


Beyond economic impact research: an actor-oriented analysis of the competitiveness of trekking tourism in the Piedmont Alps (Italy)

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The analysis of economic impacts of tourism, and regional economic effects of tourism projects, is one of the most popular subjects in tourism sciences. However, despite the popularity of these studies, only little research has been carried out into the reasons for a given level of economic impact and for the competitiveness of tourism projects. This research gap is surprising as such knowledge is necessary for a successful regional development based upon tourism.

Hence, taking the trekking tourism project “Grande Traversata delle Alpi” (GTA) in the Piedmont Alps (Northern Italy), a peripheral rural region, as an example, I assessed GTA’s competitive situation by analyzing different factors influencing competitiveness on the micro and meso level, and examined the actions related to these competitive factors [1]. This analysis focused on the logics and strategies of actions of all (potentially) involved actors in order to explain the reasons for the state of competitiveness. This heuristic presents a conceptual contribution to economic

impact/tourism and economics analysis on the basis of Mayntz’ and Scharpf’s actor-centered institutionalism [2] [3].

Guideline-based interviews were employed to identify the respective logics and strategies of actions and, along with a survey of 320 GTA trekking tourists, served to reveal GTA’s competitive situation. Interview participants were 50 actors from the field of regional and tourism politics on different scales in Piedmont, and 34 GTA-accommodation providers. Results show *inter alia* that various actors lack material and authoritative resources, such as those required for assuming responsibility for mountain trails management. In contrast, some actors do have sufficient resources but they do not positively affect GTA’s competitive situation due to opposed preferences. For example, on the Piedmont level, no marketing is done for GTA, for trekking tourism, or even for the Piedmont Alps as a summer destination.

The study concludes that tourism projects are competitive if, and only if, actors possessing both resources (individual resources are more important than financial ones), and preferences for particular actions, assume certain responsibilities. As endogenous actors often lack specific resources, an involvement of exogenous actors is indispensable if desired economic impacts are to be generated.

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