Analyzing Strategic Alliances of Museums: The Case of Girona (Spain)

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Abstract : Cultural tourism has been postulated as relevant motivation for tourist over the world during the last decades. In this context, museums are the main attraction for cultural tourists who are seeking to connect with the history and culture of the visited place. From the point of view of an urban destination, museums and other cultural resources are essential to have a strong tourist supply at the destination, in order to be capable of catching attention and interest of cultural tourists. In particular, museums' challenge is to be prepared to offer the best experience to their visitors without to forget their mission-based mainly on protection of its collection and other social goals. Thus, museums individually want to be competitive and have good positioning to achieve their strategic goals. The life cycle of the destination and the level of maturity of its tourism product influence the need of tourism agents to cooperate and collaborate among them, in order to rejuvenate their product and become more competitive as a destination. Additionally, prior studies have considered an approach of different models of a public and private partnership, and collaborative and cooperative relations developed among the agents of a tourism destination. However, there are no studies that pay special attention to museums and the strategic alliances developed to obtain mutual benefits. Considering this background, the purpose of this study is to analyze in what extent museums of a given urban destination have established strategic links and relations among them, in order to improve their competitive position at both individual and destination level. In order to achieve the aim of this study, the city of Girona (Spain) and the museums located in this city are taken as a case study. Data collection was conducted using in-depth interviews, in order to collect all the qualitative data related to nature, strengthen and purpose of the relational ties established among the museums of the city or other relevant tourism agents of the city. To conduct data analysis, a Social Network Analysis (SNA) approach was taken using UCINET software. Position of the agents in the network and structure of the network was analyzed, and qualitative data from interviews were used to interpret SNA results. Finding reveals the existence of strong ties among some of the museums of the city, particularly to create and promote joint products. Nevertheless, there were detected outsiders who have an individual strategy, without collaboration and cooperation with other museums or agents of the city. Results also show that some relational ties have an institutional origin, while others are the result of a long process of cooperation with common projects. Conclusions put in evidence that collaboration and cooperation of museums had been positive to increase the attractiveness of the museum and the city as a cultural destination. Future research and managerial implications are also mentioned.

Keywords : cultural tourism, competitiveness, museums, Social Network analysis