

## CO-OPERATION BETWEEN TOURISM ENTERPRISES AS THE SOURCE OF NEW TOURISM PRODUCT CREATION

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose** – This paper reports on an empirical analysis of co-operation initiatives to create new tourism products. It suggests possibilities for new tourism product creation through local co-operation processes, and, via an exploratory study, analyses existing levels of co-operation initiatives and their impact in Poland.

**Design** – The paper gives a theoretical overview of tourism cluster co-operation theory, and its effects on new product creation. Analysis of exploratory data on tourism enterprises operating in Polish clusters, then identifies their current state of co-operation, and suggests ways to predict future co-operation levels, especially in particular tourism product groups.

**Methodology** – After extensive review of published literature, the authors researched tourism enterprises via a questionnaire surveying tourism enterprises in Poland. The research was exploratory in nature, however the small sample gave useful results, both quantitative and qualitative.

**Findings** – Published research on clusters and co-operation has had limited application in tourism. This exploratory study extends it significantly. Tourism companies definitely perceive the value of co-operation in creating tourism products. They have co-operated to a limited extent in the past, and are now committed to intensify this. To succeed it is necessary to promote trust, co-operation and partnership amongst them, within their own sector, and in related spheres such as public bodies. The nature of co-operation in tourism fits well with the concept of clusters.

**Originality of the research** – This study provides a new contribution because prior Polish co-operation studies are few in number.

**Keywords** co-operation, destination, tourism products, creativity, innovation

### **INTRODUCTION**

The contemporary social and economic environment in which tourism enterprises operate is increasingly competitive. Customer expectations are constantly increasing, resulting in a requirement for product development and innovation. Practical design and development is conditioned by a number of factors, including the activation and building of links between all travel market partners, particularly at local and regional level (Buhalis, 2000). Businesses choose to collaborate, not only to gain access to the unique resource and competency potential of partners, but above all to take advantage of other capabilities that are needed, for them to create new products and services that meet or exceed the client's expectations (Hjalager, 2002).

This paper discusses the underpinning theory behind tourism business strategy and the concomitant role of co-operation between tourism companies and related stakeholders, when creating and offering tourism products. It is backed up by chosen aspects of original research. The “composite products” category of tourism is defined here, and the essence and importance of collaboration networks in tourism demonstrated. The use of networking and co-operation between stakeholders to increase new tourism product creation is illustrated. An overview of the literature and analysis of the authors own research results, enabled definitive identification of the expectations of enterprises operating in these networks, when they are considering and creating tourism products.

The results presented in this paper are restricted to Poland, as cultural and geographical factors have been found to be important. A key source, *Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2017 Poland*, (WTTC 2017), is briefly outlined here: the contribution of travel and tourism to GDP in Poland in 2016, amounted to a direct contribution of 1.8% and a total contribution of 4.5%. This indicator is expected to grow to 4.6% in 2017 (WTTC 2017, 3). The direct tourism and travel component of the sector generated 1.9% of total employment in 2016, and this is expected to grow to 2.0% in 2017. Thus this sector generated 4.5% of total employment in 2016 and this will rise slightly in 2017 to 4.6% (WTTC 2017, 4). A key factor of tourism’s impact is its level of capital investment. Travel and tourism investment in 2016 was 3.5% of total investment in Poland and the forecast for 2017 is that it will fall to 3.4%. (WTTC 2017, 5).

A brief analysis of data on tourism enterprises, obtained via a questionnaire surveying tourism enterprises operating in Polish clusters, illustrates the current state of co-operation in these clusters, and suggests ways to predict future co-operation levels, especially in particular tourism product groups. Published research on clusters and co-operation in tourism, and especially in Poland, is limited. This exploratory study extends it significantly. The surveyed tourism companies definitely perceive the value of co-operation in creating tourism products and are now committed to intensify such activities in the future. The survey showed a need to promote trust, co-operation and partnership amongst them and their stakeholders.

## **1. THE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES BEHIND CHOICE OF TOURISM PRODUCTS**

Tourists final choices of destination depend on their perception and knowledge of a complex mix of primary product offerings, which are the key “pull factors motivating tourists to visit them” (Benur and Bramwell, 2015, p. 213). Thus, the destination choice and the tourism products it offers, are mutually dependent. Creating a valued tourism product is particularly complex, due to the specific characteristics and nature of tourism itself. Holloway and Robinson (1997, 114) state that tourism products include: destination (controlled to some extent by departure options), service delivery (a product of the tourism provider) and material products (such as free airline bags, or side trips from the destination) to encourage the purchase of the overall offer.

Middleton (1989, 573) distinguished two levels of tourism product. Firstly, the overall product (the idea or theme, the concomitant customer expectations or image perceived at the time of decision) and secondly, the actual, specific individual products and services that can be purchased or utilised at the destination). In a later publication, Middleton (1994, 88) considered tourism products to be a mix of three main ingredients: attractions, tourism infrastructure and the availability of the destination to the potential customer.

Kotler's (1993, 6) conceptual ideas can be applied, distinguishing several forms of offered products, both tangible and intangible. These can include physical objects, services, personalities, organizations, places, and ideas. Applying this concept, forms of tourism products can be differentiated, so: material products (guides, maps, souvenirs), services (transport, gastronomy, recreational services etc.), local tourism facilities (castles, churches, monuments, museums, recreational centres), events (including as examples; exhibitions, cultural events, sports championships, even sightseeing with a guide), personalities and groupings (i.e. famous residents or their birthplaces, characteristic ethnic groups, artists), thematic trails (walking, cycling, water trails), places (viewpoints, national parks, landscapes) and finally "ideas": exploring the cultures of other nations, living and resting closer to nature). All these product categories are destination related and they jointly connect to create the complex final product.

For the purpose of this paper, the authors identified, discussed and utilised these concepts to analyse product offerings, here understood as the collection of attractions, services and material products, consumed by tourists at their destination, to meet their needs. In line with the definition of UNWTO (2008), this tourism product is defined as the activity supplied to tourists for consumption, which means that almost everything can be considered as a product, if it is identifiably used by tourists.

Thus, the comprehensive tourism product offered by a destination consists of the following structured elements: the primary offer of destination (which influences motivation and determines the final choice), supplementary offers at or by the destination (which create the experienced conditions of the consumer's stay), the accessibility of the destination (transport availability, costs, discounts, car parks etc.) and the perceived image of the destination.

However, each of these aforementioned product components only becomes a key factor when combined with others. The final comprehensive product, as perceived by a particular customer must create value and benefit them. As Middleton (1994, 66-68) notes, simple tourism product suppliers make the mistake of assuming only a narrow view of their activity, seen only through the prism of their offer. This approach is short-sighted because it focuses rather on supply rather than demand. Here demand is the tourists' expectations, which in reality often require an entire set of inter-related products.

McKercher (2016) suggested a detailed taxonomy of the tourism product, allowing the extraction of many sub-products, through six levels. The main components are consequential to human needs when undertaking tourism. They are related to: pleasure

(food and drink, leisure, tourist indulgence, personal events, built attractions, sport and recreation) personal quest (personal history, religious, medical/wellness and learning), human endeavour (industrial, built heritage, people and intangible heritage, creative, dark, museum and interpretive centres), nature (which may be dependent on winter or summer for participation, and place based for adventure, or natural features) and business (meetings, conventions and exhibitions). These six product groups may be used to form the basis for building a specific tourism product at a destination, created by co-operation between stakeholder enterprises.

As Marinero-Rodríguez and Pulido-Fernandez (2016, 122), point out, “tourism is a relational phenomenon”, therefore it should be perceived systematically as a whole, with all the various components of the system and the relationship between them covered. These authors thus propose that understanding the overall phenomenon of tourism is key to analysing the links between its components. The final destination product is complex, as it is created by many different enterprises and stakeholders. The actions of individual operators is not under their control. It is either strengthened or weakened by marketing or other policies undertaken by any other stakeholder operating within the same area. Therefore, co-operation (sometimes directed) between enterprises in the area is necessary, to create a competitive tourism product.

## **2. THE ROLE OF CO-OPERATION IN TOURISM DESTINATIONS**

The tourism sector is dominated by small and medium enterprises. In order to meet new challenges and to maintain the expected market position, it is necessary for them to co-operate and to create business networks. Collaboration is, in some aspects of creating a tourism product, not just advisable, but a necessity. This applies especially to tourism offers for people with disabilities (Szewczyk, 2015). It is necessary in this case to agree to make disabled access products available at tourism destinations, to support tourists with disabilities.

However, for many years tourism companies have worked solely under competitive mechanisms, and co-operation was perceived as an unprofitable and potentially dangerous activity. Now, in the era of globalization, enterprises are increasingly beginning to recognize the importance of co-operation (Wang and Krakover, 2008). Most authors stress that the pace of growth in the number of co-operation agreements will not fall over the coming years (Fehr and Fischbacher, 2004, Prashant and Harbir, 2009).

The inter-dependence of tourism companies is also conditioned by the complexity of the tourism product, in its local area. Competitive tourism companies in regions need to operate in tandem to create and project a positive image of the entire tourism product range. However, it is difficult to clearly separate co-operation and competition in this sector (von Friedrichs Grängsjö, 2003). Therefore, tourism companies are forced to seek more efficient forms of business activity, in which partnerships based on co-operation networks are important (Child, Faulkner and Tallman, 2005, 15-16). In recent years clusters have become a popular form of networking co-operation in tourism.

In an economic context, the word cluster was used for the first time by Porter (1990, 151). Later, again according to Porter (2001, 248) a cluster means a geographic neighbourhood of companies and parts of their supply chain. Included in this chain are their specialized suppliers and other units that perform services as well as other companies which function in the related sectors. Other institutions connected with them (for example universities, public sector offices or co-operation societies), each provide components to the given field, and are connected by inter-reliance and complement each other. Relevant characteristic features of clusters include: spatial concentrations of companies, institutions and organizations, interactivity (expanded networks of relationships, both of formal and informal character), joint trajectories of development and co-opetition existing simultaneously in some aspects of activity (Novelli et al. 2006, Tether and Tajar 2008, van der Zee and Vanneste 2015).

Worldwide, most of the clusters discussed and analysed, have been built around high technology industries. These are marked by their high proportion of expenses for research and development, as well as extensive connections with research and developmental fields (higher than in traditional industry). Moreover, the businesses are usually relatively new, therefore are based largely on innovations.

However, innovative clusters are not the only high technology users, others also benefit from technology adoption. Conversely, some low and middle technology usage clusters are an international success, because of procedural and organizational innovations (OECD 1997).

The cluster concept was adopted for tourism in the first decade of the 21st century, and the main assumption of this concept is „the functioning of tourism as a productive system” (Merinero-Rodríguez, Pulido-Fernández, 2016, 127). Tourism clusters are therefore called upon to generate new tourism products. This raises the question: in what way will the presence of clusters in tourism, in a region, influence its level of tourism product and their innovation?

Clusters differ from traditional local systems of co-operation in that new forms of partnership are essential, not only between the members of the cluster, but also between other stakeholders, such as competitive companies, the world of science and research, higher education and training organizations, financial, and mediation bodies. For the cluster theory to be satisfactorily applied, all these stakeholders ideally come from the region under study (although a virtual cluster could be proposed). Finally, existing and potential customers are also key stakeholders. In summary, the tourism economy is a network of connected tourism enterprises and different institutions that support development of tourism products in a region, which aims to result in synergistic effects.

Finally here, the formulation and implementation of new concepts of development policy based on clusters may derive from top-down or bottom-up initiatives. In other words, it may result from activities undertaken by public or local authorities, but it can also be the effect of grass-roots initiatives. More and more often, operators in the tourism market perceive and value the meaning of different interactions that occur amongst them. Thus, the innovative system ought to be understood as a complex of

institutions and their connections, that form an efficient mechanism of knowledge generation and diffusion (Novelli et al. 2006).

The cluster should take part in innovation processes thus creating innovations in many fields, as shown in table 1.

**Table 1: A possible role for tourism clusters in creating tourism innovation**

<b>The type of innovation</b>	<b>The main objective</b>	<b>The role and tasks of the tourism cluster</b>
Product innovation	Identification of possibilities to implement, innovative, specific and niche tourism products.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Identifying the ‘philosophy’ of a tourism cluster;</li> <li>– The combination of efforts to create innovative tourism products;</li> <li>– Promotion of tourism clusters and concepts;</li> <li>– Networking of infrastructure and implementation of infrastructural innovation.</li> </ul>
Classic process innovation	Boosting the efficiency of activities undertaken in the tourism entities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Active co-operation and linkages between tourism enterprises.</li> <li>– Communication and knowledge transfer between members of the cluster.</li> </ul>
Process innovation in the area of information	The use of modern methods of communication and information technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Improving the processing of information by identifying "best practices", workshops, meetings etc.;</li> <li>– The creation of coherent information system using the Internet and mobile communications.</li> </ul>
Innovation in management	Joint management structures, leading to improved business results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Multilevel co-operation among members of the cluster;</li> <li>– The combined efforts of creating management processes geared to tourists.</li> </ul>
Institutional innovation	Stability of the cluster through institutional support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Institutional supporting of the activities undertaken in the tourism cluster;</li> <li>– The inclusion of the cluster concept to other initiatives;</li> <li>– Inclusion of cluster development trends of the regional strategy and innovation strategy.</li> </ul>

Source: M. Novelli, B. Schmitz, T. Spencer, (2006), “Networks, clusters and innovation in tourism: A UK experience”, *Tourism Management*, Vol. 27, No. 6, pp. 1143-1144; D. Doloreuxa, S. Parto, (2005), “Regional innovation systems: Current discourse and unresolved issues”, *Technology in Society*, Vol. 27, No. 2, p. 134; B. S. Tether A. Tajar, (2008), “The organisational-cooperation mode of innovation and its prominence amongst European service firms”, *Research Policy*, Vol. 37, No. 4, p. 723.

The formulation of a tourism product strategy occurs at regional levels, therefore co-operation and interactions between subjects in a region becomes vital. However, it is important to draw attention to the fact that operators who create a tourism product are often restricted by their administrative boundaries, and the accumulation of inter-relationships may often not match up with these boundaries. Clusters are innovative systems based on knowledge transfer, which relies on direct human contacts, therefore geographical closeness is arguably most important for its transfer. Thus, one may show that the effects of cluster function are dependent upon knowledge diffusion intensity

(Zahra and George 2002; He and Wong 2004) and the mobility of human resources (Nohria and Gulati 1996, Hardy et al. 2003).

Clusters in tourism should be formed in such a way, that they maximize the general and positive impression of tourists through complementary material products and services. Beside the attraction of basic objects which lure the visitors (e.g. seaside beaches or historical monuments), the level of services provided by restaurants, hotels and shops with souvenirs, rail, motor and air transport are also important. This approach to creating a tourism product will result in an increase in the loyalty of tourists to destinations. Chen and Gursoy (2001) pointed out destination loyalty manifests itself not only in the intention of the tourist to return, but as well as in their willingness to recommend the destination to others. Failure of any element of the tourism complex product has a negative impact on all, and results in a negative opinion about the whole. For that reason the participants of a cluster must discipline and motivate each other, to maintain the proper level of quality of their offer.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The data utilised here was collected in 2015/2016 amongst tourism enterprises operating in Poland. The questionnaire was carefully designed, using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative responses. The question set was designed in view of the authors prior knowledge, validated by their literature reviews, and their conclusions that co-operation in tourism is necessary when designing and preparing complex tourism products at the destination. A qualitative and quantitative questionnaire was constructed for this purpose. 10 basic questions about the respondent's activities, and 6 questions characterising the respondents were used. The pilot studies undertaken prior to the main study confirmed the questionnaire's utility.

The authors took painstaking care to validate the questionnaire, via preparatory work and piloting. The questionnaire was tested directly on the pilot sample of 10 tourism entrepreneurs and managers. All of them have been representing tourism companies actively co-operating for at least 3 years. Direct form of testing allowed for oral and written comments to be taken into consideration in the final questionnaire preparation process.

The selection of companies was random. A stratified selection process was applied disproportionately, with over- representation of the lowest number of layers. This selection of six types of tourism companies (accommodation, gastronomy, sector of tourism attractions - culture, entertainment and recreation, travel agencies, craft sector and passenger transport) represents all the identified types of activities present in the tourism market and provided an appropriate representation of respondents in the sample. 100 subjects were selected for each subtype, giving a total of 600 subjects for the study. The study was conducted by post.

Correctly completed questionnaires were sent back by 63 respondents (10.5% of the sample), providing services in the all analysed fields of tourism activity (table 2). Respondents in the study were business owners or tactical managers, whose

responsibilities cover marketing activities. This selection of respondents was considered optimal because tactical managers play a key role in shaping the tourism product and in contacts with the environment. Managers were dominant amongst the replies: 55.5% of respondents were marketing managers, 27% were managers in other divisions, and business owners made up 17.5% of respondents. The participation of respondents occupying such positions in enterprises allows the responses to be treated as reliable.

Table 2: **The generic characteristics of the enterprises participating in the study**

Category of tourism enterprises	Number of enterprises	Percentage (%)
Accommodation (hotels, pensions, etc.)	24	38.1
Gastronomy	9	14.3
Sector of tourism attractions	4	6.4
Travel agencies	17	26.9
Craft sector	5	7.9
Passenger transport	4	6.4
Summary	63	100

Source: authors, according to the conducted research.

The most strongly represented sector was broadly tourism accommodation, which accounted for 38.1% of surveyed companies. Travel agencies were represented by 26.9% of enterprises, among which 8 dealt with the organization of events, 9 were conducting tourism brokering and 4 carried out both activities together. Moreover, representatives of the tourist attraction sector (sports and leisure centres, museums, tourism equipment rentals, bowling, etc.) made up 6.4%, representatives of gastronomy (14.3%) and passenger transport (6.4%).

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the aims of the study was to identify current co-operation levels, in the field of creating tourism products. The questions related to the joint implementation of individual activities in the field of tourism products allowed this assessment. Respondents referred to 21 statements regarding various categories of tourism products, divided in 6 groups, selected on the basis of literature review. The answers were rated with Likert's 5-point scale. Table 3 presents averaged assessments.



Table 3: Joint actions for a tourism product creating (undertaken and projected)\*

Tourism products created in co-operation	Diagnoses	Prognosis
<b>Creation of new / shared services</b>		
1. Organization of tourists' stay (service packages, discount / discount cards, guide, trips, etc.)	3.2	4.2
2. Food and beverage services	2.2	2.3
3. Transportation services	1.9	3.7
4. Information services (eg. signage, information points)	3.4	4.4
5. Additional services (repair services, rental)	1.2	3.1
<b>Creation of new / shared materials goods</b>		
6. Developing / publishing guides / books / other publications	1.6	2.9
7. Souvenirs (coherent visualization of the region)	2.2	4.2
8. CDs and other materials related to joint promotion such as multimedia guides, web pages	2.8	3.9
9. Tourism equipment	1	1.9
<b>Creation of new / shared leisure facilities</b>		
10. Outdoor facilities (outdoor gyms, toboggan tars, paintball, etc.)	1.2	2.2
11. Cubic facilities (swimming pools, climbing centres, karting, etc.)	1.3	3.2
12. Lifts, cable, etc.	1.2	1.9
13. Supporting facilities: rental companies, car parks	1.9	2.8
<b>Creation of new / shared events</b>		
14. Cultural / sport events (festivals, concerts, competitions, etc.)	3.1	4.6
15. Shows, exhibitions, presentations, workshops	1.9	3.5
16. Fairs, conferences, congresses	2.2	4.1
<b>Creation of new / shared attractive places and/or trails</b>		
17. Thematic trails: hiking, biking, waterways, etc.	1.9	2.4
18. Viewpoints	1.3	3.8
<b>Creation of new / shared ideas</b>		
19. New concepts of free time activities	1.1	3.1
20. Creating an image of a destination	1	4.6
21. Joint initiatives, eg. cleaning up the environment	1.2	3.9
<b>Creation of new / shared other products</b>		
22. Other, what kind? - connections (eg. sewage), road infrastructure	1	4

\* Likert's 5-point scale, averaged assessment

Source: authors, according to the conducted research.

Current co-operation is limited. The results show that co-operation in services most often concerned the organization of the tourists' stay (average rate: 3.2) and information services (3.4). In the group of tangible products, enterprises co-operated most often in the preparation of common promotional materials (2.8). Another important aspect of co-operation was the organization of joint cultural and sporting events - in this case, the average compliance with this statement was 3.1. The average index of 2.2 was obtained for the joint organization of fairs and congresses. The form of co-operation indicated most often was accommodation facilities. The analysis of responses in particular groups of companies showed a higher propensity for co-

operation between tourism attraction companies and hotels. Transport companies also often co-operated with the travel agencies and hotels.

The second objective of the research was to predict willingness to co-operate in creating future tourism products which was addressed by questions related to this objective therefore, creating the same 21 categories of tourism products. The same Likert's 5-point scale was used. The averaged assessment of tested aspects were all in the range of 1.9-4.6. Analysis of the responses shows that surveyed tourism businesses expressed willingness to co-operate in every product category, and particularly in these activities, which they already co-create.

Respondents expect intensified co-operation primarily in the product group "ideas", such as: creating an image of a destination (future co-operation assessed at the level 4.6), joining initiatives (3.9) and new concepts of free time activities (3.1). Further co-operation should lead to the emergence of new leisure facilities and attractive places. The highest growth dynamics of the importance of co-operation is evident in the creation of: cubic facilities (assessment grows from 1.3 to 3.2) and viewpoints (increase of assessment from 1.3 to 3.8). Respondents expect a significant increase in the importance of co-operation also in transportation services (increase of assessment from 1.9 to 3.7). Joint organization of such services may contribute to the decrease of traffic jams in Polish resorts. The analysis of the results points to the expected positive trend towards co-operation - the gradual expansion of co-operation from intangibles to the creation of joint material products. This trend of co-operation is particularly desirable from the point of view of attracting tourism destinations.

The results indicate a differentiation of attitude towards co-operation between differing activity groupings of tourism companies. Higher assessments for particular product groups were indicated by companies from: the sector of tourism attraction, gastronomy, the craft sector and passenger transport. In accommodation companies, co-operation rates were lower, and the lowest rates were seen in travel agencies. Due to the small sample and thus the exploratory character of these studies, this confirms the evidence from more extensive studies.

Tourism enterprises are known to face barriers and difficulties in co-operation, as is widely reported in the literature (Baggio, 2011; Baggio et al., 2010, van der Zee and Vanneste 2015). Respondents were asked to choose the most important barrier, wherein the selection list included barriers widely described in the literature. Respondents first of all pointed out the problems of: mutual distrust between business partners (42.8%) and lack of appropriate partners (22.2%). 3.2% respondents declared the problem of finding places and/or opportunities for co-operation. These barriers were most strongly emphasized by those companies that co-operated to a lesser extent. Other barriers found were: the high costs of co-operation (17.5%) and the lack of measurable effects from existing co-operation (14.3%), these two barriers were pointed out by enterprises co-operating intensively. These barriers affect the reduction of co-operation and the low effectiveness of existing co-operation activity. Their minimising should become a priority for streamlining co-operation.

## CONCLUSION

For this paper, the literature on clusters in tourism and related sectors was reviewed comprehensively and studies of this nature were found to be relatively rarely undertaken. Therefore, the results of the research presented in this article are important for identifying, quantifying and evaluating the role of co-operation in development of tourism products in Poland.

The results confirm the often stated literature thesis that companies undertake co-operation (Ginevičius 2010, Sroka 2011, Gomezelj Omerzel and Smolčić Jurdana 2015), but in the case of tourism companies, co-operation relates only to specific activities (Lemmetyinen and Go 2009, Soteriades 2012). The results lead to the conclusion that tourism businesses in Poland operate in a highly insulated way. This may contribute to their under-development in the field of innovation (Zontek, 2015).

There are already several identified tourism clusters in Poland. However, as the report *Clustering in the Tourism Industry* (Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, 2015) indicates, indigenous tourism clusters suffer from a lack of integrated tourism offers, probably due to them being in an early development phase. However, the surveyed tourism companies do perceive the value of co-operation in creating a tourism product. Although they have been co-operating to a limited extent and recognise the barriers of co-operation so far, they have pledged to intensify such activities in the future. Therefore, it is necessary to promote trust, co-operation and partnership amongst them, not only within the enterprises' sector, but also in relation to other spheres of science and the public system. It is also important to promote new forms of co-operation within clusters.

Analysis of the research results in tourism clusters, by Merinero-Rodríguez and Pulido-Fernandez (2016, p. 128), indicates a methodological difficulty in the implementation of such research. Previous researches have focused on single case studies. It was therefore necessary to examine how the characteristics of individual clusters influence their functioning, effectiveness and ability to create new tourism products. The authors of this paper have attempted to bridge this gap, but this requires further research, oriented especially on the comparisons between destinations.

The purpose of the paper was realized, subject to two main limitations. Firstly, only enterprises were included in the study and other stakeholders, such as institutions and organizations who have contributed to this influence towards the creation of the product, have not been investigated. Secondly, the limited primary data, although supportive of the authors conclusions from literature, only partially endorses the conclusions. Such limitations mean that the results presented in this paper should be treated as exploratory, but the research sets the scene for a more comprehensive study, on a more diversified sample, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

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