

Strategic Innovation Study on Mountain Scenic Areas Based on Industry Cluster Theory

Zheng Xiang^{1,2}

1 School of Management, Wuhan University of Technology, Wuhan, P.R.China, 430070

2 Lushan Scenic Spots Management Bureau, Luhsan, P.R.China, 332900

(E-mail: zx31@vip.sina.com)

Abstract Industry Cluster, a global economic phenomenon, has attracted the attention of many national and regional governments. As one of the important ways to enhance the competitiveness of tourist destinations, tourism industry cluster has revealed its importance and caused widespread concern in theoretical circles. However, China's research on the tourism industry cluster is relatively weak, and studies on the industry cluster of mountain scenic areas are even fewer. This paper, based on existing studies on tourism-related industry clusters, combines the features of mountain scenic areas from the perspective of which clusters can achieve the effective integration of resources, and constructs a strategic innovation model for the development of clusters of mountain scenic areas while making recommendations as to how to carry out cluster development strategies.

Key words Mountain scenic area; Tourism industry cluster; Strategic innovation

1 Introduction

Since 1990, Porter (Michael E. Porter) put forward the concept of “industry cluster” in his book *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*. The theory is used to guide regional development and its research and application spread rapidly across the world, providing an important theoretical approach in enhancing regional competitiveness. In China, the study of the tourism industry from the perspective of industry cluster is only emerging in recent years. On the presence of the tourism industry cluster, Yin Yimei and Liu Zhigao^[1] believe that tourism cluster has two prerequisites: aggregation and industry relation; on theoretical research of the tourism industry cluster, Zhang Meng^[2] analyzes the advantages of tourism industry cluster; Zhang Jianchun^[3] explores the formation mechanism of the tourism industry cluster; Xia Zhengchao and Xie Chunshan^[4] address some basic tourism industry cluster issues from the tourism point of view; some scholars including Wang Zhaofeng^[5], He Yurong and Lu Jianhong^[6]. Many relevant research literatures can be found, but because of the different angles and objects, no consensus has been reached on the basic theory of tourism industry cluster, and the particularity of the tourism industry cluster has not yet caught enough attention. This paper draws on existing researches, combined with the characteristics of mountain scenic areas, and builds a strategic innovation model for the development of tourism industry cluster in mountain scenic areas in order to enhance overall competitiveness and promote the comprehensive development of the economy.

2 The Connotation of Tourism Industry Cluster

From existing literatures at home and abroad, because of the different angles and objects, no consensus has been reached on the tourism industry cluster and related concepts. Tourism industry cluster theory is different from that of the industrial cluster and that of the service industry cluster in general. This is determined by the characteristics of the tourism industry itself. In addition to characteristics shared by the tourism industry and other service industries, the tourism industry is also characterized by comprehensiveness, openness, space constraints and global effect of prize. The comprehensiveness determines the integration of tourism business in geography and space^[7]. Tourists need to complete the whole process of tourism activities involving food, shelter, transportation, travel, shopping and entertainment, the six elements of tourism, which are a unified whole. A complete tourism product should contain the six elements; otherwise it would lack a certain feature due to the absence of a business, resulting in incomplete tourism consumption and undermined value of customer experience, ultimately affecting the competitiveness of the tourism destination.

Based on the particularities and feature of the tourism industry and products, combined with the spatial layout of the tourism industry, the tourism industry cluster is defined in this paper as: in a certain region, tourism-related businesses form a strategic unity linked by vertical and horizontal networks for the purpose of common development objectives, with both competition and cooperation. Through this unity, effective integration of tourism resources is achieved, tourism elements perfected, the quality of

tourism products improved, the overall competitive advantage formed and competitiveness enhanced.

3 Characteristics of Mountain Scenic Area

The formation and development of China's scenic mountain areas are not only restrained by geographical locations, natural environment, but also closely linked with China's five thousand years of civilization. They have features distinct from seashores, grassland, rivers and ancient villages^[8].

First, resource characteristics: Mountain scenic areas are based on natural scenery with a wide range of geological features, climates, water resources, animals and plants, which are diverse and natural. They are also rich in cultural resources with very high aesthetic, historical, cultural and scientific values. Many mountain tourism resources have been listed as world and national tourist attractions thanks to its unique features, where visitors can enjoy a variety of aesthetics and which are ideal places for appreciating the art of beauty.

Second, limited tourism space and fragile ecological environment: Although mountain scenic areas are huge, lack of plains in the mountains means limited space for tourists. Meanwhile, mountain scenic areas are dependent on the ecological environment. Tourism activities are likely to have impact on the ecological environment of the scenic spot. Because of its fragile ecosystems, restoration is difficult.

Third, poor natural conditions: famous mountain scenic spots are remote from cities, usually characterized by harsh natural conditions, climate changes and barren land. In the north, there is also water shortage. As located in mountainous areas, these scenic spots are less developed in economy and culture in the history compared with neighboring areas

Fourth, the complexity of interests: because of their size and volume, mountain scenic areas are complex with administrative divisions. Some scenic spots strand across several counties, several villages and towns, or dozens of village committees. Complex administrative divisions and a host of management and business units within the mountain scenic spots lead to a number of stakeholders, whose competence is difficult to define and relations are very complex.

Fifth, big seasonal differences from tourism: the structure of different types of tourism products is flexible with demands in different times. In general, tourism products developed based on natural resources are concentrated with seasonal tourist flows; tourism products developed based on cultural resources are less concentrated with seasonal tourist flows. Most mountain scenic areas based on natural resources with a single product structure and homogeneity will generate increased concentration of monthly and quarterly tourist flows; compound product structures, complementarity and reasonable spatial layout will weaken the concentration of monthly and quarterly tourist flows.

Based on the above analysis, mountain scenic areas have advantages in resources, but limitations in spaces, ecological environment, geographical and administrative boundaries and big differences between peak and slack seasons. With the rapid development of tourism and diversification of consumer demand, competition in the tourism industry is increasing fierce. Using resources unique to mountain scenic areas and developing tourism industry cluster to achieve complementarity and common development is undoubtedly an effective way to enhance the competitiveness of mountain scenic areas.

4 Analysis of Strategic Innovation Model for the Mountain Scenic Areas Industry Cluster

Tourism industry cluster generally goes through three phases of formation, i.e. point, line and surface^[9], which is a gradual process of development. Combined with the unique features of mountain scenic areas, a strategic innovation model for the formation and development of mountain scenic area tourism industry cluster is constructed as in Figure 1:

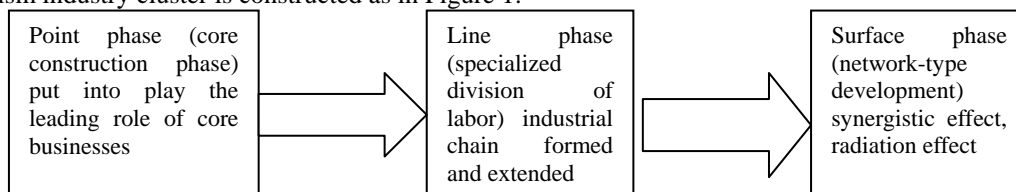


Figure 1 Formation of Tourism Industry Cluster

4.1 Multi-core point model in the formation phase

This is the formation and construction phase of all elements of the tourism industry.

First of all, strengthen the development of tourism resources and make them richer and more

unique. According to the big concentration of tourism resources of mountain scenic areas, integration advantages and basic principles^[11] for tourism industrial layout and micro site selection of tourism businesses, develop and construction in small areas, which are divided into central areas, surrounding areas and peripheral areas in order to make use of the combination of scenic spots, save space cost and balance carrying capacities the environment in popular and less popular sites. Then based on the features of small natural scenic sites and cultural destinations, plan, design and build tourism enterprises with supporting functions, which enable them to demonstrate various features and uniqueness that enhance attractiveness and diversity to meet the demand. At the same time, build core businesses at the corresponding tourism elements supply layer in cities and towns to produce cluster effect and attract and promote other complementary businesses towards the destination cluster, extending the local tourism industry chain. Through the construction, an interactive development model is formed where unique scenic spots are in the mountains and businesses lie at the mountain foot.

Second, strengthen the construction of public infrastructure and supporting services (such as banks, telecommunications, media, hospitals, etc.), step up promotion of tourism products and establish a good image of regional tourism. By cultivation, mountain scenic areas can form several distinct tourism business clusters with the central site as the core and surrounding and peripheral sites as sub-cores supported by towns bordering the mountains. This will lay a foundation for the development of tourism industry cluster of the entire scenic area.

4.2 Linear pattern in the improvement stage

In this stage, as the formation of the core attractions in small scenic spots and the improvement of the assorted tourism enterprise construction, tourism industry chain has gradually taken shape and tourism market prospers. At the initial period, the start point of the tourism industry chain is more often than not the travel agencies, which will be responsible for all services during traveling. This kind of industry chain is simple and short. As the specialization of the function of the travel agencies, the start point of the tourism industry chain extends to hotels, restaurants, and transport companies. The core enterprise will outsource the insignificant links or links with weak competitiveness. Meanwhile, as the improvement of infrastructure and public service construction, the provision of tourism elements will be more complete and open and the tourism industry chain will be extended and expanded as a result.

4.3 Network pattern in the maturing stage

Through accumulation of the previous two stages, the small scenic spots of mountain resorts have possessed the capital and capability to be further developed in tourism resources and the cooperative development between them is further enhanced, which enrich the tourism resources and form the closely interdependent relationship between each tourism element. The pattern of industrial layout displays network-type industrial connection as in the figure two. Synergistic effect and radiation effect of tourism industrial clusters will strengthen the inner and outer connection of clusters, promote chain of the industrial clusters to be further extended, and make each node of the chain more vigorous, mature and intricate, which will promote the whole competitiveness of tourism industry in mountain resorts by forming network-type tourism industrial clusters.

5 The Measures for Strategic Innovation of Tourism Industrial Cluster in Mountain Resorts

5.1 Institutional innovation fostering the favorable link for development of tourism industry clusters in mountain resorts

Because each scenic spot of mountain resorts belongs to different administrative districts, some strategic obstructions appear in the development process and coordination is inadequate. Some intentional or unintentional "Cloning phenomena" existing in the development process of scenic spots trigger vicious competition harmful to the continuous, rapid and healthy development. Therefore, management system reform should be carried out to establish uniform administrative organization for coordination between each department. The coordination organization of tourism industry can be formed by the personnel assigned by each administrative district to plan and manage tourism industry of the region as a whole. In this way, the economic, social and ecological benefits of resources of scenic spots in mountain resorts can be brought into full play. This can not only be easily accepted by each group, but also create a fairly relaxed environment for development of tourism industrial cluster. From a macro point of view, some measures which are taken by government and work for common enterprises such as speeding up marketization of local economy, conducting the institutional innovation, and fostering a good credit environment, are essential to the development of tourism industry as well.

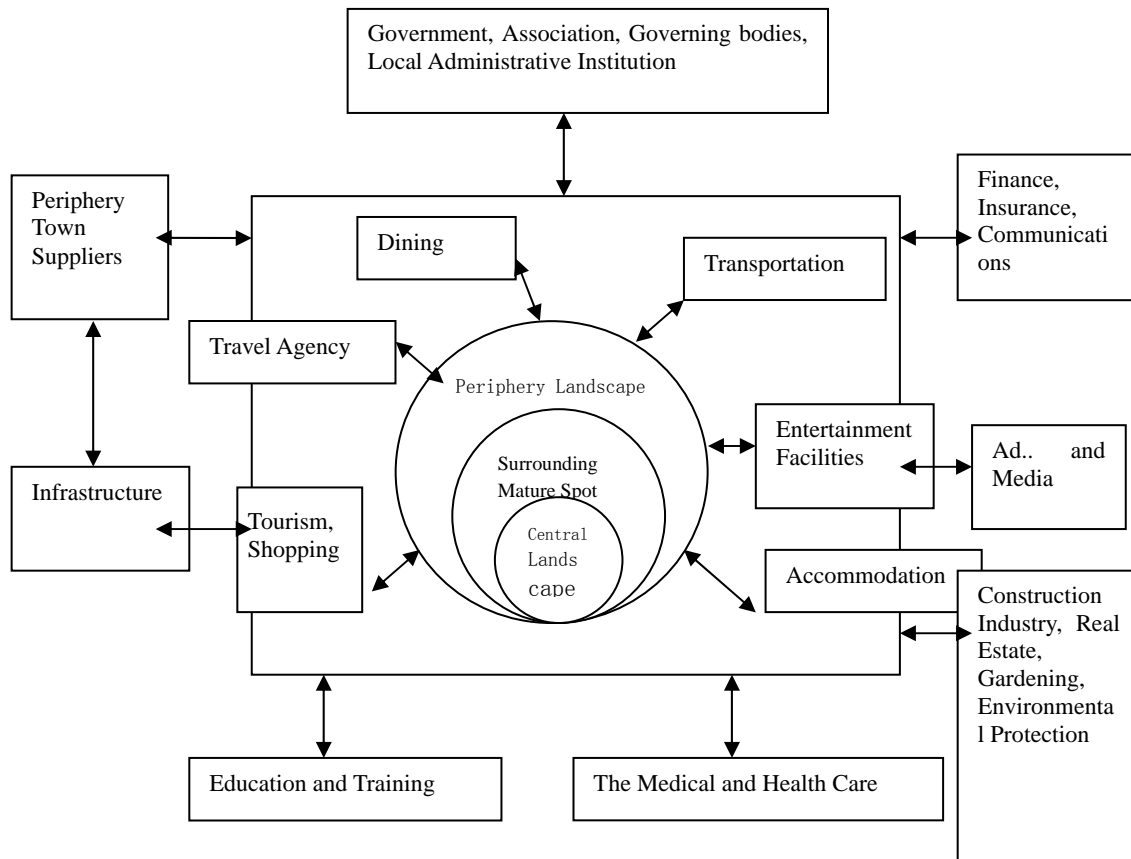


Figure 2 The Network Structure of Tourism Industrial Cluster

5.2 The whole competitive advantage of mountain resorts fostered by concept innovation

Currently, the developer and constructor of tourism resources in mountain resorts are mainly local government departments of each administrative district, tourism governing bodies, some scenic spots operators and so on. Since the proprietary rights and part of operation rights are largely dominated by local government departments of each administrative district, the administrative departments usually gives priority to their own interests. Therefore, the competitions for tourism resources, tourist source markets and tourism construction projects are very harsh. As the concept of extensive tourism in a large system deepens, the overall integration of tourism resources by breaking the administrative boundary is imperative. Under the premise of meeting the generality problem of each interest subject, association between strong enterprises should be carried out by considering the characteristics of each interest subject and synthesizing advantages of each tourism resources. The active integration of tourism industrial clusters in mountain resorts into bigger surrounding industrial clusters can foster whole regional advantages and give the potential of new industrial organization into full play. By complementing each other's advantages, sharing resources, the whole advantages are created, which can promote the overall development of scenic spots in mountain resorts.

5.3 Promotion of inner and outer interactive development of scenic spots in mountain resorts by network connection

The information networking has become an indispensable part of current society. Therefore, the construction of each subsystem's informatization must be intensified, by which information communication of cross-industry and cross-region tourism industry can be strengthened and the comprehensive service capability of information network be improved so as to provide enterprises in clusters with various service through virtual network and guide exchanges and cooperation between them. For example, various training, consultation and information can be provided by setting up intermediary organizations, associations and information centers. Exchange party of entrepreneurs intentionally organized can promote exchanges and cooperation between tourism enterprises and the formation of connecting network of tourism enterprises for cooperation. Through business connection, resources sharing, and experience exchanges, tourism enterprises can reduce operation costs and

improve efficiency of the whole tourism industry, producing a 1+1>2 economic benefit. Meanwhile, under the mechanism of free exchange of information, innovation is engendered to improve the technical progress rate of tourism economy. Tourism industry associations of all levels should proactively use industrial cluster development strategy to improve the competitiveness of local tourism industry. As the service-oriented organizations, the associations should actively shoulder the function to serve enterprises of the association and the related enterprises, dynamically collect relevant information, and strengthen exchanges and coordination to boost mutual cooperation between different interest subjects in the cluster.

5.4 The improvement of effective integration efficiency of resources in mountain resorts by management innovation

Firstly, it is needed to update narrow concept of tourism industry, change traditional development approaches, and fully realize the importance of tourism industrial cluster to promote local tourism and economic development. In the light of characteristics and advantages of development of local tourism industry, the theory of industrial cluster should be applied to consider development of local tourism industry and development plan for tourism industrial cluster should be consciously put forward to foster a favorable environment for tourism industrial cluster development.

Secondly, it is needed to determine an overall system concept to develop tourism industry, overcome the narrow and confined operation philosophy, establish and form the new organic tourism industry chain confirming with the reality of tourism industry development, and break separate and viciously competitive thinking pattern. Centered on development, production, operation and service of tourism products as well as resources and operation program including cultural traditions, recreation and entertainment, art appreciation, folk customs, historic relics and adventure, the brand value chain and industrialized service system shall be set up with unique tourism characteristics. Only in this way can tourism industry become an organic industrial ecosystem and a permanent sunrise industry.

Thirdly, it is needed to set up a win-win operation concept and form a loose network coalition with other enterprises on the basis of mutual interest to complement each other's advantages and collaborate with different responsibilities. By integrated advantages from drawing on each other's strength, tourism enterprises can contend with strong rivals together, promoting the overall development of tourism.

5.5 Providing the approach for extension and internationalization of tourism industrial cluster in mountain resorts by constructing tourism enterprises group

Currently, the pace of constructing the tourism enterprises group is tended to speed up in China. The pace of collectivization of China's tourism enterprises increases so obviously since 2004 and some significant measures that some tourism enterprises, such as Beijing Tourism Group, China Travel and CITS, made in the process of collectivization have already attracted the world attention. As the competition between different tourism enterprises becomes harsher and harsher, it is hard for single tourism enterprise to contend with international tourism enterprises group. China's tourism enterprises urgently need to further collectivization to efficiently go into the international market. The massive facts at home and abroad also prove that collectivization is the fundamental approach and the only course for tourism enterprise to further develop and expand, because enterprises group has more advantages that come from scale economy than single enterprise. Hence, collectivization carried out by tourism enterprises in mountain resorts is the only way to expand enterprise scale, optimize allocation of resources and enhance competitiveness, which also meets the inner needs of tourism industrial cluster extension in mountain resorts and the requirement of international development tendency.

6 Conclusions

As tourism goes further, local competition has transformed from industrial competition to tourist destination and regional competition. Tourism industrial cluster strategy is actually a development strategy for tourism region. In the region, different enterprises are competitive and interdependent for common interests, forming a win-win situation for tourism industry and communities. From the point of view of global tourism development, there will be no size, no resource integration, and no competitiveness if there is no cluster. It shows that only with tourism industrial cluster strategy can competitiveness of scenic spots in mountain resorts be improved and be in an invincible position in the future competition.

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