

The critical success factors for tourism route development: An examination of route typologies

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Objectives | Tourism routes are initiatives that involve stakeholder's partnerships, including public and/or private members, led by associations to facilitate collective decision-making (UNWTO (World Tourism Organization) & ETC (European Travel Commission), 2017). These initiatives have the potential to boost tourism destinations and products, as well as promote cooperation and knowledge exchange among stakeholders (Brás et al., 2010; Cloutier et al., 2016; Del Chiappa et al., 2019), among other benefits. However, there is limited research on factors influencing their overall success, namely, the critical success factors (CSFs) (Del Chiappa et al., 2019; Marais et al., 2017). Accordingly, the aim of this research is to identify CSFs by assessing their differences through a comparison of route typologies. The route typologies were developed based on the thematic group (UNWTO & ETC, 2017), the territory (UNWTO & ETC, 2017) the structure (UNWTO, 2015), the members sectors, and defined goals. To achieve that, we conducted five case studies, which included the *European Route of Industrial Heritage*, the *Traditional Salt-Making: the Atlantic Route*, the *European Federation of the Way of Saint James*, the *Asociación de Municipios del Camino de Santiago* (Spain), and the *Rota da Bairrada* (Portugal).

Methodology | Data collection involved semi-structured interviews with current and former members of these tourism routes. The participants comprised technicians or representatives from public institutions; members of academia; and technicians, managers, or proprietors of private companies in the tourism and wine sectors. The interviews, conducted between May 2022 and December 2022, primarily engaged potential interviewees through email communication facilitated by the technical secretariats of their respective entities. The CSFs, outlined in an interview script, were categorized into four phases: Networking, Operational Activities, Resources, and Performance Measurements. This categorization drew from Bornhorst et al. (2010), encompassing determinants of success for destination management organizations and tourism destinations, further enriched by extant research on governance, critical success factors, and wine tourism management. Additionally, official documents, websites, and promotional materials from the selected case

studies underwent analysis. Subsequently, the data underwent content analysis employing the WebQDA software.

Main Results and Contributions | The main findings highlight that these organizations primarily focus on tourist promotion and creating a network of stakeholders as their main objectives. However, there is underperformance in monitoring the attainment of defined objectives. Commitment and collaboration among all members are among the most emphasized CSFs, forming the cornerstone of networking activities. Funding-related factors are pervasive, with public entities playing a predominant role in funding these initiatives. Concerning human resources, the availability of time, staff, and working capacity is deemed essential for establishing these initiatives. Nevertheless, some differences between typologies were identified. In territorial-based tourism routes, greater challenges are encountered in terms of cooperation compared to linear-based routes. In these instances, increased efforts in internal marketing are required to establish and cultivate connections between producers and tourism agents. When the goal is tourist promotion, there is a greater concern with the number of visitors, whereas in cases where the main goal is territorial development, the perception of its members is defined by the quality of the presented projects. Moreover, this research contributes theoretically by highlighting variations and commonalities among various route typologies in terms of CSFs for tourism route development. By considering a diverse range of case studies, this research provides a comprehensive overview that was previously lacking in the literature. It also offers practical recommendations for establishing and enhancing tourism routes.

Limitations | One of the main limitations relies on the fact that there may be a risk of bias in participant selection, as participants who take part in this research may potentially be more deeply involved members in route activities. Furthermore, this study employs an exploratory approach limited to specific case studies, and, as a result, the findings should not be generalized. Therefore, it could also be beneficial to assess the importance of these CSFs through confirmatory research.

Conclusions | Regarding the importance of Networking factors, these results are in line with the conclusions drawn from previous works on the management of other tourism routes, which gave a central role to these factors (Cloutier et al., 2016; Del Chiappa et al., 2019). Furthermore, in addition to the importance of public institutions in funding these initiatives and facilitating collaboration among private agents, success also depends on the leadership and capabilities of specific individuals. This research suggests certain hypotheses for confirmatory approaches in future research.

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