland. [Online]*. Available: https://www.visitengland.com/sites/default/files/downloads/londongreeters_casestudy.pdf

[20] London & Partners. (March 2018). *Visit London [Online]*. Available: https://www.visitlondon.com/

[21] Borough of Greenwich. (March 2018). *Visit Greenwich [Online]*. Available: http://www.visitgreenwich.org.uk/

[22] Parisien d'un jour – Paris Greeters. (March 2018). *Paris Greeters [Online]*. Available: https://greeters.paris/

[23] Delon, E. (July 2017). Les «greeters», ou le tourisme autrement. *Les Echos Week-end. [Online]*. Available: https://www.lesechos.fr/21/07/2017/LesEchosWeekEnd/00086-035-ECWE_les--greeters---ou-le-tourisme-autrement.htm

[24] Office du Tourisme et des Congrès de Paris. (March 2018). *Parisinfo [Online]*. Available : https://www.parisinfo.com/

[25] Région de Bruxelles Capitale. (March 2018). *Visit.brussels [Online]*. Available: https://visit.brussels/fr

[26] J. Canada. (May 2017). Hotels vs. Airbnb: The battle has begun. *Hospitality Trendz [Online]*. Available: http://hospitalitytrendz.com/the-battle-has-begun/

[27] W. Coldwell. (July 2014). Airbnb's legal troubles: what are the issues?. *The Guardian [Online]*. Available: https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2014/jul/08/airbnb-legal-troubles-what-are-the-issues