Destination leadership for innovation:
Who guides transformation processes in ski resorts?

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Abstract

Discussions about destination management and governance have primarily concentrated on procedural and structural topics in the context of planning, coordinating and marketing tourist destinations. But destination competitiveness depends also on the human factor (see Laesser & Beritelli, 2013; Pechlaner & Volgger, 2013). Therefore, in research on destinations exists room and necessity for the analysis of destination leadership issues.

However, traditionally, leadership research in tourism and hospitality mainly applied organizational leadership theories (see e.g. Bass & Avolio, 1990) to the firm level. In contrast, leadership in destinations requires a profound relational perspective with a focus on leadership at all levels and their interfaces, with particular regard to multi-sector collaboration.

To understand who leads and why in specific instances of destinations, this qualitative study investigates leadership reality in ski resort destinations in South Tyrol (and beyond). The exploratory study suggests a number of leadership determinants and leadership consequences. Besides psychological aspects also socio-economic, governance-related and especially historical elements seem to influence leadership reality in ski resort destinations. Thus, a main conclusion is the asserted need for developing dynamic leadership theories. Such theories might be suitable to capture the seemingly circular relationship between innovation and leadership: On the one hand innovation appears to be a consequence of leadership (*leadership for transformation*), on the other hand transformation processes may in turn highly impact on the allocation of leadership roles in the destination context (*leadership through transformation*).

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Laesser, C., & Beritelli, P. (2013). St. Gallen consensus on destination management. Journal of Destination Marketing & Management.

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