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Title: The role of transport in tourism development: nodal functions and management practices.

OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH

Although most of the tourism literature acknowledges transport as one of the most significant factors to have contributed to the development of tourism worldwide (steamships and the steam trains in the 19th century, cars and coaches in the 1950s and wide-bodied jets after the 1970s), there has been little research undertaken on the precise relationship between transport and tourism.

Analysing the existing tourism transport literature, it is possible to highlight some trends, such as:

- Most of the existing research has been conducted from a single discipline perspective (economics, geography, management, psychology or sociology), without a multidisciplinary approach;
- Studies usually concentrate on only one mode of transport, predominantly air transport. In addition, apart from rare exceptions such as Owen (1991) and Stubbs & Jegede (1998), intermodalism among the different modes of transports is seldom considered;
- Some types of partnership (marketing, promotion, alliances, loyalty programs, CRS) between transport and tourism companies are still to be considered, principally other suppliers than airlines and hotel chains (Lafferty and Fossen, 2001);

- Although many studies about transport networks focus on hubs, Bowen (2000) is one of the few researchers to illustrate how international hubs, such as Bangkok and Singapore, took advantage of transiting traffic concentration to develop their tourism markets. Other nodal functions such as gateways and their impacts on tourism are still to be considered.

This PhD research seeks to fill this literature gap through taking a multidisciplinary and intermodal perspective, and considering different types of partnerships between the tourism and transport sectors and the contribution of gateways to tourism development. As transport is one of the key elements to tourism, the knowledge obtained in this research will help to better understand how multi-modal transport can or not improve tourism in gateway destinations. Moreover, this knowledge will be useful not only to the study area (Centre Stage of New Zealand), but also to many other gateway destinations around the world that want to increase their tourist numbers by attracting their existing transiting passenger traffic.

Research area

In order to develop this thesis, a case study area was chosen: the Centre Stage (CS) of New Zealand region, a brand developed by four regional tourism organizations — Marlborough, Nelson, Wairarapa and Wellington — in central New Zealand (Totally Wellington, 2000).

Ferry services linking Wellington, the capital city, and Picton make them, respectively, gateways to the North and South Islands. The flow of passengers passing by these two places can be a great source of tourists if they are attracted to visit and stay there. The three vessels used in these services¹ — two conventional ships (The Interislander) and one fast ferry catamaran (The Lynx) — are able to carry coaches, cars, trucks and rail, allowing a multi-modal analysis to be developed. Moreover, transport management issues like seasonality, service disruption, terminal location and environmental impacts can influence tourism development and

¹ These vessels are operated by The Interisland Line. Since January 2nd, 2003, another company, Strait Shipping, is operating a French-flagged conventional ship, Santa Regina.

also need to be analysed. Lastly, there is the competition with regional air services across the Cook Strait that can be compared to the ferry services.

Theoretical background

Van Klink and van den Berg (1998:8) suggest that gateways are in “*an excellent position to stimulate intermodal transport*” and that, in the case of seaports, this can be a way to enlarge their hinterlands. In the case of passenger transportation, Pearce (1995) notes that “*gateways in a general sense are seen as major entry/exit points for travellers into or out of a national or regional system*”. In another study (Pearce, 2001), he also explains how places can have multiple nodal functions at the same time (hubs, gateways, origins and destinations). For this reason, it is possible to consider that every passenger passing through a gateway is a potential tourist for local and regional tourism areas (destination). At the same time, the accessibility created by the transport infrastructure can help gateway nodes to generate tourists to other destinations (tourism origin).

As seen from the above-mentioned definitions, the gateway function is mainly associated with transport operations and passenger flows, including integration between different modes of transport or transfer within the same transport mode in different scales (international, national, regional or local). However, if portal communities want to develop themselves as tourist origins or destinations, it is necessary to persuade local people to travel outside their usual environment as well as transiting passengers to visit and stay in these destinations. In order to achieve this, well-coordinated actions between transport companies, the tourism sector and local / regional tourism organizations are required. This can involve operation, management, marketing and sales partnerships between transport and tourism activities.

RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

This research aims to achieve a better understanding of the role of a transport system to promote and develop tourism in a certain destination.

The main research questions associated with this project are:

- How can transport services, infrastructures and networks improve tourism in gateways?
- What are the roles of different players (the demand, the transport suppliers and the tourism organization) in the development of multiple nodal functions?
- How can partnerships among these players improve tourism in gateways?
- How do transport management issues like seasonality, service disruption, environmental impacts etc. influence tourism development?

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

In order to operationalize the theory embraced in this research, two different approaches will be taken. Firstly, the research will focus on various players' points-of-view: the *supply* (tourism and transport businesses), the *demand* (passengers and tourists) and *tourism organizations*. Suppliers and tourism organizations will be approached to identify how management issues and partnerships between transport and tourism companies can develop tourism in the study area.

Secondly, two different travel patterns will be analysed so the various nodal functions can be better explored. One will consider multi-modal inter-regional journeys that use the ferry services. Passengers taking the ferries will be interviewed to determine whether they had come to gateways just to pass through them or whether they are also staying and visiting those places. The second will approach actual and potential intra-regional travellers (within CS region) using ferry and air transport modes. Origin and destination functions will be analysed and the transport role in them identified. In the case of the ferries, their two different services (the Lynx and the Interislander) surely have different impacts on the gateway, destination and origin functions according to the price, speed, comfort, time of depart etc. that they provide. In the case of intra-regional trips, another component can be added to this comparison: the air services. To achieve this, different data collection methodologies will be used.

Data collection and data analysis

For the demand and potential travellers, face-to-face surveys seem to be the most efficient way to collect their opinions, behaviours and profiles (quantitative and qualitative data). Ferry

passengers sail for at least two hours, which makes them more available to be interviewed. Potential travellers will be selected among people living in the CS region. Specific questions on the questionnaire will consider the two travel patterns mentioned above (see items 1 and 2 below). In addition, other issues will be considered in this study: different transport services and its impacts on different nodal function (item 3):

1. Inter-regional² pattern travels:

- 1.1. What makes inter-regional passengers travel by ferry across Cook Strait?
- 1.2. Is the passenger visiting/staying in Wellington or Picton during the current holiday/trip? Why? Why not? How could the ferry booking experience have induced s/he to visit these destinations?
- 1.3. What would make him/her visit Wellington or Picton? What would make him/her stay longer in Wellington or Picton?
- 1.4. What are the main differences (booking procedures, seasonality, peak season) between domestic & international tourists / FIT and tour groups pattern of travel?

2. Intra-regional³ pattern travels:

- 2.1. What makes intra-regional passengers travel by ferry or air across Cook Strait? Had s/he considered travelling by the other mode of transport?
- 2.2. What is the pattern of travel by these two different modes of transport?
- 2.3. Is there any difference in where tourists stay in CS according to the transport used? What are the differences in types of activities undertaken? How long do intra-regional tourists stay in the CS?
- 2.4. Which destinations have more potential to attract tourists? What are the main places of origin?
- 2.5. What would attract potential demand to visit/travel within the CS?

3. Relationship between ferry services and nodal functions:

- 3.1. How can different ferry services (The Lynx – fast ferry, more expensive and comfortable service – and the Interislander – conventional ships) create different opportunities for tourism activities in different locations (Wellington – urban capital

² In this context, inter-regional travels are those originated or whose destination is outside the Centre Stage of New Zealand.

³ Only travels within the Centre Stage of New Zealand.

city developing tourism in Wellington and Wairarapa regions – and Picton – small town improving tourism in Nelson and Marlborough regions)?

For the supply and tourism organizations, two different methodologies will be used. In-depth interviews (qualitative data) will be considered for key tourism and transport (air and ferry services) businesses involved in the gateway function and CS tourism. For all other tourism and transport companies and organizations indirectly involved, a postal survey may be used (a mixture of quantitative and qualitative data will be obtained). In this case, this technique can be considered more useful and practical, since tourism and transport suppliers are spread all over the CS region, making face-to-face contact more expensive. Questions to be included in the in-depth interview and postal survey include:

- How do tourism and transport companies/organizations see the ferry services operation? In which ways are they succeeding? What can be improved?
- What are the operational impacts of the ferry services on other tourism related businesses?
- Apart from the ‘Centre Stage of New Zealand’ brand to promote central New Zealand as a tourism market, what other opportunities could be explored by transport and tourism sectors in order to attract more tourists to the Centre Stage region?
- Is seasonality a big issue? How can transport and tourism companies work together in order to minimize it?
- How can the different ferry services deal with service disruption⁴? Would passengers use more the ferry if they knew that they would have compensation or substitution? How can the air services become partners?
- What can be learned / expected from previous, present - from regional air services⁵ - or future competition – such as from other ferry services – to improve tourism in the CS region?
- How do environmental issues impact or not on the ferry services operation? What are the consequences to the tourism industry?

⁴ Cancellations occur when waves are higher than four meters in the case of the catamaran and eight meters for the conventional ships.

⁵ Although the regional air services can seen primarily as competitors, they could also act as partners if The Interisland Line, for example, decide to create alternatives for its passengers in the case that the ferries can not operate due to bad weather.

- What is the importance of freight to maintain tourism transport services? Is freight cross-subsidizing the passenger service?
- What are the consequences of moving the ferry terminal from Picton to Clifford Bay? Which businesses and places will benefit? Which will lose?

Considering that changes to existing tourism transport services will surely have an impact on demand and also knowing that new tourists' / travellers' needs will mean different services to be offered by the suppliers, it is important that the methodology is able to measure and analyse these mutual influences on each other.

In order to consider seasonality issues and their impacts on the demand, actual and potential travellers/tourists will be surveyed during the high season: winter (2003) and summer (2003-4). The winter 2003 data collection will be used to gather information in terms of the existing and potential demand and their needs and suggestions for tourism transport in the CS region. Moreover, the data obtained will be analysed and included in the postal survey and in-depth interviews, so providers can evaluate the response from travellers and the potential users. After analysing data from the postal survey and in-depth interviews, another round of data collection will be made with the demand (during the summer 2003-4) taking into consideration the main issues from the previous surveys. Finally, a second round of in-depth interviews will be arranged with the same key tourism transport business, so they can evaluate how the demand's perception will change or not some of their previous considerations.

As can be seen, in this research, data collection and data analysis processes will interact with each other, so new products and suggestions raised from each player can be tested with the others. Face-to-face survey results will also help to develop some of the questions to be considered in the postal survey and in-depth interviews.

Analysing quantitative and qualitative data from different sources (players) will require various tools. Statistical packages such as SPSS will be used for the quantitative data. Qualitative data will be analysed making use of analytical and descriptive, comparative and

synthesis approaches. In some other cases, specific techniques can be employed, such as Geographic Information System.

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