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Destination Management through Organizational Ambidexterity: Conceptualizing Haitian Enclaves

1. Introduction

For numerous Post-Colonial, Post-Conflict and Post-Disaster Destinations (PCCDs), many of which are located in the Caribbean region, tourism is considered a key tool for economic and societal development. However, not every PCCD destination is succeeding in developing its tourism economy (Séraphin, 2011), with the lingering negative reputations of some destinations a residual problem. Consequently, Mihalache and Mihalache (2016) state that more variegated forms of innovation, in terms of mode and style, could be crucial to the sustainability of tourism organizations. This is perhaps particularly true for destination management organizations (DMOs) with Mihalache and Mihalache (2016) arguing that DMOs need to leverage their extant capabilities while simultaneously developing new ones to overcome the challenge of destinations having poor reputations.

Within PCCDs, the development of tourist enclaves, whereby tourists tend to holiday primarily in secure enclosed self-contained facilities has emerged as a frequently adopted approach to innovating tourism. However, while in Caribbean contexts this has ameliorated some issues, other problems have resulted with the situation regarding tourist enclave development in Haiti a case in point. This regional spotlight paper thus addresses two important lacunae. First, the paper situates the tourist enclave situation within an analytical framework of organizational ambidexterity, and conducts an analysis and identifies implications. Secondly, and more generally, the paper contributes to the general dearth of research in the area of tourism management in the Caribbean, especially the Haitian context (Seraphin, 2014b), and responds to a need to generate fresh data and insights.

2. Organizational ambidexterity, enclaves and destination marketing – framework and method

Organizational ambidexterity (OA) captures many of the tensions surrounding PCCD contexts and tourist enclave development. OA principally comprises two concepts, namely “exploitation” and “exploration” (Birkinshaw & Gupta, 2013; O’Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Stokes et al., 2017; Stokes et al., 2015). OA in an exploitative strategic mode tends to concern resources and strategies operating within fixed, known and predictable boundaries whereas when operating in an explorative strategic mode, OA is more likely to point at shifting, uncertain and unpredictable conditions. Smith (2016, p.12) argues that ‘organizational ambidexterity is a metaphor for these two polar opposites working “paradoxically in tandem”’.

In many ways, establishing tourist enclaves can be argued as constituting a rather exploitative response to PCCD challenges. Enclaves are predicated on creating safe and controlled, bounded environments in which tourists can holiday without being exposed to the risks and dangers that reside beyond the enclave in the less predictable and controllable – i.e. more exploratively natured – wider community. However, in being segregated in this way, tourists are likely to be denied the opportunity to experience potentially more authentic parts of the PCCD culture. In addition, linked to enclave development, DMOs in PCCDs may be seen as operating variously in exploitative or explorative modes. An exploitative DMO will perhaps tend to look reactive and lacking coherent strategies. An explorative DMO is likely to be more pro-active and seek creative and cogent solutions to PCCD challenges. The next stage of the paper considers these issues and dynamics in relation to the case of Haiti. The study applies the lens of OA to generate a unique conceptualization built within existing literature to lead towards potential policies and strategies for enclaves in Haiti and other destinations in the Caribbean.

3. Tourism development in Haiti: background, issues and OA dynamics

Between the 1940s and 1960s, Haiti was one of the most popular tourist destinations in the Caribbean (Minto-Coy & Séraphin, 2017; Thomson, 2014). However, a series of poor governments, including the Duvalier dictatorships (1957-1986), seriously damaged Haitian national interests. Consequently, Haiti was largely marginalised as a tourist destination until the earlier 2000s (Séraphin, 2014a). Contemporaneously, despite the efforts of the Haitian DMO (Experience Haiti, 2017), Haiti continues to struggle to attract visitors due to its prevailing negative image (Séraphin, Gowreesunkar & Ambaye, 2016). Moreover, disadvantaged Haitian nationals remain excluded and alienated from much of the tourism industry (Thomson, 2014). Thus, in recent decades, Haiti has found itself in a relatively chaotic and unpredictable explorative environment.

In response to these uncertainties and the inability to steer and control the overall trajectory of the tourist sector, the Haitian government and DMO invested extensively in the tourism industry in an attempt to redress its image. They pursued a number of strategies, including the establishment of tourist enclave communities: 'Enclave tourism is tourism that is concentrated in remote areas' (Ceballos-Lascurain, 1996, cited in Mbaiwa, 2003, p.159). Enclaves aim to offer a safe and controllable holiday environment and experience for tourists while shielding them from some of the potential problems and social issues which prevail in the PCCD settings beyond the walls. However, enclaves can also have the boundary-creating exploitative effect of separating tourists from locals. Consequently, Mbaiwa (2003) argues that enclaves offer very limited multiplier effects on local economies because they tend to retain wealth and income expenditure within the enclave. As a result, in Haiti, tourism development generates social issues due to gaps in standards of living between Haitians and visitors and this reinforces socio-economic disparities (Thomson, 2014). Moreover, for Mbaiwa (2003), enclaves are a

peripheral activity in which tourists do not experience the destination but instead spend time in closed centres with limited local interaction. In Haiti, The Labadee Resort is an example of an enclave as ‘...the property is surrounded by a 10-foot-high fence, and guarded by a private security force. Passengers are not allowed to leave the resort, and only a small number of locals are permitted ... to enter and trade souvenirs on payment of a fee’ (Weeden, 2015, p.3). While this initiative might be deemed pro-active, novel and explorative in design and aspiration, paradoxically, it equally might be considered that, in effect, the enclaves also create a notional stable, predictable and exploitative context in a wider explorative unpredictable environment.

Perhaps a more OA explorative destination management approach here would be to foster interaction with local people (especially artists and craftsmen), and develop opportunities for the tourists in the resort to visit the wider destination and have a genuine experience of Haiti as many tourists want to experience authenticity (Kowalczyk, 2014). As an indicative progressive development, the resort of Labadee has partly achieved an exploitative-explorative transition as it encompasses an artisanal shopping village and market/showcase where tourists can meet with locals and buy products (RCL, 2014). Similarly, in 2015, there were plans to connect artisans to passengers on Royal Caribbean cruise line ships (Haiti Libre, 2015). Indeed, therein it might be possible to view cruise ships as sea-based enclaves but operating in a similar OA manner to land-based enclaves. The implication is that DMOs could consider adopting more OA-explorative style actions that connect the largely currently exploitatively fixed and separated positioning of local craftsmen and enclave tourists. Thus, such actions could help to overcome the complications and contradictions presented by enclaves. The above ideas are summarised in Table 1 below.

[INSERT TABLE 1]

4. Policies and strategies to be adopted by other destinations in the Caribbean

In the previous section, Haiti was selected as a case in point to show the potential importance and application of an OA approach to destination management. The situation underlined can be evidenced in a range of comparable destinations in the Caribbean as they exhibit similar PCCD heritage legacies and widespread political instability (Bucheli, 2008; Pulvar, 2008; Reyes-Santos, 2013). On this basis, it can be argued that many Caribbean destinations might consider developing OA approaches as a core aspect of their sustainable development. This would perhaps assist in overcoming segregation of tourists and locals and allow economic multiplier effects to take place more readily. Consequently, it is important for regional governments to engender and facilitate appropriate contexts that would enable OA to flourish, but this is challenging due to ongoing explorative political environments (Brooker & Joppe, 2014).

In addition, in order to support the potential for explorative innovation, it is important for Caribbean economies to encourage and support local artisanal activity. This could perhaps be achieved through providing an authentic experience to tourists and ensuring that industry remains in the hands of the locals (S raphin, 2014a). It is argued that when businesses are owned by locals, they are more beneficial (in terms of multiplier effects) to the country than when they are foreign-owned (Manyara & Jones, 2005; Rogerson, 2003; Shah, 2000; Wanhill, 2000). For example, S raphin (2013a, 2013b) identifies guesthouses and tour guiding as typical activities from which local people can derive direct benefit from the tourism industry and also provide visitors with a more genuine country experience than perhaps that found in enclaves. More importantly, such activities provide visitors with opportunities to better understand, and develop a connection with destinations. As S raphin, Butcher and Korstanje (2016) explain, when tourists are educated about a specific destination, they may be more likely to discount

adverse publicity on this destination, but, more importantly, they are likely to develop some attachment with the destination and subsequently go beyond the limitations of PCCD enclaves. Last, but not least, there is a need for the islands to work together toward a multi-centre product for tourists (Poon, 2015) and this should be implemented in such a way that each island can keep its exploitatively-grounded identity and individuality whilst also exploratively forming and enhancing the collective. With the application of an OA mind-set and enactment, the above strategies can potentially lead to positive and sustainable results. Table 2 presents an overview that seeks to reconcile exploitative and explorative innovation within an enclave in order to address the paradoxical implications of an enclave and heighten tourism evolution and sustainability (highlighted by Table 1).

[INSERT TABLE 2]

4. Conclusion

The aim of this regional spotlight paper was to apply the theoretical lens of OA to the phenomenon of tourism enclaves (using the case of Haiti). Despite the challenges and negative perceptions associated with PCCDs, OA offers an alternative perspective on pointing at complex (and potentially paradoxical) tensions in enclaves and wider DMO and government action. DMOs employing OA could develop a strategic advantage that ensures the sustainability and advancement of tourism in PCCD Caribbean settings. This paper outlines and explores a novel OA framework and, by way of future research, calls for greater understanding of the dynamics of exploitative and explorative innovation within enclaves in wider Caribbean contexts.

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