Stakeholder Engagement in Destination Management: A Systematic Review of Literature

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The topic of stakeholder engagement is not a new phenomenon, nor is it an entirely distinct area of study, rather stakeholder engagement has drawn input and influence from number of academic streams and can be based on a range of different perspectives. The wide variety of circumstances and contexts that involve stakeholder engagement means that it has proved challenging for researchers to create a single, all-encompassing construal of stakeholder engagement, however there is a growing body of knowledge that seeks to inform and enhance how stakeholders are engaged. Within the international tourism sector the benefits of engaging with and harnessing the collective energy of multiple stakeholders is widely acknowledged and promoted, however the perceived challenges associated with stakeholder engagement can make destination managers hesitant to implement the practice to its fullest potential. This paper seeks to review extant knowledge in stakeholder engagement so as to inform dialogue and broaden awareness of best practice in stakeholder engagement within tourism destinations.

The evolution of stakeholder research
Most all academic output pertaining to stakeholders acknowledges the seminal work of Freeman (1984) which defines stakeholders as entities capable of exerting influence or being influenced by an organisation. Freeman (1984) asserts the criticality of integrating stakeholder interests into the strategic activity of an organisation and presents the relationship between firm and stakeholder as a dyadic relationship founded on resource dependency and on a desire to balance interests and influence. A significant amount of research in stakeholder theory has focused on the definition of the stakeholder concept, the classification of stakeholders and categorisations of stakeholder salience, all of which contribute to understanding of which stakeholders influence organisations and how organisations respond to such influences (Rowley, 1997). Donaldson & Preston (1995) identified three distinct streams within stakeholder theory; the *instrumental* stream focuses on how firms utilise stakeholder relationships to achieve organisational objectives, the *normative* stream posits a moral perspective to the development of stakeholder relationships and the *descriptive* stream of research examines the behavioural aspects of relationships between stakeholders and firms. Each of these streams of research brings broader understanding to the concept and also underlines the multi-faceted nature of the relationship between organisations and stakeholders. Interactions between an organisation and stakeholders can be motivated by perspectives of social responsibility, managerialism and social control (Greenwood, 2007), differences in approach can be based on desires to balance disparate needs or in some cases may be founded on a desire to manipulate outcomes in a particular direction via the planned orientation of stakeholders (Plaza-Ubeda *et al,* 2010). The growth in acceptance of stakeholder relationships as a key area of organisational activity affirms the importance of external stakeholders to the strategic management of a firm and has contributed to a broadening of theories and models of inter-organisational relationships. In stakeholder theory, the firm and stakeholder whilst not entirely self-sufficient are perceived as mutually independent and the primary motivation of the relationship is the balancing of interests to further the attainment of respective organisational objectives (Mainardes *et al*, 2011). This is in marked contrast to relational exchange theories which underpin network theory, social partnership, inter-organisational collaboration and collective agency. Relational and social exchange theories confirm the importance

of external stakeholders to organisational activity and present that in many instances sectoral complexity and uncertainty can only be addressed by acknowledging interdependencies between organisations and by engaging in coordinated, inter-organisational collaborative action (Fyall & Garrod, 2005). Organisations are found to develop relationships with other organisations not just for reasons of self-interest as predicted by resource dependency, transaction cost or economic efficiency theories but also because of a greater realisation of independencies within and across sectoral environments. Social partnerships and inter-organisational collaboration are recognised as distinct relational forms through which firms seek to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes that can not be attained independently (Savage *et al*, 2010). Network theory looks at how patterns of interaction and collaboration between multiple stakeholders constitute structures that can be analysed in order to appreciate how the nexus of relationships impacts outcomes (Rowley, 1997) The concepts of collaborative advantage (Huxham & Vangen, 2000) and collective agency (Koschmann *et al*, 2012) confirm the potential of inter-organisational groupings to attain synergistic outcomes and domain influence beyond what individual action might achieve. The growth in prevalence of networks, inter-organisational collaboration and social partnership has extended stakeholder theory beyond the dyadic perspective of Freeman (1984) extending the realm to include a wider set of motivations, structures and activities for engaging stakeholders. The growth in collaboration between organisations bears witness to a wider acknowledgement of interdependencies between stakeholder groups and the important role of stakeholder collaboration plays in enabling organisations to surmount challenges presented by increasing sectoral turbulence and complexity (Fyall & Garrod, 2005).

Tourism as a Network of Collaborating Stakeholders
Tourism is a fragmented sector, requiring purposeful coordination so as to ensure coherency of perception and delivery (Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007). Tourism destinations are traditionally perceived along geographic delineations that encompass a range of services, activities and attractions to cater to the needs of a visiting public. As clusters of product and service providers, tourist destinations bring together public and private organisations, who although acknowledging interdependence, can frequently perceive an inability to directly influence one another and are therefore often found to behave independently and act in self-interest (von Friedrichs Grangsjo, 2003). Tourism destinations themselves are seen as independent entities, often with distinctive brand identities, yet they commonly coalesce under regional and national destination identities, so just as tourism providers within destinations must grow connectivity to attain competitive success, so too must destinations within their larger regional or national context. Destinations, at all levels, are both the sum of their component parts and more than a collection of parts; destinations rather than individual service providers are what modern consumers perceive as the units of tourist choice (Baggio & cooper, 2010) and it is how the destination experience is connected that is increasingly acknowledged as the key source of competitive advantage in international tourism (King, 2002).

There exists a strong acknowledgement of the applicability of the stakeholder concept to the management of tourism regions and destinations. Tourism practitioners at all levels

recognise the influence of others on organisational activities and appreciate also that organisational actions are likely to have impacts for others within the domain. Stakeholder influence on tourism is based not just on a multiplicity of interdependent product and service providers, tourism additionally that attracts high levels of external influence from both political and societal stakeholders. National, regional and municipal organisations are charged with delivering wider social and economic benefits from tourism activity and therefore exert considerable influence on tourism organisations via policy and resource inputs. Consumers and the wider public also exert strong power on tourism actors, the public as both contributors to and consumers of tourism experiences feel both impacted and entitled to input with regard to destination decision making. The Tourism Stakeholder wheel presented by Buhalis (2000) parsimoniously identifies five core categories of tourism stakeholders; (i) tourism enterprises, (ii) public sector, government and municipal organisations, (iii) tour operators, (iv) the host population and (v) tourists. An identification of tourism stakeholders is a critical first stage of adopting a stakeholder perspective of tourism, however it must be acknowledged that tourism stakeholders are not static entities; the stakeholder mix and stakeholder agendas change over time, therefore managing stakeholders requires a continual awareness and inter-organisational sensing (Ford, 2011). The primary challenge for contemporary tourism managers is to synchronise the dynamic, competing forces, interests and resource requirements of disparate stakeholder groups through effective structuring of inter-organisational relationships; destination success is attained through how destination stakeholders interconnect; the way they act and interact together (March & Wilkinson, 2008).

The reality of contemporary tourism activity presents destinations as strategic networks of relationships (Meriläinen & Lammetyinen, 2011) defined by the mesh of inter-organisational relationships rather than by cartographical boundaries. Tourism organisations must, as advocated by stakeholder theory, individually identify and engage with their specific stakeholders, however there is also a wider social exchange imperative for collective stakeholder action across destinations so that macro-environmental domain level issues can be addressed. Relational and Social exchange theories are founded on the premise that as sectoral domains become densely populated they become more turbulent and complex (Fyall & Garrod, 2005). This is particularly evident in the tourism domain, where growing environmental pressures such as resource scarcity, economic cycles, technological flux and increasing competition present challenges for tourism firms that are difficult to address individually. The resolution of complex domain issues requires organisations to work together to source, share and apply knowledge so as to effect meaningful and sustainable sectoral development. Jamal & Getz (1995) define tourism collaboration as the joint objective setting and decision making of autonomous stakeholders so as to resolve problems or manage issues across a domain. The areas of activity addressed by tourism collaboration can frequently involve issues such as tourism policy, destination management, product development, branding and promotion, best practice and sustainability. The coming together of destination stakeholders in seeking to address problems and attain shared objectives adds a new dimension for destination managers as to how such collaborative stakeholder activity is facilitated and structured. The administration of inter-organisational collaboration is increasingly seen as the role of the destination management organisation (DMO). Atorough & Martin (2012) present the DMO as an independent organisation,

representative of the collective destination interests, facilitating cooperation toward a common objective and in doing so personifies a destination willingness to sacrifice individual interest for common good.

The role of a DMO is to engage and connect destination stakeholders through interaction so as to facilitate and direct cooperative endeavour (Meriläinen & Lammetyinen, 2011). The form and structure of the DMO depends on the unique attributes of the region and the particular mix of stakeholders it represents (Atorough & Martin, 2012) however as tourism enterprises are commonly found to be both knowledge averse and resource scarce it can frequently fall to public sector intervention to establish or facilitate the setting up of a DMO (Baggio & Cooper, 2010). At a regional level, DMO's are typically populated by representatives of key stakeholder groups including the state tourism organisation, regional tourism organisation, municipal authorities and tourism operators (March & Wilkinson, 2008). The balance of power and dependency within destinations is a key factor that can influence both the form and functions of a DMO, since it is frequently those stakeholders that control the most important resources that exert the strongest defining influence (von Friedrichs Grangsjo, 2003). Municipal authorities can often be found at the helm of DMOs since not only do they possess the administrative and financial resources necessary for DMO facilitation but local government also frequently have control of key historical, cultural and infrastructural elements of the destination offering (March & Wilkinson, 2008). The central influence of municipal authorities may also stem from their status as representatives for the host population and they therefore have both an interest and responsibility to maximise collaborative benefits for all destination stakeholders.

The benefits of collaboration in tourism activity by destination stakeholders are many and consist of positive outcomes for individual organisations and the destination. Collaboration allows individual organisations to benefit through the pooling of resources and complementary capabilities, which afford collective economies of scale and/or experience and thereby enable organisations to achieve more collectively than individually (Savage *et al.*, 2010). Collaboration amongst destination stakeholder also endows added-value to destinations through the collective acquisition of knowledge and insight which can enhance innovativeness and adaptability in dynamic competitive environments (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999). The ability for individual tourism SME's to access resources and participate in destination decision-making in a constructive manner brings definitive benefits for the destination whilst additionally building a sense of destination community, shared responsibility and strengthening inter-organisational ties (Thompson, Perry & Miller, 2007). For municipal authorities a collaborative approach to destination management can minimise adversarial conflicts amongst stakeholders, legitimise political decision-making, coordinate action, promote wider appreciation of the impacts of tourism and deliver sustainable outcomes for the region (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999). Huxham & Vangen (*2000)* coined the term *'collaborative advantage'* to describe the desired benefits and synergistic outcomes of collaborative activity whilst also cautioning that collaborative inertia can arise due to the presence of obstacles that interfere with the attainment of collaborative goals. Whether a destination attains collaborative advantage or not, depends upon the presence of collaborative values, appreciative linkages and a belief of interdependence, and is

contingent on having appropriate structural features to make collaboration work (Savage *et al., 2010)*. The conditions giving rise to collaboration and the governance of collaboration has consequences not just for destination outcomes but also for the dynamics of the collaboration and whether stakeholders choose to participate or not (Wang & Xaing, 2007). Collaborative arrangements within destinations need to be inclusionary, involving collective learning and consensus building in order to be equally beneficial for all stakeholders (Bramwell & Sharman, *1999)*.

Structuring Stakeholder Engagement within Tourism Destinations
Co-ordinating relationships amongst disparate stakeholders within destinations requires careful governance and purposeful consideration of coordination mechanisms in order to balance multiple inputs, perspectives, values and interests so as to optimise collaborative synergy. A number of recent studies have shown that governance arrangements impact directly on the effectiveness of stakeholder interactions and ultimately destination competitiveness (Baggio, Scott & Cooper, 2010; Nordin & Svensson, 2007). Concepts of governance originate from systems of government; the arrangements and structures that have traditionally regulated the boundaries between the public sector, private sector and society, however new *constellations* of cooperation, participation and accountability have emerged in recent decades and have become embodied within the governance concept (Nordin & Svensson, 2007: 54). Governance is commonly seen as the process of interaction between government organisations and society (Horlings, 2012) however in applying the concept to tourism destinations, governance can also be seen to encompass the methods and capabilities through which multiple stakeholders at a destination interact with one another (Baggio, Scott & Cooper, 2010). Nordin & Svensson (2007) identify that issues of governance are particularly applicable to destination management because of the multiplicity of stakeholders, public and private sector involvement and the inherent need to share and exchange resources amongst destination actors.

The elements of governance are the parameters under which stakeholder involvement in destination management is implemented and therefore includes choices regarding membership, decision making, power relations and norms of behaviour. In dealing with initiatives to involve stakeholders in destination management, the primary concern is often which stakeholders need to be involved, the number invoved and how that involvement will be structured. Collaboration initiatives require a mix of individuals and organisations with the appropriate capacities and sectoral statuses to ensure desired interests are represented (Huxham & Vangen, 2000) however, the membership number is frequently a trade-off between having adequate membership to generate the requisite energy to deliver upon objectives whilst also allowing the group size to be manageable in terms of communication and coordination. The degree of alignment, cohesion and diversity amongst stakeholders is also important; stakeholders that share common characteristics bring benefits of perceived interdependence, strong alignment of values, thus enhancing stakeholder satisfaction, commitment and engagement (Garriga, 2010). Homogeneity can inadvertently give rise to collaborative inertia due to group think (Minoja, Zolla & Coda, 2010) therefore some degree of diversity amongst stakeholders is desirable so as to generate an element of positive tension conducive to critical thinking and dynamic discourse.

Destination governance research commonly addresses issues of structure by examining the degree of centralisation/de-centralisation within stakeholder engagement mechanisms. Decentralised decision-making adopts a consensus-building perspective which can in itself promote engagement from stakeholders but may pose challenges with regard to accountability (D'angella, De Carlo & Sainaghi, 2010). Decentralisation within destination governance is in effect the result of a need to balance control and coordination, however it is additionally a manifestation of power within a destination and how power is wielded in objective setting, decision making and institutional practices. Stakeholder engagement in destination management is seldom a partnership of equals, rather the terms of the collaboration are frequently set by the more powerful parties (Greenwood, 2007) and power differentials, real or perceived, can impact considerably on collaborative activity and therefore need to be carefully managed (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999). Network density and centrality are key factors in influencing individual response strategies to power imbalance; density pertains to the degree of interconnectedness of stakeholders, whilst centrality refers to the relative position of stakeholders to one another, the number of ties, level of access and degree of control exerted over each other (Rowley, 1997). High density stakeholder networks can give rise to collaborative coalitions which can in turn exert more unified pressure in destination decision making, in contrast fragmented low density, networks are more likely to have conflicting behaviour and as such the ability to influence central actors is reduced accordingly (Rowley, 2007). The power balance in destination management can be typified under two antithetical forms of governance; community-based versus corporate-based (Flagestad & Hope, 2001). The community-based destination governance model consists of independent tourism firms where no entity has hierarchical or dominant status over others and where the management of the destination is guided by collective stakeholder engagement activity. The Corporate-based model is where destination management activities are carried out by a central business organisation which engages with the wider tourism network but maintains a dominant strategic position within the destination (Flagestad & Hope, 2001). D'angella, De Carlo & Sainaghi (2010) bring many of these variables into play in their typology of destination governance, which categorises destinations dependent on the strength of coordination mechanisms and the concentration of governance functions, giving rise to four archetypes of destination governance as being regulatory, entrepreneurial, fragmented and leading firm. Whilst a number of typologies exist, the governance approaches adopted by a tourism destinations are commonly neither distinct nor mutually exclusive and many destinations adopt hybrid models that are deemed appropriate to the specific mix of stakeholders, the resources available and the nature of the collaborative activity.

Not withstanding the importance of governance approach, it is acknowledged that administrative and coordinating structures are not in themselves adequate to organise activity and coordinate endeavour, rather strong social coordination is vital to keep stakeholders alert to the rules, roles and responsibilities of shared destination governance (Thompson, Perry & Miller, 2007) and to reinforce that behavioural norms that support and direct behaviour within such mechanisms. The relational factors that both influence and motivate stakeholder interactions are found to be relationship orientation, trust, communication, learning, power, reciprocity and commitment of

stakeholders to the DMO and one another (Polonsky, Schuppisser & Beldona, 2002). The importance of collaborative norms and values to the success of destination network activity is widely acknowledged *(*von Friedrichs Grangsjo, 2003) however the issue of leadership within shared destination management commands particular attention in the literature. Effective stakeholder engagement requires leaders with high levels of vision, courage and persistence (Sloan, 2009) so that stakeholder audiences are motivated and energized to become involved in destination activity (Kavaratzis, 2012). Technical expertise in itself has been found to be insufficient to build the vital coalitions required for stakeholder engagement and leadership styles in collaborative destination management must incorporate high levels of public diplomacy and social expertise (Horlings, 2012). The criticality of leadership in directing and motivating collaborative destination activity gives rise to questions as to the adequateness of the traditional model of singular leadership and Horlings (2012) suggest that, in contexts of regional development, leadership may need to be a shared effort, with more emphasis on behavioural leadership so as to facilitate the creation of trusting relationships between stakeholders. The issue of identity also emerges alongside leadership as a factor that can be pivotal to the success of collaborative destination activity. A strong shared identity allows stakeholders to collectively represent both themselves and the destination (Lemmetyyinen & Go, 2008) whilst the symbolic and behavioural impact of a shared identity reinforces the required norms of interdependency and mutuality. Koschmann, Kuhn & Pfarrer (2012) support the need to create a distinct and stable identity for the collaborative structure and suggest that the naming of the destination partnership should emanate from within the stakeholder membership rather than from a central administrative or funding organisation.

Facilitating Stakeholder Engagement
Destination network structures provide an administrative or coordinating framework but it is ultimately the policies and practices of the convening network that determine the levels of stakeholder participation within a destination. Stakeholder Engagement (SE) is defined as the practices an organisation undertakes to involve stakeholders (Greenwood, 2007) and can be distinguished from Stakeholder Integration (SI) which is defined as being the strategic capability of an entity to establish positive collaborative relationships with a wide variety of stakeholders (Plaza-Ubeda, Burgos-Jiminez & Carmona-Moreno, 2010). Stakeholder engagement activity in destinations can be broadly divided into iterative phases of stakeholder catching and stakeholder keeping (Touminen, 1995) and include three strategic levels of activity; stakeholder attraction, stakeholder integration and stakeholder management. The Attraction level being the initial communication process aimed at building stakeholder awareness and interest in participation; The Integration level involving interactive networking aimed at developing positive stakeholder relationships thereby enabling the pursuit of shared objectives; The Management level constituting activities of monitoring and motivation that enhance practice and optimise collaborative outcomes (Waligo, Clarke & Hawkins, 2013). Practices of engagement with stakeholders can be formal or informal however engagement activities are most effective when they are inclusive and fair (Byrd, 2007; Sloan, 2009). Stakeholder Integration is a dynamic capability that stems from the ability of the DMO to utilise engagement instruments to attract, maintain and build meaningful relationships with and across stakeholder groups. The number and types of stakeholders involved can both determine and limit the participation instruments utilised (Bramwell

& Sharman, 1999).

Bayley & French (2008) emphasise the importance of distinguishing the process of stakeholder engagement from the instruments utilised and confirm the availability of a wide array engagement instruments, the choice of which is frequently determined by differing objectives in terms of information sharing, democratic ideals, levels of cohesion, practicality, feasibility and preferences pertaining to decision quality or speed. Plaza-Ubeda, Burgos-Jiminez & Carmona-Moreno (2010) segment engagement activities under the headings of participation, consultation, cooperation, information and attest that different instruments under each of these headings induce different social consequences for stakeholder including satisfaction, trust & commitment levels. Stakeholder engagement practices identified within the literature include public hearings, workshops, advisory committees, social contact events, negotiations, public engagement approaches including surveys, focus groups, invitation of written submissions, written comments (Byrd, 2007; Yang et al, 2011). The effectiveness of stakeholder engagement is contingent upon the allocation of requisite levels of time, resources and leadership and research suggests that when one or more of these key inputs are not available the level of stakeholder engagement will be lessened (Byrd, 2007). Engagement practices should be designed so as to act as sensing mechanisms to capture information about the interests and expectations of stakeholders and thereby supports mutual learning and adaptional behaviour within destinations (Sloan, 2009). Communication is a critical element of both engagement activity and a pre-requisite for engagement (Koschmann, Kuhn & Pfarrer, 2012) and whilst communication can take many forms, uni- or bi-directional, the intensity and frequency of communication can be seen as an indicator of proactivity in developing relationships (Plaza-Ubeda *et al*., 2010). Internet and social media technologies overcome many communication limitations previously attributed to time and distance, therefore enhancing communication potential within stakeholder engagement initiatives and afford DMO's the possibility of building real-time interactive relationships between collaborating stakeholders within the destination (Svendson & Laberge, 2005; Bhat & Guar, 2012).

Challenges in Facilitating Stakeholder Engagement
There exists a strong perception in the tourism field that stakeholder engagement is difficult or impossible to achieve (Byrd, 2007) however through a better understanding of the challenges, barriers and common causes of resistance, destinations can proactively address these and thereby increase stakeholder engagement levels. A study by Wang (2008) identified a number of commonly cited factors for non-engagement with destination management bodies including perceived absences of information, lack of time or available staff and in some cases a perception that the agenda or activities of the convening body may be too rigid in scope and may require specifically tailored approaches for sub-groups or stakeholders rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. Complexity and rigidity in regulations or procedures has a negative impact on cooperation between destination stakeholders and fragmentation of policies also hinders meaningful cooperation, co-production and negotiation between public and private actors (Horlings, 2012). Whilst there often exists a strong desire for stakeholder engagement and partnerships approaches to destination management, the requisite levels of infrastructure, managerial capacity and resources required to coordinate these efforts

are frequently not forthcoming thereby making collaborative activity less productive and more difficult to sustain (Koschmann, Kuhn & Pfarrer, 2012). The fragmented nature of the tourism sector, predominance of SME's and weak relational ties makes it difficult for tourism destination networks to be self supporting and therefore many require public sector in facilitation (Dredge, 2006) however an overly dominant position by political-administrative or public sector actors can in itself be a disincentive to wider stakeholder involvement and commitment (March & Wilkinson, 2008). Huxham & Vangen (2000) identify that difficulties in agreeing goals for collaboration can give rise to collaborative inertia, as can issues of accountability and democracy which arise from unclear structures, roles and responsibilities. The representativeness and legitimacy of stakeholder engagement activities is of critical importance and group membership can also be a potential source of dissatisfaction or resistance. In this context, particular attention should be paid to the extent to which representatives of a stakeholder group are actually representative of that group (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999) and in particular DMO's should be alert to the dangers of inferring the involvement of many through the representation of a few (Shortall, 1994). Shifting membership, shifting purposes and the pace of change all add complexity to stakeholder engagement and can create ambiguity in membership, status and representativeness (Huxham & Vangen, 2000) which can result in lack of engagement desire amongst destination stakeholders.

Desire for and expectations of involvement amongst destination stakeholders are not uniform (Bhat & Guar, 2012) rather stakeholders can exist along a continuum from those engaging proactively to those that are content to remain passive. Differences with regard to the propensity of stakeholders to engage are testament to the inherent tension that exists between individual and collective interests within destinations (Thompson, Perry & Miller, 2007). Since the benefits of collective destination activity often accrue without participation, stakeholder participation can be withheld as a protest against free–riding by other stakeholders (Wang, 2008) or alternatively the lack of connection between benefits and participation may itself be a logical disincentive to participate when organisational resources are scarce. An additional reason presented by for non-participation may be that individual stakeholders have in the past actively contributed to destination activity and therefore may believe it is time for other stakeholders to step up to the plate (Wang, 2008). The balance between actively engaged stakeholders and the passive community is of critical importance to the legitimacy of destination networks and can give rise to destabilising questions if not addressed (Dredge, 2006). Whilst it is hoped that most stakeholder engagement initiatives within destinations are founded on sincere desire for partnership, stakeholder engagements have in some instances been found to be based on an immoral desire to deceive or manipulate of stakeholders to achieve particular outcomes (Greenwood, 2007). Initiatives to promote shared decision-making or partnership exist along a continuum from non-participation through tokenism toward full stakeholder power (Arnstein, 1970 cited in Byrd, 2007) and whilst most DMO's may never reach nor aspire to attain full democratic decision-making they should always remain alert to the perils of implicit or explicit tokenism. Engagement that pronounces to involve stakeholders in developing directions or decisions about issues that may already have been prescribed in advance undermines the very spirit of stakeholder engagement and can have long-term detrimental impacts for trust, cohesion and commitment by stakeholders.

Discussion

The value of stakeholder engagement within destinations stems from the way it enables creative debate, harnesses a valuable multiplicity of perspectives and creates opportunities for innovation and growth, however as literature has shown these same positive facets also make stakeholder engagement a difficult and challenging activity. Stakeholder engagement is collectively a philosophy, a strategy, an organisational capability, a process and a range of interaction instruments. The elements to be considered in seeking to engage tourism stakeholders in collaborative destination management have been elucidated by the literature review and a composite model of the factors impacting stakeholder engagement is proposed in Figure 1.1 overleaf.
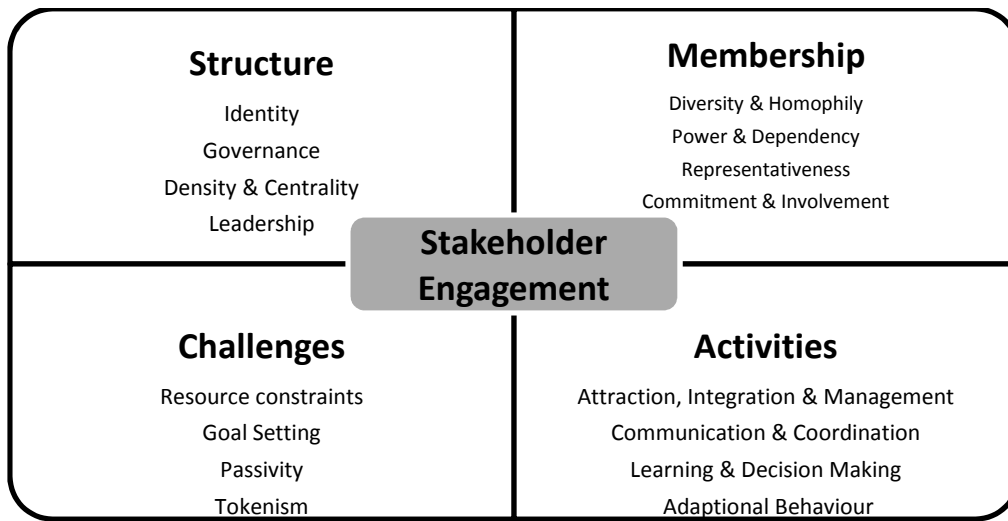
Structure

Identity
Governance
Density & Centrality
Leadership

Membership

Diversity & Homophily
Power & Dependency
Representativeness
Commitment & Involvement

Stakeholder Engagement

Challenges

Resource constraints
Goal Setting
Passivity
Tokenism

Activities

Attraction, Integration & Management
Communication & Coordination
Learning & Decision Making
Adaptional Behaviour

Figure 1.1   Factors impacting stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement is an accumulative process that attains synergistic outcomes by bringing knowledge and resources together via an open attitude of interaction so as to promote adaptional behaviour (Plaza-Ubeda *et al.*, 2010). Effective engagement requires careful consideration of structure and membership in advance of engagement and strong technical and social expertise in the administration of activities once engagement is initiated. DMO's must remain alert to the potential barriers, real or perceived, that may inhibit engagement or pre-suppose passivity in the stakeholder community. The direct correlation between levels of tourism stakeholder engagement and the quality of tourism destination experience (Bornhorst, Ritchie & Sheehan, 2010) underpin the need for systematic management of stakeholder engagement initiatives and reaffirm the need for further research as to how stakeholder engagement can be promoted. Koschmann, Kuhn & Pfarrer (2012) point out that whilst stakeholder engagement is commonly mandated by funders, expected by local communities and assumed by policy makers to be the best way of working through social issues it is by no means a straightforward activity and therefore is an area warranting further research.

Conclusion

This research paper represents the preliminary stage of a larger research project that seeks to develop recommendations for best practice in promoting and facilitating stakeholder engagement within tourism destinations. The review of literature presented identifies many of the elements warranting attention in the design and delivery of stakeholder engagement initiatives within tourism destinations, however it is widely advocated that deeper understanding of the challenges and key success factors in destination stakeholder engagements is best achieved through context specific qualitative research of the phenomenon. Baggio, Scott & cooper (2010) confirm that comparative case studies, in-depth qualitative enquiry that explores structural, social and cultural aspects of destination management, are an effective methodology by which the key factors that differentiate between effective and ineffective destination governance can be determined. In this vein the next stage of this research project will involve a case based evaluation of stakeholder engagement initiatives at a number of tourism destinations. The research will on focus on analysing the different forms and methods used to include stakeholders and specifically which characteristics are found to be most instrumental in enabling meaningful engagement. The study will utilise multiple sources of information and triangulation of data to ensure that the various perspectives of stakeholder engagement within a destination are represented. Success in the engagement of stakeholders can take many forms and there is no aspiration by the researchers to unearth or propose exemplars of tourism stakeholder engagement, rather the proposed research is based on a belief that engagement strategies must always be tailored to the specific requirements of the destination, the stakeholder community and the nature of the destination objectives. It is however hoped that, through the exploration of academic knowledge and destination practice at a number of case locations, this research will add to the body of knowledge and provide an extension to existing guiding principles for stakeholder engagement. The importance of tourism to local and regional economies has made more significant the need for public-private collaboration in managing tourism destinations and more pertinent the need to identify best practice in generating high levels of stakeholder engagement.

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