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## Transformative collaboration: knocking down taboos, challenging normative associations

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Maria Jose Zapata & C. Michael Hall (2012). Public–private collaboration in the tourism sector: balancing legitimacy and effectiveness in local tourism partnerships. *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 4(1): 61–83.

### Introduction

Collaboration remains one of the most significant issues in understanding the relational dimension of different actors within the tourism system as well as its governance (Zapata & Hall, 2012). The literature on collaboration has continued to grow (Rodriguez, Williams, & Hall, 2014; van der Zee & Vanneste, 2015). However, there remains several significant knowledge and research gaps as many studies often focus on collaboration and the development of networks as ends in themselves, rather than examining the extent to which the collaborative relationships achieve their intended aims over time (Hall, 1999, 2011a, 2018a). This is especially the case in a public policy and governance context. Nevertheless, a number of key themes and emerging themes can be identified that research on collaboration will need to continue to address in the foreseeable future.

### The contextual practice of collaboration

Collaboration is a contextual practice. Although there is often more of a focus on much tourism marketing research, for example, on individual agency, there is growing recognition that collaboration reflects its institutional environment, societal contexts, values and culture (Amore & Hall, 2016). The importance of context has become integral to research on sustainable transitions, for example, where individual agency and collaborative relations is regarded as embedded within socio-technical systems and institutions which then serve to enable or constrain individual and collaborative action depending on their structure (Hall, 2013, 2016). Indeed, one common feature to the many different forms in which collaboration is actioned

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around the world is how collaboration has become a strategy to address the uncertainty generated by wicked and metaproblems (Head, 2008; Head & Alford, 2015; Roberts, 2000), such as the challenges of reconciling development with sustainability, the struggle against climate change or the so-called immigration crisis in European contexts. The importance of multiple-actor strategies to solve these metaproblems has advanced in recent decades and, increasingly, as it does, the startup of collaborative strategies.

### Coexistence of collaborative practices

The contextuality of collaboration makes the heterogeneous practices that fall under specific behavioural norms or 'etiquettes' of collaboration follow different pathways in practice (Hultman & Hall, 2012). For example, since the 1980s there has been enormous growth in formal public private partnerships in connection with the normalisation of the neoliberal paradigm in public administration practices. This has shaped the agendas of states, local and regional governments and multi-lateral agencies (e.g. UNDP, European Union), and broader adoption of the New Public Management agenda (Hall & Zapata Campos, 2014). Nevertheless, while these forms of collaboration have come to stay and have become norms in the standardised delivery of services in cities and destinations, new forms of collaboration in more diffused forms, such as networks and virtual communities, have emerged enhancing greater flexibility and expanding collaboration to new stakeholders, cultural contexts and even geographical spaces.

### Collaboration and space

Collaboration is intimately connected to space, yet space here should be understood as relational and can be physical, cognitive, cultural, virtual, and/or legal, among others (Graham & Healey, 1999; Hall, 2011b, 2018b; Tornaghi & Knierbein, 2014). Relational spaces of collaboration are increasingly important in the contexts of network governance and metagovernance (Amore & Hall, 2016, 2017), especially the move towards the dehierarchization of the state towards the growth of more reflexive self-organisations that are governed through dialog, deliberation and state (Jenkins, Hall and Mkono, 2014). Networks of metagovernance constitute therefore an important line of research in tourism studies.

Space and territory continue to be relevant in supporting and facilitating collaboration activities. For example, even if new network social movements and collaborations for sustainability increasingly rely on new information technologies (Gössling & Hall, 2018), face-to-face encounters and physical proximity continue to be relevant factors that explain the diffusion and scaling up of collaborative practices (see de Andrés, Zapata Campos, & Zapata, 2015). Other commentators have observed tendencies of reterritorialization (Montin, 2007) of certain national policies (including environmental, integration and tourism and recreation policies) appropriating them to regional, supramunicipal and local/municipal levels. Similarly, physical space, distance and territory continue to be important in explaining the role of collaborative spaces, networks of actors and coalitions in introducing changes and innovations in the system. In the same line of enquiry, the physical allocation of certain collaborative ventures, for example at the periphery of cities, has permitted the crystallization of small-scale safe spaces of experimentation (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010; Zapata Campos et al., 2018), where actors seemly oppositional

have learnt to collaborate, and where prevailing practices and rules can be challenged precisely due to their allocation at the physical, organisational and governmental periphery of cities and city governments. For example, Dutch cities are using *wijkwandelingen*, or neighbourhood walks, as a hyperlocal way of improving cities. Mecking (2018) writes of the Dutch process of *meedoen*, to participate, and discusses how the residents of Spoorwijk, one of the poorest and most ethnically diverse neighbourhoods of The Hague have found neighbourhood walks as an active way to resolve neighbourhood issues together. Every three months, locals gather to take a neighbourhood walk.

Together, they visit problematic areas and discuss what action should be taken. Any resident can turn up and take part, and about ten to fifteen participants of all ages and social groups usually come along. ... The route differs each time, and is determined by residents, who can email organisers [from City Hall with] their complaints and requests in advance or mention issues along the way (Mecking, 2018).

These collaborative and innovative spaces at the periphery appear to develop a kind of 'immunity' that allows them to question established rules and strategies and predispose them to prompt organisational and institutional changes in their fields/sectors.

Nevertheless, as noted above, relational spaces of collaboration do not necessarily occur in distinct geographical spaces. In recent years there has been an increase in affiliation-based communities, enabled by social media and internet platforms, that are constituted as broad networks of stakeholders stretching beyond a territory who are instead bonded by strong relations, shared interests, identities and values (Almandoz, Marquis, & Cheely, 2017). Therefore, the management of distances (geographical, legal, cultural, cognitive, organisational) seems to be extremely relevant to gaining an understanding of what collaborative practices and structures look like, their effects and their strategies, in order to address the challenges of the institutional environments in which they are embedded (Zapata Campos et al., 2018).

### **Collaborative and interactive forms of governance**

Collaborative spaces are a typical feature of relational and interactive forms of governance (Torfing, Peters, Pierre, & Sørensen, 2012), that reflect how public sector policies are articulated through collaborative network arrangements (Ansell, Sørensen, & Torfing, 2017; Torfing & Ansell, 2017) in which the role of the public has been transformed, but not diminished (Jacobsson, Pierre, & Sundström, 2015). In this context, more indirect governing mechanisms are developed both to control (at distance) and to enable instrumental implementation of policies where collaboration is expected. The growth of these collaborative spaces also reflects a trend in public administration of promoting networks on the basis of the need for collaboration on cross-cutting policy and sectoral issues, such as tourism (Amore, Hall, & Jenkins, 2017; Koppenjan & Klijn, 2004). It also mirrors how the boundaries of what traditionally has been understood as the public sector or the private sector have become more fluid and less strict than in liberal perspectives (Pesch, 2015) and where public and private spheres are blended (Bulkeley & Betsill, 2013), including with respect to e-governance and the sharing economy (Gössling & Hall, 2018). For example, Zapata Campos and Zapata (2017) show how through collaborative arrangements between civil society organisations and local government, novel and somehow radical sustainable practices have been incorporated into local environmental governance,

and how this process was possible as a result of reframing the relationship between publicness and privateness (Lövbrand & Stripple, 2012) and turning private consumption into a legitimate matter of public governance through these collaborative ventures (Zapata & Zapata Campos, 2018).

## Conclusions and futures

This short commentary has extended some of the observations in Zapata and Hall (2012) with respect to public-private collaboration in tourism and has highlighted some of the major contemporary concerns and issues. Many of the themes discussed reflect the ongoing tensions over the appropriate role of the state in contemporary society, especially given a backlash against austerity measures in some countries and increased uncertainty about the effectiveness of new public management, including with respect to tourism management and development (Hall & Zapata Campos, 2014). While collaboration between different policy and implementation actors in both formal and informal networks remains an important theme in tourism related research, the centrality of the state in governance, including its key role in supranational and international regimes, means that the overarching role of state institutions in determining the legitimacy and direction of collaborative activity in tourism requires more positive reassessment. The significance of the 'rules of the game' for tourism related collaboration, as for tourism public policy and governance overall, means that the meta-governance of collaborative arenas, such as partnerships and networks (Torfing et al., 2012), continues to be a challenging area for organisational learning. To what extent this move reflects a genuine transition from New Public Management to a different New Public Governance, or remains just an illusion, will only be found out by future research.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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