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Strategic marketing planning for heritage tourism: A conceptual model and empirical findings from two emerging heritage regions

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Strategic marketing planning for heritage tourism: A conceptual model and empirical findings from two emerging heritage regions

This paper examines the process of strategic marketing planning for heritage tourism; an inherently complex and fragmented system, requiring a coordinated approach among a range of stakeholders. A conceptual model, detailing key stakeholders and specific strategic functions, as well as a prescribed method of coordination, is presented. Two regions were investigated using a qualitative methodology, which examined five strategic documents and consisted of depth interviews with 11 key informants from the tourism industry. Key findings indicate that weak coordination, in terms of strategic marketing planning, has negative implications for heritage tourism marketing concerning four key strategic functions; strategic orientation, resource allocation, product service development and destination promotion. The paper emphasises the importance of strategic marketing planning for each function and considers the role of the public sector in terms of providing strategic direction. Furthermore, the paper highlights the potential difficulties of engaging in heritage tourism development in a non-traditional destination.

Keywords: Strategic marketing planning, Heritage tourism marketing, Strategic orientation, Resource allocation, Product service development, Destination promotion

Introduction

After three decades of political instability, the heritage tourism industry is arguably in its infancy in Northern Ireland. Tourism is recognised as a key economic driver for the region with a specific focus on the development of tourism, from government level, evident in regional strategic plans concerned with tourism and economic development. Given the geography of the region, heritage resources are the key focus of tourism development, in this non-traditional destination (Ayikoru, 2015).

As an industry, tourism requires a multi-sectoral, integrative approach (Panyik, Carlos and Rátz, 2011; Dwyer, Edwards, Mistilis, Roman and Scott, 2009), which is inclusive of government, private sector and community. Destination stakeholders must understand their role in tourism development (Dwyer et al, 2009; Hankinson, 2009), and they must understand the inter-connected nature of their efforts. Although, the onus is

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on public sector agencies to lead and ultimately instigate tourism development (Krutwaysho and Bramwell, 2010; Chhabra, 2009), committed community participation is also important.

The requirement for strategic planning approaches which are appropriate (Lane and Clewes 2000; Piercy, 1998) to the heritage tourism context is much debated and discussed in the literature (Alvarez and Korzay, 2011; Saxena and Ilbery, 2008; Aas, Ladkin and Fletcher, 2005), however there is as yet no solid, agreed upon framework on which to base heritage tourism planning. In order to address this problem, this research breaks down the components of the planning process and examines each individually.

Heritage Tourism Marketing Planning

The marketing of heritage regions as tourist destinations is a complex process and differs from traditional and mainstream tourism marketing practice (d'Angello and Go 2009; Hanna and Rowley 2011), with regional development and strategic objectives of the destination superseding those of individual businesses (Buhalis, 2000). In particular, a central aspect of the marketing of heritage regions concerns trying to achieve a balance in terms of generating commercial activity and preserving the heritage region (Hardy and Beeton, 2001; Gilmore, Carson, Ascenção and Fawcett, 2008; Jones and Shaw, 2012). This involves making a decision regarding whether to actively market a region as a tourist destination, which will have an impact on the social and environmental nature of the region (Su and Wall, 2014). There will be considerations in terms of allowing and developing access to heritage resources, given the need to offer a range of tourist products and services. The focus of marketing planning will not solely be concerned with increasing visitor numbers or generating a maximum return on investment (Harrison, 2002; Ottman, 2011). Heritage sites must ultimately serve the dual purposes (Donohoe, 2012; McKercher et al, 2005) of fulfilling tourist expectations whilst continuing to provide a residency to locals, thereby maintaining authenticity (Zou, Huang and Ding 2014).

As a heritage resource is traditionally considered to be a public good (Nuryanti, 1996; Palmer and Bejou, 1995; Kerr, 2003; Wray, 2011), the public sector will be responsible for core elements of the tourist provision and management (Ruhanen, 2010), including responsibility for the delivery and maintenance of a range of heritage tourism

resources such as infrastructure provision, planning control, marketing and promotion (Ruhanen, 2008). Such tasks are linked with bodies operating at different levels of government (Krutwaysho and Bramwell, 2010; Hall, 1999). The complexity herein lies with adequate coordination between these bodies and levels in the shared pursuit of tourism development, in order to overcome any potential conflict of interest or discord in policy direction (Krutwaysho and Bramwell, 2010; Kimbu and Ngoasong 2013). Indeed, this complexity can act as a limitation to tourism development. McKercher, Ho and du Cros (2005) further this point by reporting difficulties in collaborative working between stakeholders in this context due to a sense of 'protecting one's turf' rather than considering the best interests of the region, from a heritage tourism perspective.

Prior research indicates that effective strategic marketing planning requires the involvement of key stakeholders in the planning process (Aas et al, 2005; D'angella and Go, 2009; Bornhorst, Ritchie and Sheehan, 2010). Given these considerations, the marketing of heritage tourism relies on an infrastructure of key stakeholders, operating across different levels, carrying out a number of strategic functions, underpinned by a strategic process.

This study investigates the nature and scope of stakeholder involvement, participation and interaction in the strategic marketing planning process. Hence, Research objective 1 is to identify the range of stakeholders and investigate the extent of stakeholder involvement and participation in the strategic development of tourism marketing management in a regional economy (Northern Ireland).

Given the complex framework within which strategic marketing planning takes place in a heritage tourism context, the second research objective examines the processes of coordination in relation to the execution of specific marketing functions, as relevant to heritage tourism. This research objective will be fulfilled by generating in-depth understanding of the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders (as identified through RO 1) regarding tourism marketing management and implementation. This will involve consideration of the roles played by respective stakeholders, their relevance to effective coordination, and identification of crucial relationships in relation to the coordination and management of strategic marketing planning, hence research objective 2 is to investigate the coordination and management of strategic marketing planning of tourism in the context of heritage regions.

Heritage Tourism Infrastructure

In terms of the actual management and delivery of tourism infrastructure, government level bodies have a central role in strategic marketing planning (Kerr, 2003; Vernon, Essex, Pinder and Curry, 2005; Wray, 2011), particularly as they direct and lead the strategic planning process (Hall, 1999). Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs) are heavily involved in the coordination and management of strategic marketing planning (Sheehan, Ritchie and Hudson, 2007; Bornhorst et al, 2010). These organisations provide the links between government level bodies and private sector tourism organisations that provide products and services for tourists, that is Tourist Product Service Providers (TPSPs) (Gilmore, Carson and Ascenção, 2007; Greenley and Matcham, 1986). DMOs operate as a linking mechanism between public and private sectors, enabling coordination and integration (Bregoli, 2013; Bornhorst et al 2010).

Given the division of roles and responsibilities as described, an infrastructure of stakeholders representing heritage tourism marketing is illustrated in figure 1. The overall industry consists of three distinct levels. Government bodies are placed at level 1, as they provide strategic leadership and direction for tourism. TPSPs operate at level 3, the most customer-facing position in the infrastructure. DMOs, and other ancillary bodies sit at level 2, given their coordinating functions.

Strategic Functions

Strategic marketing planning for heritage tourism involves four strategic functions; strategic orientation, resource allocation, product service development and destination promotion. These are discussed below.

Strategic orientation

Strategic orientation is concerned with ensuring there is a level of consensus among stakeholders who are involved in the planning process, and that this consensus is directed towards tourism development.

Achieving a mutually agreeable strategic orientation among the array of stakeholders involved in heritage tourism marketing is important (Hanna and Rowley 2011), given the diverse range of stakeholders with potentially conflicting goals, orientations and ideas for tourism (Jamal and Getz, 1995; Nuryanti, 1996; Vernon et al, 2005; Wray,

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2011). Consideration of strategic orientation is a vital starting point for strategic marketing planning (Morgan and Piercy, 1998) in heritage tourism, and as a marketing function it encompasses a range of activities and responsibilities, including the stakeholder engagement process (Sautter and Leisen, 1999; Hardy and Beeton, 2001; Panyik et al, 2011).

Resource allocation

Resource allocation refers to the process of dispersing public resources throughout the tourism industry to suitable bodies, including destination marketing organisations, community groups and individuals. Given that there may be several bodies with tourism funding, it is important that they allocate funds in a streamlined manner.

The provision of an effective tourism product service offering ultimately requires intervention from public bodies in order to help stimulate development and provide necessary infrastructure (Hall, 1999; Gilmore, 2003; Alvarez and Korzay, 2011). This involves dedicating resources towards tourism-related projects at government level and requires a degree of management in relation to coordination between respective stakeholders. Resources dedicated to tourism development are largely provided by government departments. Given the diverse nature of tourism, resource allocation for tourism is likely to take a multi-sectoral approach (Panyik et al, 2011) with contributions from national, regional and local agencies (Devine and Devine, 2011). Furthermore, funding channelled towards local authorities, quangos and other government agencies also streams from central government. Public sector spending is often criticised for being inefficient and ineffective (Gilmore, 2003), a factor which is more pronounced in tourism, given the already fragmented nature (Wilson, Nielsen and Buultjens, 2009; Sheehan, Ritchie and Hudson, 2007; Jamal and Getz, 1995) of the industry. Effective management of resources to ensure public funds are appropriately administered is a critical issue (Pike and Page, 2014), and therefore is a key strategic marketing function for tourism development

Product service development

Product service development concerns the development of tourist related products and services; those which will contribute to the visitor servicing process.

Product service development is a key marketing function for tourism; the tourist offering consists of a broad range of products and services (Datzira-Masip, 2006;

Greenley and Maatcham, 1986; Panyik et al, 2011). These products and services will be provided by both public and private sectors (Alvarez and Korzay, 2011; Wray, 2011). Given that product service development should contribute to the public good, facilities are provided at government level to include major infrastructural developments and those concerning natural landscapes or resources (Nuryanti, 1996; Wilson et al, 2009). The provision of the range of products and services should be complementary and interdependent. A key requirement in the provision of these products and services is the level of coordination and integration between bodies in order to achieve a holistic tourist product (Kimbu and Ngoasong 2013

Destination promotion

Destination promotion is the promotion of an area or region at the destination level, normally carried out by a public body (Alvarez and Korzay 2011).

The promotion of a region as a tourist destination can potentially be carried out across a range of levels. Within a destination there are multiple individual businesses that will be involved in promotional efforts, either on an individual and independent basis, or as part of a collaborative effort. Overall, the task of destination promotion is complex and complicated and requires coordination of a number of stakeholder groups.

The principal task of promoting a region as a tourist destination lies with the public sector (Alvarez and Korzay, 2011; Greenley and Matcham, 1986), however the task ultimately requires collaborative efforts between national government, local authorities and private sector TPSPs (Alvarez and Korzay, 2011). This has implications for resource allocation and depends upon the links between each strategic marketing function; destination promotion will be funded in part by an array of public sector bodies (Boyne and Hall, 2004). In promoting a destination there can be a conflict or incongruence in strategic orientation in terms of the direction or image with which the destination is promoted (Skinner, 2005). These four strategic marketing functions are illustrated in figure 2. These will be executed by the stakeholder framework depicted in figure 1, relating to the integrative approach required; several stakeholders will be involved in executing each of these functions.

Strategic Processes – importance of horizontal coordination

Given the complex and multifaceted nature of the destination (Panyik et al, 2011; Prideaux and Cooper, 2003), the division of responsibilities relating to strategic functions can be problematic (Wang and Ap, 2013). As outlined, a range of government agencies (public sector), operating at different levels, will have responsibilities for various strategic marketing functions. In order for this to be managed effectively, horizontal coordination is required through interaction at local, regional and national levels (Hall, 1999; Westering and Niel 2003; Dinnie, 2010; Krutwaysho and Bramwell, 2010).

Following a study of sustainable heritage tourism marketing (SHTM) at a World Heritage Site, Donohoe (2012) contends that marketing should focus on 'enhancing partnership networks; facilitating community collaboration and benefits; developing and operationalising a research agenda; and communicating core values with target markets (including stakeholders)' (p.137). Donohoe's study confirms the importance of partnerships in terms of their fundamental role to the long-term success of heritage tourism marketing, validating Chhabra's (2009) proposition that collaboration and partnership are the fundamental basis of SHTM. However, the study is limited in that it does not dictate the fundamental parameters of these partnerships, including who should be included, the nature of the partnerships and how the partnership are managed, nor what these partnerships should achieve, in terms of strategic functions.

Similarly, a study of tourism policy implementation in Thailand, carried out by Krutwaysho and Bramwell (2010), concluded that strategic implementation required interactions between an array of groups and individuals, including different public sector agencies and levels of government, each bound by their own distinct views or policy agendas. The performance of government was influential to the success of policy implementation; however stakeholders were engaged in processes of horizontal coordination in terms of negotiation and bargaining in order to achieve implementation, based on their own interests.

Given that effective marketing activity in a heritage tourism context is dependent on horizontal coordination, the strength of coordination at government level is a significant factor. Research carried out by Aas et al (2005) examined the extent of stakeholder collaboration in the management of a heritage tourism development project which utilised the approach, in Luang Prabang, Laos. A key conclusion drawn from the

study was that poor coordination at government level had a negative impact on the overall tourism effort, 'a gross lack of coordination among the government agencies, made the project inefficient and reduced the will of others to be engaged,' (p.43) indicating that horizontal coordination at government level has an impact upon stakeholder engagement throughout the industry. The key components of horizontal coordination are illustrated in figure 3. Dialogue and communication are required between relevant government bodies (Krutwaysho and Bramwell, 2010). This enables cooperation between departments in pursuit of the implementation of key strategic functions, which will ultimately result in a strategic orientation between relevant bodies and their counterparts (Nunkoo, Gursoy and Juwaheer, 2010).

Given the multi-faceted nature of tourism, the demands of managing a heritage tourist region transcend individual bodies and as a result a coordinated approach between stakeholders is required to ensure a clear process of strategic marketing planning. A conceptual model presenting a multi-level framework of tourism management, which encapsulates and builds upon the literature, combining figures 1, 2 and 3, is demonstrated in figure 4. This was used to guide the empirical research carried out in order to address the objectives of the study.

Methodology

In order to fulfil the objectives of the research, a research methodology which provided in-depth insights into the strategic marketing planning process, as well as taking account of the perspectives of various stakeholders involved in tourism at heritage regions was required. To achieve a rich and in-depth investigation and understanding of the processes involved in tourism marketing planning, a qualitative methodology using a case study approach was chosen. The research aimed to take a holistic approach to the tourism industry and investigate strategic marketing from the perspective of government level bodies, including government departments, local authorities and ancillary government bodies, such as DMOs. In short, the range of government related organisations that have some impact upon planning for tourism.

Two tourist regions were chosen as cases, Causeway Coast and Glens and the Mournes region. These serve as individual units of analysis, which aligns with the holistic,

multiple case design (Carson et al 2001; Jordan and Gibson 2004). The case design is presented in figure 5.

Research investigating the role and impact of planning at government level (level 1, figure 4) was designed to gain an understanding of the nature and scope of stakeholder involvement and participation in tourism development at strategic planning level. Analysis of strategic masterplans for the two heritage regions and the whole geographical region was a logical first step in this process. The masterplans were developed under the leadership of government agencies, including Department for Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI), Department for Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD), Department of the Environment (DOE) and the national tourist board, and essentially detail the strategic planning process for 5-10 years in advance. They provided a valuable source of information regarding strategic planning issues and tourism development.

A content analysis instrument was employed to analyse these masterplan documents, designed to identify specific stakeholder groups who were involved in the strategic development process. Stakeholders identified in the plans were categorised into groups according to the stakeholders' unit of governance; for example, where several government departments were listed, these are grouped under the category 'government department'. In this manner, stakeholder groups were identified from the plans.

However, the content analysis of key strategic documents can only unveil a limited amount of data. It was possible to identify the stakeholders who contributed to the plans, but it was not possible to evaluate the extent of this contribution. In order to get a comprehensive view, in-depth interviews were used to further investigate the stakeholder engagement and consultation process with organisations operating at Level 2.

In-depth interviews provided a valuable instrument for gathering individual perspectives on phenomena given the research issues, allowing a rich and nuanced account of stakeholder opinions, attitudes and experiences (Wilson et al 2009). The in-depth interview was useful for gathering rich and meaningful data, which led to significant depth of understanding (Carson, Gilmore, Perry and Gronhaug, 2001).

At level 2, key informants operating in the tourism industry in Northern Ireland were specifically chosen for their role in tourism. A total of 11 key informants participated in the research representing more than 75% of the Destination Marketing Organisations, Local Action Groups and government agencies with tourism responsibilities in Northern Ireland. Of these, four were from the Causeway Coast and Glens region, representing two DMOs and two LAGs. Two were from the Mourne region, representing two DMOs. The remaining five were representatives from government level agencies related to tourism, including CAAN, National Trust and DMOs from Fermanagh and Belfast, to provide further context. Given the size of Northern Ireland, these 11 key informants provided a good representation of the two heritage regions under study.

Key themes discussed during the interviews included: the identification of key stakeholders, the nature of relationships between stakeholders, the extent of interaction with stakeholders operating at all levels, the priorities and focus of tourism development, the requirements for effective tourism delivery and the potential barriers to tourism development. Follow up interviews were carried out with four of the informants following the initial analysis of interview transcripts. This provided an opportunity to present emerging findings and to encourage further discussion, which contributed to the depth of understanding and to verify emerging issues.

Data from interviews were transcribed and then analysed using a coding framework developed from the literature (according to the conceptual model). Specifically, key issues relating to heritage tourism marketing were highlighted, and then coded according to relevant stakeholder group(s). Key issues were linked to strategic functions. Data were then organised in relation to the strategic process (horizontal coordination), with interdependencies between each noted. Using an iterative approach, the coding process was further refined as data were analysed, and key themes and linkages emerged.

Findings

Insights into each strategic function are presented in relation to the effectiveness of strategic processes. In addition to the organisations identified from the literature review, there are several government associated organisations in Northern Ireland which

have tourism related responsibilities. One of which is an umbrella organisation representing outdoor and countryside activity groups (CAAN), and is engaged in product development initiatives. In addition, Local Action Groups are also prevalent in tourism development given the scale of the Rural Development Programme in Northern Ireland, and its tourism specific agenda. These organisations operate at level 2 (figure 4).

Strategic Orientation

This section presents findings concerning levels of horizontal coordination achieved at Level 1 in relation to achieving a strategic orientation for tourism (Jamal and Getz, 1995; Nuryanti, 1996; Vernon et al, 2005; Wray, 2011). Key issues are linked with a lack of engagement between relevant bodies (Krutwaysho and Bramwell 2010; Aas et al 2005), due to poor communication and a failure to recognise mutual responsibilities for tourism (Wang and Ap 2013), which has negative implications for strategic marketing planning process. This consequently has an impact on each respective level within the industry. Overall, the process of horizontal coordination is described as weak, complicating the execution of strategic functions.

The key stakeholders including government departments and local authorities operate at level 1. Tourism is part of the remit for several government departments, and each local authority examined in this research has some responsibility for tourism. However, relevant departments are perceived by informants to be failing to engage in a sufficiently cooperative relationship in terms of tourism development, due to weak inter-departmental communication. This is manifested in the multiple approaches to tourism which are ultimately inconsistent, incompatible and incongruent. Key informants operating at level 2, who require guidance and support from level 1, indicated that there is a lack of co-ordination and this impacts upon their own efficiency and ability to fulfil their role. For example:

> There could be better coordination between the government
> departments...because strategic priorities have been recognised, we have two
> departments that have tourism as a key priority - yet the two departments
> don't work together. (Level 2 manager, Mourne Heritage Trust)

Another respondent offered a similar insight, suggesting that the core of the problem is that responsibility for tourism is dispersed among several departments. Given the weak inter-departmental communication detected, this respondent suggests that tourism should be an overarching priority, with links between all departments for both strategic and operational activities.

> Tourism is part of a wider portfolio around economic development and tourism is a priority for that department [DETI] but it's not necessarily a priority for the other departments and there lies the problem, it should be a priority for government. (Level 2, Senior Tourism Initiatives Manager, Down District Council)

The current administrative structure whereby responsibilities are dispersed in this manner adds to the bureaucratic burden and hinders the decision making process, which becomes evident in the analysis of other strategic functions.

In the Mourne region, Level 2 stakeholders describe a failure of local authorities to achieve a strategic orientation relating to the region which results in a range of limitations for tourism. This manifests itself in a lack of communication between such bodies and ultimately to a failure to collectively recognise the requirements of tourism marketing for the region; organisations are essentially bound to the requirements of their specific localities rather than taking an overall destination approach. The situation acts as an impediment to tourism development as it undermines the strategic orientation for heritage tourism in this region. The following quote illustrates this point;

> Working with three different councils is difficult. When it comes to the bigger council meetings, if you look at Newry and Mourne district council area, we are on the periphery of that area; we're competing with South Armagh and with Newry City. Within the Council chamber you have different agendas and different interests within that chamber and the Mournes, as a destination, is quite weak from that point of view. (Level 2, Manager, Mourne Heritage Trust)

The view is taken from the perspective of a Level 2 stakeholder (DMO manager) who has, as part of their remit, marketing responsibilities regarding the Mournes as a destination. However, this task is stifled by the administration of local authorities.

The described lack of strategic orientation at Level 1 inevitably filters down throughout the industry infrastructure. Local Action Groups (LAGs), operating at Level 2 are portrayed in a similar manner to government departments in terms of inter-departmental communication:

> Local Action Groups deliver the Rural Development Programme, yet they do not communicate well with one another...There are three groups with three different strategies. This needs to be streamlined. (Level 2, Manager, Causeway Coast and Glens Regional Tourism Partnership)

The organisation of LAGs is in contention with the organisation of the tourist regions, with negative implications reported from a destination perspective (DMO).

Resource allocation

The lack of strategic orientation detected at Level 1 has direct implications for the specific marketing functions concerning tourism development (Aas, 2005). In particular, resource allocation between Level 1 and Level 2 is described as inefficient due to various government departments failing to allocate tourism resources in a way which is reflective of the tourism infrastructure. In this context, government departments do not have a common approach (Panyik et al 2011) to tourism and therefore one department may aspire to funding and supporting a particular initiative which another associated department does not (Krutwaysho and Bramwell 2010). The following quote demonstrates the implication of this:

> The coordination of funding coming from different government departments would certainly help [implementation]. Better commitment from government and better communication right down to an implementation level. (Level 2, Senior Tourism Initiatives Manager, Down District Council)

The fragmented strategic planning process has implications for strategic implementation. Government departments fail to recognise how respective funds are being spent, indicating that there is a lack of strategic orientation between departments, for example, one department may support and fund a development initiative while another department opposes it, based on the individual policies of that department, regardless of the potential benefits brought about by tourism. Similarly, there may be more than one department with a resource budget for tourism, yet the various

departments are described as failing to communicate in terms of how this funding is used. As a result, the coordination of funding is 'messy' and prone to inefficiencies (Devine and Devine 2011). Resource allocation is influenced by the strength of strategic orientation, and subsequently impacts upon other strategic functions, such as product service development.

A specific illustration of this is provided in the Mourne region. A Mourne Coastal Route was proposed; however its development was restricted as relevant bodies could not agree on a funding plan. The outcome was that the development and implementation of the project was an overly lengthy process, consequently jading destination stakeholders.

A similar situation is reported in the Causeway Coast and Glens region where there is a conflict of interest as to whether or not development should be permitted at or near the World Heritage Site. The implication is that any potential development initiatives are subject to debate between various local authorities, as the following quote illustrates.

> We have funders, such as Moyle District Council, who want more development at the World Heritage Site and then another LA will say, "No development, we can't have any development, it can't happen if it's within the World Heritage Site". Because of this we are tied sometimes. (Level 2, Sustainable Development Officer, Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust)

A further implication of poor strategic orientation at Level 1 is evident in the resource allocation process from a Level 2 perspective. There are inefficiencies in the allocation of resources for tourism due to several government departments failing to allocate funding for tourism in a streamlined manner. This situation impacts upon Level 2 stakeholders who attempt to attract resources in order to fund activity (such as promotional activity and product development). This situation not only results in the effective spending of resources, it also creates inefficiencies at Level 2 in terms of the process government agencies must participate in, in order to attract funding. Level 2 is heavily dependent on the competence at Level 1. This scenario is detected in both regions:

There seems to be a lack of communication and cross-communication in this region. For example in this organisation, we try to get funding from the different departments where we would say 'look, we relate to you for good reasons', but it's a struggle. (Level 2, Sustainable Development Officer, Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust)

[Government] departments don't work together to actually say, "well we've set aside a certain budget for that", so we are finding ourselves competing all the time for funding [from different departments] which is a huge waste of our time and resources. (Level 2, Manager, Mourne Heritage Trust)

These comments relate to the difficulties in applying for funding from government departments (Level 1) who do not recognise their mutual responsibilities for tourism (Wang and Ap 2013), thus subordinate departments (level 2) apply for multiple, piecemeal funding streams, which is an ineffective use of their resources. In addition, they find themselves competing for similar funding streams which are dispersed across government departments, as the following quote illustrates:

For the likes of Causeway Coast and Glens Regional Tourism Partnership [DMO] it may be frustrating because it seems like there is no regional approach; they have to make two applications rather than just one, but DARD are the managing authority and that's how they set out the programme...There is a danger that a project may be approved by one LAG and not by another. (Level 2, Grow Local Action Group)

Product service development

In relation to product service development, poor strategic orientation between government departments is linked with deficiencies in this strategic marketing function. A key issue with product service development is the range of bodies who are involved in this strategic function (Alvarez and Korzey 2011), and who are required to coordinate in order to make progress. The failure to recognise collective responsibility for tourism, in relation to identifying and developing resources for tourism, is problematic as heritage tourism requires strong horizontal coordination if tourist products are to be developed (Donohoe 2012; Chhabra 2009).

Product service development is dispersed given the organisations involved in delivering it, Councils, Tourist Board, DMOs; we need an organisation to

have a coordinating role. (Level 2, Sustainable Tourism Manager, Mourne Heritage Trust)

The array of relevant organisations in relation to product service development, such as government departments, local authorities, destination marketing organisations and other ancillary bodies, emphasises the need for strong coordination. Table 1 details potential development initiatives in the Mourne region which have been stunted due to government level stakeholders failing to achieve a strategic orientation through horizontal coordination.

A conflict of interest between relevant stakeholder groups has a negative impact on product development, as the following quote demonstrates:

Down District Council...are supportive of the national park, that's not the same in the other Councils of Newry and Mourne and Banbridge. (Level 2, Senior Tourism Initiatives Manager, Down District Council)

For example, two of the three LA with ownership rights of the Mourne region are in opposition to a national park being developed in the region. Given this, the project is effectively at a standstill until some resolve can be reached.

The forestry service (an ancillary government body) illustrates how a failure at government level to align departments towards tourism as a strategic priority can impede development. Stakeholders operate according to a policy agenda specific to their remit, without taking due consideration of the tourism potential. The result is that there is an insufficient level of tourism products and services available in the Mourne region in particular, and an underutilised resource:

The forests are really underutilised areas. If you go to Tollymore now, you can park your car and do your own thing and that's really it...I think there is [sic] massive opportunities for using that site to create opportunities for the private sector to make money – and the public sector – that public-private partnership...We've been trying to build mountain bike trails with objection from the Forest Service; their priority has been making money by cutting down trees. (Level 2, Marketing Manager, CAAN)

Destination promotion

The recurrent and systemic lack of coordination extends to the function of destination promotion. There is potential for confusion in roles and responsibilities for promotion between LAs and DMOs. Despite the fact that LAs fund DMOs to manage aspects of tourism marketing, such as promotion, individual LAs continue to invest in promotional activities, in addition to the DMO effort. This inevitably leads to duplication in the spending of resources and results in potentially mixed marketing messages emerging from the regions. In practice, each local authority produces promotional literature pertaining to their local region. In addition to this, both regional tourism organisations, such as DMOs and sector specific organisations, such as Bed and Breakfast Associations, produce promotional literature. Not only is this approach inefficient in terms of duplication of activities, there is also the danger that messages communicated are diluted among the various channels, thereby communicating a weak and potentially confused marketing message. Furthermore, numerous brochures and associated promotional literature are likely to create problems for distribution agencies and also confusion for tourists as they are challenged with 'cutting through the clutter' of promotional messages. Lack of coordination in relation to destination promotion is illustrated with the following quote:

> In the Mournes there is no overarching body developing a single message. As a result there are too many messages and they are ineffective. (Level 2, Senior Tourism Initiatives Manager, Down District Council)

Respondents at level 2 advocated that the presence of an overarching body may help towards coordinating messages; however this will be subject to effective structures being in place to support the arching body.

Discussion

This paper highlights the intricate dynamics which dictate the coordination and management of strategic marketing planning in a heritage tourism context. In particular, the considerable power and influence of specific stakeholders within the public sector is evident. Overall, there is a lack of core strategic direction for tourism management. The result is that the strategic functions relevant to strategic marketing planning for heritage tourism are unclearly and ambiguously assigned between myriad bodies and agencies (Wang and Ap, 2013). This scenario is magnified when examined

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in the context of specific and individual strategic functions as they are carried out by respective stakeholders. Not only is the organisation of the industry as a whole complex (as illustrated in figure 1), it is only when individual functions are examined in isolation, the true diversity and complexity of heritage tourism is brought to light. To correct this situation, the requirement for strong coordination between stakeholders is paramount.

At strategic level, horizontal coordination between bodies is endemically poor, resulting in a wholly disintegrated approach to strategic marketing planning for heritage tourism. The implications of this approach are evident across the spectrum of strategic marketing functions and are significant across the levels of management and administration for tourism, from government level planning to individual tourism providers. In particular, the influential role of government is highlighted (Wray, 2011), given that lower level stakeholders must operate within the constraints of level 1 activity. There are deficiencies across the four strategic functions that can be attributed to components of the processes of horizontal coordination, specifically weak inter-departmental communication (Donohoe et al, 2015), lack of co-operation and strategic orientation.

The limitations of policy-led tourism bodies as described by McKercher et al (2005) and Kruywatsho and Bramwell (2010) are detected in this study and have practical implications for heritage tourism marketing. In particular, this behaviour restricts product service development (as table 1 illustrates) and the resource allocation function as organisations fail to communicate effectively, and thus fail to recognise their mutual responsibility for and contribution to tourism development. This ultimately has knock-on effects for the industry, creating a confused and complicated web. Overall, it represents the lack of a shared vision for tourism, despite tourism being recognised and prioritised as a key economic driver. The role played by the public sector largely dictates the management of tourism (Wray, 2011; Krutwaysho and Bramwell, 2010) in the two regions, with the overall coordination and delivery of tourism dependent on the organisation of Level 1 and Level 2. Decisions made at Level 2 are subject to strategic processes and are constrained by ineffective coordinating processes. This leads to a serious lack of direction and support for companies operating at level 3 whose purpose is to provide the tourism service product.

Conclusion

A deliberate and predetermined process of strategic marketing planning, particularly in relation to horizontal co-ordination, is vital to the effective execution of strategic marketing functions, in a heritage tourism context. This currently poses a challenge for heritage site management in these two regions. The key processes required to carry out strategic marketing planning for heritage tourism have been investigated. The findings have illustrated the lack of a central coordinating mechanism within the strategic planning framework. The fundamental role and impact of coordination on specific marketing functions is emphasised, while establishing the core strategic marketing functions for strategic marketing planning for heritage tourism.

The prevailing role played by the public sector in tourism is emphasised and its theoretical relevance in terms of tourism marketing is reinforced, as is the crucial requirement for strong strategic direction. Improved coordination between relevant bodies, underpinned by an overall recognition of the characteristics and dynamics of tourism and the benefit of a mutual approach, would make the organisation of heritage tourism more efficient and effective. The success of the strategic marketing planning process is highly dependent on effective coordination at government level, which ultimately impacts upon strategic functions, including product service development and destination promotion, the effects of which are felt most acutely at the tourism product delivery level (level 3). The effectiveness (in terms of coordination) of strategic planning carried out at level 1 and level 2 directly impacts upon the operational delivery of tourism at level 3; operational planning suffers from the inadequacies in the strategic planning processes.

This research contributes to the strategic marketing literature by examining key issues relating to heritage tourism marketing in an emerging destination. Empirical findings suggest that coordination between relevant bodies is absolutely crucial to strategic marketing planning and should be efficient, methodical, straightforward and ultimately action-orientated, so as to continue to engage the spectrum of relevant stakeholders. This process will impact upon the competitiveness of the destination (Ayikoru, 2015), as it will directly influence the tourism offering.

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Strategic marketing planning at heritage regions could be enhanced through a centralised approach to tourism, enabling inter-departmental agreement in relation to strategic functions for tourism development. Explicit recognition of the roles played by respective stakeholders and consideration of their relevance to effective coordination and integration is vital to the achievement of successful and holistic strategic implementation. Thus, it can be argued that the competitiveness of the destination lies more with the success of its strategic marketing planning processes, than in the natural heritage resource on which the tourism product is based. The key factor is the strategic marketing planning process itself.

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Level 1	Government Level Bodies
Level 2	Destination Marketing Organisation
Level 3	Tourist Product Service Providers

Figure 1 Heritage Tourism Infrastructure

Strategic Orientation

Resource Allocation

Product service development
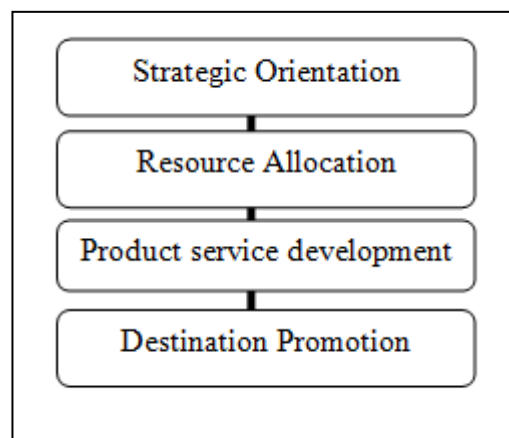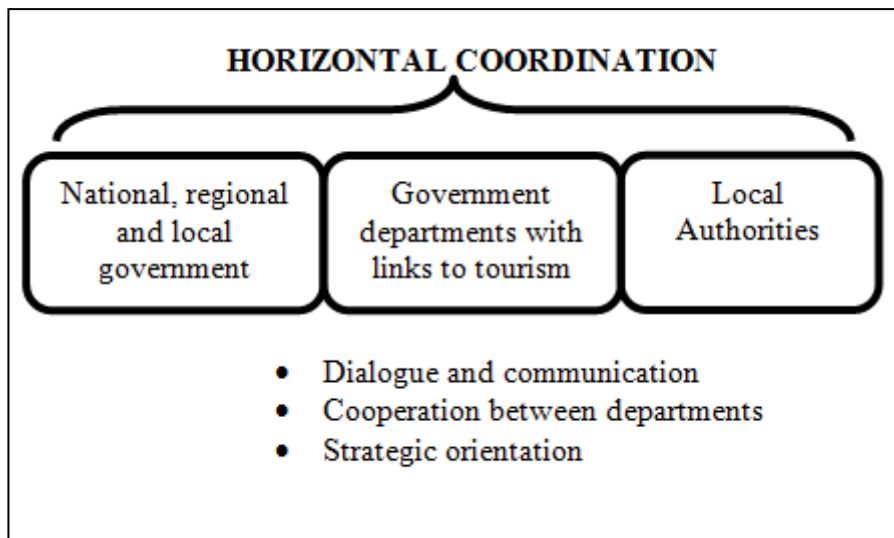
Destination Promotion

Figure 2 Strategic Marketing Functions

Figure 3 Horizontal Coordination
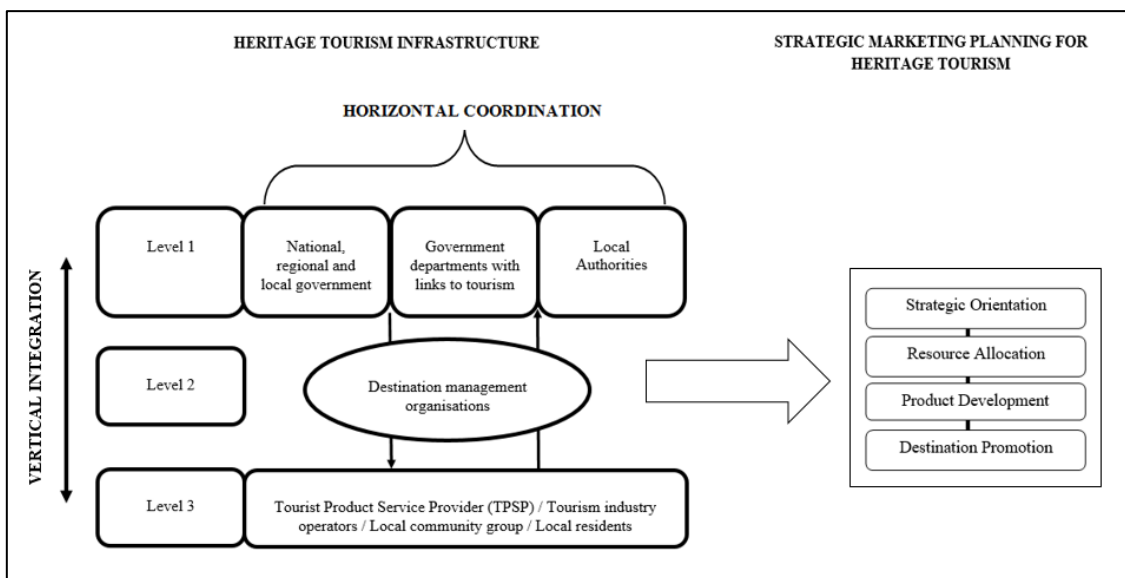
Figure 4 Conceptual model

	Source	Data collection and Analysis	
Level 1	Government Level Bodies	Key strategic documents Attendance at industry events	Content analysis
Level 2	Destination Marketing Organisation	Key informants	In-depth interview
Level 3	Tourist Product Service Providers	Tourist Product Service Providers	In-depth interview

Figure 5 Case design

Table 1 Product Development Initiatives in Mourne Region

Strategic Development Initiative	Reasons for failure	Strategic process
Mourne Coastal Route	**Local Authorities** Lack of shared strategic alignment Limited strategic direction supporting the project Funding issues	Horizontal coordination
National Park	**Local Authorities** Lack of shared strategic alignment Lack of strategic direction	Horizontal coordination
Development of Forests	**Government Departments** Lack of a shared strategic alignment Lack of recognition of requirements of tourism development	Horizontal coordination

Table 2 Table of acronyms

CAAN	Countryside Access and Activities Network
DARD	Department for Agriculture and Rural Development
DETI	Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment
DMO	Destination Marketing Organisation
DOE	Department of Environment
LA	Local Authority
LAG	Local Action Group
SHTM	Sustainable Heritage Tourism Marketing
TPSP	Tourist Product Service Provider