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Tourism Destination Governance: A Systematic Literature Review and Future Research Agenda

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Introduction

The concept of governance is originated from public sector reforms in the 18th century (Ruhanen et al., 2010) and is generally defined as the means by which a system strives to fulfill its functions, such as decision making, communication, and performance evaluation (Laws et al., 2011). Due to the increasingly large economic volume, tourism is regarded as one of the most novel and contemporary fields of governance research and practices (Richter, 1983).

In tourism academia, efforts to define, assess, and explore destination governance have mainly been made in political science and business disciplines (Laws et al., 2011). Destination governance is generally defined as "the rules and mechanism for developing policies and business strategies which could combine all the organizations and individuals" in tourism destinations (Zhang & Zhu, 2014, p.125). However, destination governance demonstrates a more complicated nature, characterized by a multitude of stakeholders, strong resource interdependencies, and bundled tourism products (Candela & Figini, 2012; Raich, 2006).

Destination government has been greatly influenced by theories from corporate governance in its analyses (Beritelli et al., 2007). Different from the hierarchical intra-firm environment, destination governance adopts a much "softer" and more complicated manner to collaborate and coordinate with internal and external stakeholders in the tourism context (Baggio et al., 2010; Nordin et al., 2019; Nordin & Svensson, 2007). Destination governance also involves high degree of relevance to the context (Laws et al., 2011), which is shown from the fact that a large number of research findings are generated from case studies and highly pertinent to the specific settings of studies (i.e., Dawkins & Colebatch, 2006; Halkier, 2014; Wiwin et al., 2020). Such reliance determines destination governance to evolve along with the changing environment and context (Laws et al., 2011).

The effectiveness of destination governance is highly related to the successes of local tourism development, responses to crises or disaster, and well-being of local communities (Bichler, 2021; Çakar, 2018). With years of development, the context of tourism destinations has revolutionarily changed. The rising applications of technologies in tourism scenarios, ranging from information communication technologies (ICTs) to big data (Ivars-Baidal et al., 2019; Li et al., 2018), have radically transformed governance practices in destinations. In 2020, the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic not only alters the interdependent environment for destinations but also calls for their swift transformation, adaption, and recoveries in the face of crises (Vargas, 2020). Dramatic changes in the context force researchers to rethink and reflect on the knowledge in destination governance.

Despite the complex nature and changing context of destination governance, research in this area is mostly fragmented, lacking synergies in current literature regarding its definition, scope, and dimensions (Ruhanen, 2013). The only two literature review studies conducted on this topic (i.e., Ruhanen, 2013; Zhang & Zhu, 2014) failed to address new changes, such as the massive collaboration among stakeholders, evolving technology development, unpredictable crisis, and rising competition from other destinations. To address the identified gaps in the literature and respond to the urgent request from the practice, this study aims to critically summarize and synthesize the existing literature in tourism destination governance by employing a systematic review approach. This study contributes to the current literature by summarizing significant

aspects, discussing incongruity issues, identifying research gaps, and highlighting future research directions. In addition, consider the contextual feature of destination governance, the study findings will provide insights for destination management organizations (DMOs) to enhance governance practices.

Methodology

A systematic quantitative review is a method to investigate the status quo of knowledge in the chosen field and address future research gaps (Vada et al., 2020). This method is featured with an explicit, comprehensive, and systematic process (Le et al., 2019) and has been widely applied in social science research (Pickering & Byrne, 2014). Recent tourism scholars have also used this approach to synthesize findings, map boundaries, and explore emerging trends in literature review studies on tourist well-being (Vada et al., 2020), tourism risk and gender (Yang et al., 2017), and virtual reality development in tourism practices (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore, 2019). Aligned with the research objectives, a systematic approach to review literature on destination governance is appropriate for this study.

This study adopts a revised 5-step systematic literature review method (i.e., Khoo-Lattimore et al., 2019; Le et al., 2019; Yang et al., 2017). The five steps are summarized as: (1) Determining review objectives and formulating research questions; (2) Setting review protocol (i.e., keywords, databases, selection criteria); (3) Screening search results from pre-defined databases and refining inclusion and exclusion conditions; (4) Extracting remain literature for summary tables in relevant topics; and (5) Analyzing contents, identifying gaps, synthesizing information, and reporting findings.

Based on the research objectives identified in the introduction, the study develops a review protocol to guide the literature search. The two-term combinations of "destination" and "governance" or "governing," "tourism," and "governance" or "governing" were used as search keywords. Researchers first search four keyword combinations in seven academic databases identified from prior tourism literature review studies, including Google Scholar, Scopus, EBSCO Host, Science Direct, Emerald, Web of science, and Sage (Le et al., 2019). Researchers then manually check each record, ensuring such papers focus on destination level and avoid enrolling irrelevant records. Only peer-reviewed journal articles written in English and published until 2020 will be included for further analysis, because they were examined through a review process that reduced flaws and enhanced quality (Feldman, 2016).

During the search, an initial of 144 records were identified, and 26 records were removed for duplicating results. Also, fourteen non-journal publications (i.e., book chapters, reports, and conference papers) were excluded; two articles with no full texts were removed; three articles without destination foci (i.e., tourism value chain governance) were also eliminated. Thus, a total of 99 eligible records and their reference list were cross-checked for additional relevant articles. The list of 99 selected articles was documented and can be provided upon request.

The study will conduct an inductive content analysis on the identified 99 articles to summarize bibliographic details and synthesize information into themes. The review will conclude selected articles' bibliographic details (i.e., publication years, country), theoretical framework applied, research subjects, methodological frameworks (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method), research context, and samples with summary tables. Based on the study results, a framework will be developed to map the existing literature and guide future research directions in destination governance.

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