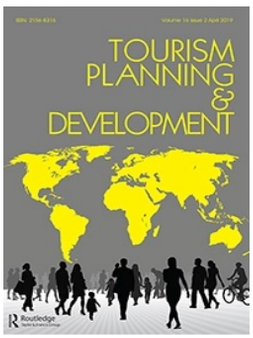

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Spatial Concentration of Tourism – a Case of Urban Supremacy

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ABSTRACT

Tourism growth on the national level in Sweden is being concentrated to the three main urban centres. The question is if the same trend is discernible within Swedish regions. If so, tourism as a tool in regional transformation and for alleviating spatial disparities has a weak basis. The strategy to strengthen the competitiveness of each region/local community based on the Tourism Led Growth Hypothesis but is questioned. Urban hierarchy and centrifugal forces are often overlooked. Data on overnight stays between 2008 and 2016 are analysed for four regions in central Sweden: Dalarna, Värmland, Gävleborg, and Jämtland. Results indicate that there is an ongoing concentration to regional urban centres and that destination competitiveness is directly linked to an urban supremacy. Thus, tourism growth is primarily a concern for urban areas and, which contradicts the traditional notions of tourism policy in Sweden, where tourism is regarded as a remedy for declining regions.

KEYWORDS

Planning implications; urban supremacy; overnight stays; tourism policy

Introduction

Globalisation and free trade have accelerated an urbanisation process. In many regions, traditional jobs in industry and agriculture are gone and job opportunities are mainly to be found in urbanised areas (Coe et al., 2013). However, tourism is often promoted in the planning policy discourse as an industry that can counteract this concentration; i.e. that tourism creates economic growth and employment (Dávid & Tóth, 2012) in regions which are struggling with loss of traditional jobs and an ageing and decreasing population (Kauppila et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2017; Möller & Amcoff, 2018). In some rural destinations investments in the tourism industry have been successful, generating employment and growth in the local economy (Brouder, 2012). In other rural areas the positive impact of tourism has been limited (Nguyen & Funck, 2019).

It is not hard to understand why tourism is considered a suitable driver of peripheral economies. Tourism is location specific; it generally draws on local natural and cultural resources. The multiplier effects of tourism, with its strong backward linkages, will have positive impacts on local and regional economies (Naranpanawa et al., 2019; Yang &

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Fik, 2014). Impact will vary depending on the size and type of tourist expenditures and the structure of the receiving economy (Archer & Fletcher, 1996; Heng & Low, 1990; Tyrrell & Johnston, 2006; Wood & Hughes, 2006; Yang et al., 2018). The regional policy in Europe has become increasingly directed towards strengthening sparsely populated areas' ability to compete with other areas (Giordano & Dubois, 2019).

There are, in other words, high expectations that tourism will contribute significantly to the development of a specific region, although the actual role tourism plays in regional development can be questioned. A strong association between economic growth and tourism growth is evident in studies when this relationship is analysed on a national level (Shahzad et al., 2017). However, there is a lack of studies on the relationship between economic growth and tourism growth on regional and local levels. The literature in this area is sparse, but it mainly suggests that the growth of tourism occurs where there is general economic growth, i.e. in urban areas (Yang & Fik, 2014).

A study by Bohlin et al. (2014) shows, for instance, how the distribution of guest nights on the regional level in Sweden has developed over twenty years (1992–2011). Although Sweden has had a considerable increase of guest nights, the disparities between regions have not decreased. In fact, the concentration on three main national metropolitan areas has increased dramatically, and especially to the capital, Stockholm. The conclusion drawn is that "the tourism industry thus follows rather than leads" the economic development (Bohlin et al., 2014). Research from Poland by Majewska (2015) has detected several clusters of regions where tourism is becoming concentrated due to localisation and urbanity.

It may not be hard to realise that tourism tends to concentrate on national urban centres. Such centres exhibit well-developed infrastructures, such as accommodation, amenities, and accessibility, for domestic and international tourism. The question is, if there is a similar pattern of growth at the regional level; i.e. do regional urban areas also show a higher growth in tourism. It is consequently interesting to find out if traditional tourist destinations in regions lacking national urban centres are competitive in relation to the regional urban areas. Consequently, the aim of this study is to find out how tourism growth is distributed on a regional level in regions containing both tourist destinations and regional urban centres. In order to test how tourism growth is distributed on the regional level, data on overnight stays in commercial establishments were derived and analysed between 2008 and 2016 for four regions in central Sweden: Dalarna, Värmland, Gävleborg, and Jämtland.

The next section consists of a literature review, which is followed by the study. The study consists of an analysis of secondary data retrieved from Statistics Sweden. The concept of tourism in this article includes both leisure and business or corporate travel. It excludes any day tourists, not making an overnight stay away from their permanent place of residence. Commercial guest nights include accommodation in hotels, hostels, holiday villages, camping, and rented accommodation.

Literature review

Endogenous vs exogenous growth

The devolution of economic governance implies that local communities had to build the capacity for creating economic growth (Pike et al., 2017). These ideas are much in line with

the ideas of the endogenous growth theory where economic growth is seen as being generated by investments in human capital and innovations fuelling the local and regional economy (Acs & Varga, 2002; Akcigit & Kerr, 2018). From a policy perspective these ideas changed the focus, from sector-specific policies into area-based policies, the so-called cross-sector regeneration partnership (CSRP) where economic development is created by cooperation among local actors (Saxena, 2014). Thus, policymakers focus shifted towards involvement of local communities in the implementation of economic growth policies (Malek & Costa, 2015; Panyik, 2015) in order to valorise the local resources with the help by, and also for the benefit of, the local community (Gkartzios & Lowe, 2019; Ray, 2006). The endogenous growth model requires new kinds of investments, in both infrastructure and in the local community in order to build the capacity for economic growth within the region/local economy itself.

In this endogenous growth paradigm, the tourism sector has been regarded as a key sector of the economy to be strengthened in order to modernise the local economy. Many rural areas, where tourism has been regarded as a potential vehicle for economic growth, have had structural problems in the local economy. Often these economies have been dominated by primary and secondary sectors, where employment has declined. There is research indicating that the economic impact of tourism in rural areas is rather limited because of low spending behaviour of tourists. However, a recent study from France by Bel et al. (2015) has shown activity-based tourism where outdoor pursuits play a vital role in generating revenue. This leads to a noticeable impact on the local economy in rural areas. There is also research showing that small, remote islands that are specialising in tourism is growing faster than other economies due to, among other things, a relative shift in the terms of trade of the sector and not on a rise in productivity of the sector (Hernández-Martín, 2008).

Another feature is that the educational and income level among the staff in the tourism industry is much lower than other sectors of the economy. Together with an ageing population and a negative net-migration this has reinforced the negative spiral in the local economy. In order to alleviate economic problems in these regions the European Union has set up the Rural Development Programme (RDP) in order to fund projects and firms that can create new employment and business opportunities in these areas. As part of these restructuring efforts, subsidies from the European Union have been used for investments in the tourism sector (Zasada et al., 2018). The aim has been to strengthen the service sector in the local economy. Tourism has, therefore, been regarded as an effective way to create economic growth in peripheral areas because of low requirement of formal education and low barriers for entering into the sector. Since 2016 a lot of EU funding has been used to support development of new tourist products and facilities (Tirado Ballesteros & Hernández Hernández, 2017). The support for tourist business in the countryside has been seen as an opportunity for communities in remote areas to stimulate in-migration, entrepreneurship, and a gradually more diversified local economy (Eimermann, 2016; Mattsson & Heldt Cassel, 2020; Mottiar, 2016; Thulemark & Hauge, 2014).

Despite a few successful investments in the tourist sector in some rural areas, this endogenous growth model has been increasingly questioned since there is little evidence that this is a solution for many of the declining regions. Hall (2007) has noted that these optimistic notions are based on a naïve view on how the tourism sector works. How well tourism will succeed in a specific area depends on many things such as economic structure of the local economy, level of remoteness, and the economic trajectory (Lundmark &

Åberg, 2019). In some cases investments in one sector of the economy might affect the tourism industry negatively due to an inadequate planning system (Dias-Sardinha & Ross, 2015).

Economic growth characteristics

Fujita et al. (1999) have developed a general model in order to explain the spatial distribution of economic activity. They argue that the spatial distribution of economic activity is an effect of centripetal (concentration) and centrifugal (spreading out) forces in the economy and these forces create specific geographical patterns of economic activity. They have shown that centripetal forces gain the upper hand since consumers and entrepreneurs benefit from a concentration of activity in space. Concentration creates more possibilities, which gives people an incentive to move to urban locations. Hence, the centre scores higher than peripheral locations. However, it can be expected that tourism based on natural resources, which makes it similar to agriculture (Krugman, 1998), may possibly be less subject to centripetal forces.

The relationship between economic growth and development of tourism has gained a rising interest over the past 20 years. Up until today the research has reached disparate conclusions regarding the causal relationship between the two processes. In one stream of research, a clear indication that growth of tourism is a key driver for economic growth is pointed out, i.e. that tourism is, to a lesser degree, dependent on centripetal forces compared to many other industries (Bassil et al., 2015; Eeckels et al., 2012; Parrilla et al., 2007). These studies are often referred to as Tourism Led Growth Hypothesis (TLGH). This hypothesis was first applied in a study of Spain (Balaguer and Cantavella-Jordà, 2002) and has since received much attention (Perles-Ribes et al., 2017; Tugcu, 2014). The TLGH resembles the Export Led Growth Hypothesis, which is used for analysing the significance of exports in economic development (Balassa, 1978). Both these hypotheses assume that one sector of the economy drives the performance of the whole economy.

A comprehensive review of TLGH studies is presented by Pablo-Romero and Molina (2013) and by Brida et al. (2016). Paci and Marrocu (2014) have studied the relationship between regional economic growth and rise in overnight stays on a regional level and concluded that there is a strong association between tourism growth and economic growth at NUTS 2[1] level in Europe. The result of their econometric analysis indicates that the driver of growth is tourism, which is in line with the TLGH hypothesis. A recent study by Meler (2015) argues that wine tourism could act as an agent in creating centripetal forces in developing rural destinations. His line of argument is that multiple products add to attractiveness of a rural tourism destination. In essence this is what gives urban destinations an advantage relative to rural destinations. A study in Korea by Yun (2014) shows that cultural amenities are seldom spatially clustered in rural areas. Hjalager's (2000) contention that tourism should be investigated and compared to industrial districts raises issues related to the interplay between entrepreneurs (Porter, 1980). However, it disregards the fundamental role played by the spatial concentration of consumers. Positive effects of tourism on scale and scope have also been discussed by e.g. Andriotis (2002) and Weng and Wang (2006). Dwyer and Kim (2003) present a comprehensive discussion of destination competitiveness, but their model does not explicitly address

the significance of urban supremacy inherent in central place hierarchies (Christaller, 1966) and the resulting dynamics changing competitiveness over time.

Another strand of literature finds evidence for causality in the opposite direction, i.e. that economic growth stimulates tourism growth (Antonakakis et al., 2015; Aratuo & Etienne, 2019; Payne & Mervar, 2010; Tang, 2011). This research is known as the economic-driven tourism growth hypothesis (EDTGH) and consists of several empirical studies. Du et al. (2016) have applied an econometric model to 109 countries to assess if international tourism should be regarded as an additional income determinant or if it is integrated in the traditional income determinants. They conclude that tourism is related to other sectors of the economy and investments in the tourism sector are not strong enough to drive economic growth independently. Yang and Fik (2014) made a longitudinal study of tourism development in 342 Chinese cities and they concluded that tourism growth is stimulated by general economic growth. Economic and industrial development leads to more visitors, and investment in tourism-related infrastructure increases. A similar observation is made in a study of the Swedish hotel sector, where Falk and Hagsten (2015) noticed that hotels located in cities grew faster and were more profitable than hotels in peripheral locations.

The application of TLGH and EDTGH is, however, often limited to entire economies, often national ones. As a result, space is disregarded, and the unevenness of tourism growth will not be revealed. Another problem with the TLGH studies, recently pointed out by Fonseca and Sánchez-Rivero (2019), is that these studies consist of significant bias, overstating the importance of the tourism sector in economic development. Furthermore, a general problem is that the number of studies of the relationship between economic growth and tourism growth in a spatial context is limited.

The conclusion so far is that tourism development generally seems to be dependent on centripetal forces in the economy, which means that tourism growth is primarily concentrated on urban areas. Tourism is predominantly a final demand sector in the economy. The total impact of its direct, indirect, and induced effects will consequently be of a lower magnitude than for businesses in other sectors having fewer but stronger and more specific linkages in the economy. This may, in turn, reduce the actual effects on general business development in a less developed local economy as leakages (Lejárraga & Walkenhorst, 2010) will be significant. It is perhaps an aspect that contributes to tourism showing a faster growth in large urban economies as compared to peripheral settings (Wiersma et al., 2005; Zhang et al., 2007). Business travellers, who are more frequently in urban economies, also spend significantly more than leisure travellers (Dávid & Tóth, 2012; Suh & McAvoy, 2005; Swarbrooke & Horner, 2012). Although tourism growth generally seems to be driven by economic growth in urban areas, it still remains unclear if this is also the case if we study the spatial distribution within regions.

Another issue associated with this is if a successful development of tourism in remote economies will lead to a more diversified economy. Such an economy will be less sensitive to external markets and boom and bust cycles characterising the situation in many rural economies (Schmallegger & Carson, 2010). In many peripheral areas the accessibility is low which makes it hard to get visitors from metropolitan areas or from abroad (Hall, 2007; Lundmark & Müller, 2010).

The Swedish case: changing tourism policies for growth

The tourism sector is growing in importance to the Swedish economy. Recent estimates indicate that the turnover in the sector amounts to more than 296 billion SEK, which is in the neighbourhood of 3% of GDP. This is a result of a growth of both domestic and international tourism. Because of this development, Sweden has experienced a steady rise in the number of overnight stays in commercial accommodation facilities. The number of overnight stays has grown steadily over the last decade, and in 2016, the final year of our study, the number of commercial bed nights amounted to around 62 million. This was an increase of 3% compared to the previous year (Tillväxtverket, 2017).

As a result, the Swedish government has gained an increased interest in tourism as a possible component of regional policy. Structural changes in the Swedish economy, with a downturn in employment in agriculture and forestry, called for replacement jobs. Initially regional policy endeavours leaned firmly towards relocation of manufacturing industry from centre to periphery (Schön, 2007). This involved schemes of loans and direct subsidies, but was not very successful if at all. In the early eighties tourism industry shows considerable growth and it was gradually incorporated in regional policy.

The image of Swedish tourism at this point in time is very much congruent with leisure travel. A dominant aspect of leisure tourism is vacation and weekend travel. To a Swede this is very much a question of getting away from the urban situation (Rojas, 2004) and to visit the countryside, be it a second home, a caravan park, or any other form of accommodation. The main reason for not giving business travel the same attention is probably due to the fact that it has been seen as less subject to marketing efforts as its main driving force, is business to business contacts, and only a lesser part has been conference and convention type travel.

The stage for regional policy has been subject to major changes from the 1970s up until today. It has been influenced by Sweden's entrance into the EU in 1995 as well as the advent of new public management. This has had a clear bearing on regional planning. Thus, regional development planning in Sweden has changed since the 1990s. The traditional regional policy was grounded in an external growth model, in which peripheral areas were regarded as backward and in need of support from urban areas. Due to financial stress, and also due to ideological changes in state policy and the membership of the European Union, the traditional Swedish regional policy was altered. The aim with the regional policy of European Union is partly to decrease the regional disparities between different areas in Europe, the so-called cohesion policy. However, the way to achieve this was differently addressed by the EU.

For Sweden, the membership in the EU meant that the regional policy changed focus. Distribution of resources from wealthy to poorer regions was replaced by a strategy to strengthen the competitiveness of each region/local community. This should be accomplished by mobilising local and regional resources. The rescaling of economic policy and state institutions to supra and sub-national actors has been seen in the literature as a way to enhance the possibility to exploit local resources, and also a way to strengthen political accountability. The new regional growth strategy was partly based on new actors and networks in order to achieve regional growth. These changes in the governance system were noticeable in many policy areas (Brenner, 2004; Jessop et al., 2008; Roodbol-Mekkes & van den Brink, 2015; Swyngedouw, 2004). The regional development governance system

shifted from what Hall (2011) categorises as a hierarchical mode of governance into a system with elements of other forms of governance i.e. network and community-based governance.

Tourism is still considered to be an important vehicle in regional development and in reducing spatial disparities. Among politicians, there is a strong perception that tourism in general, and innovative tourism products in particular, can turn the tide in any backward-going region regardless of its location and *in situ* available resources. It is difficult to overcome structural problems in remote areas without substantial public investments and careful regional planning. However, in relative terms a recent estimate of the share of public investments in tourism in relation to the total amount of subsidies in rural areas may appear limited. Almstedt et al. (2015) have studied the EU subsidies granted for Sweden between 2007 and 2013 and concludes that approximately 6% of the total EU funds were granted for tourism activities, which was the third biggest sector of investments. But there is considerable variation between the regions when it comes to how much they spend on tourism development. Some regions do not fund tourism projects at all, while others use up to 15% of the EU money on tourism-related activities. The majority of the enterprise support is granted to companies in the accommodation sector receiving around 60% of the subsidies. The money for different tourist-related projects are in the field of nature-based tourism and various marketing activities.

The prime minister of Sweden (Löfven, 2018) recently also made it clear that it is important that the countryside retain a reasonable infrastructure so that it can harbour city people that need to take a break from hectic urban life. The idea of tourism as a universal solution to regional problems has also been amplified by the fact that tourism has had considerable growth in Sweden, especially since the Swedish recession in the early 1990s.

All regions have experienced at least some growth. However, it is not at all evenly spread as has been discussed in a previous study (Bohlin et al., 2014). Thus, it is evident that the main growth has taken place in the large cities. The capital of Stockholm is by far more successful in attracting tourists than any other region in Sweden. An interpretation of this finding is, of course, that any general policy boosting tourism will mainly fuel the centre of the country rather than its periphery (Bohlin et al., 2014).

Method

Study area

The conclusions drawn in this paper are based on an analysis of accommodation statistics between 2008 and 2016 in the municipalities located in four counties in central Sweden. The study area is comparatively large. It consists of about 112,000 km^2 which is larger than Portugal for example. The area is sparsely populated. The total population is 980,000 inhabitants, which is approximately one-tenth of the population of Portugal, and indeed that of Sweden. Three of the counties are almost equally sized in terms of population: Värmland (280,000 inhabitants), Dalarna (285,000 inhabitants), and Gävleborg (285,000 inhabitants). The fourth region, Jämtland, has only half the population of the others with approximately 130,000 inhabitants. The study area has four urban centres, one in each region, which exceed 50,000 inhabitants. The remaining urban areas are significantly smaller.

The regions were selected since the tourism industry plays an important role for the regional economy, and also because they are located at a distance to the three major metropolitan areas in Sweden (Stockholm, Göteborg, and Malmö). Another common feature is that besides the urban centres, they have a vast rural hinterland with a few destinations where tourism plays a large role in the local economy. The selection of these four counties makes it possible not only to understand the spatial dynamics driving the distribution of Swedish tourism on the local level; i.e. to see if it follows the same pattern as on the national level but also to detect if there are any outliers from the observable trend.

The tourism destinations in the area are among the largest in Sweden outside the metropolitan areas, which are also pointed out as especially important tourism areas by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities (SKR) which classifies several of the municipalities in our study. The classification is based on a calculation of how local businesses are mixed between different sectors. Municipalities classified as "tourism areas" have a higher dependence on tourism than other municipalities in the classification. They all have a larger number of people employed in the tourism sector compared to other similar municipalities. They also have a greater number of commercial guest nights compared to other municipalities that have a similar population size. The tourism areas are depicted in Figure 1.

The winter tourism areas are concentrated on the Western part of the region and include Åre and Härjedalen in the county of Jämtland, and Älvdalen and Malung in the county of Dalarna. This area's major ski-destinations Åre, Malung (Sälen), and Idre, which are among the largest in Northern Europe. The area around lake Siljan (Rättvik, Leksand, and Orsa), in the central parts of Dalarna, includes several summer destinations. The final municipality classified as a tourism area is Eda in the county of Värmland. Eda municipality has a large shopping mall located in Charlottenberg, including accommodation facilities catering to cross-border trade with Norway generating a substantial number of guest nights.

Data

The data used in this study are guest nights. It is collected by Statistics Sweden (SCB) and it consists of all overnights stays in commercial accommodation establishments. This study is based on annual data on municipal level. SCB's confidentiality rules limit accessibility. Thus, if less than four accommodation establishments exist in a municipality it has to be aggregated with another municipality in order to release the statistics on guest nights. Another limitation of the data is that the smallest facilities, with fewer than five rooms or nine beds, are not included in the statistics. This might lead to an underestimation of the total number of overnight stays in rural areas. Besides these limitations, guest nights which are mediated through platforms such as Airbnb are not included in the data. However, this is of minor importance since these platforms do not play any decisive role in the study area.

The results of the aggregation are shown in Figure 1, where some of the municipalities are joined which can be seen on the map as areas where municipality names include a slash. The map represents the lowest geographical level available in the accommodation statistics which can be acquired in this area of Sweden without losing data due to

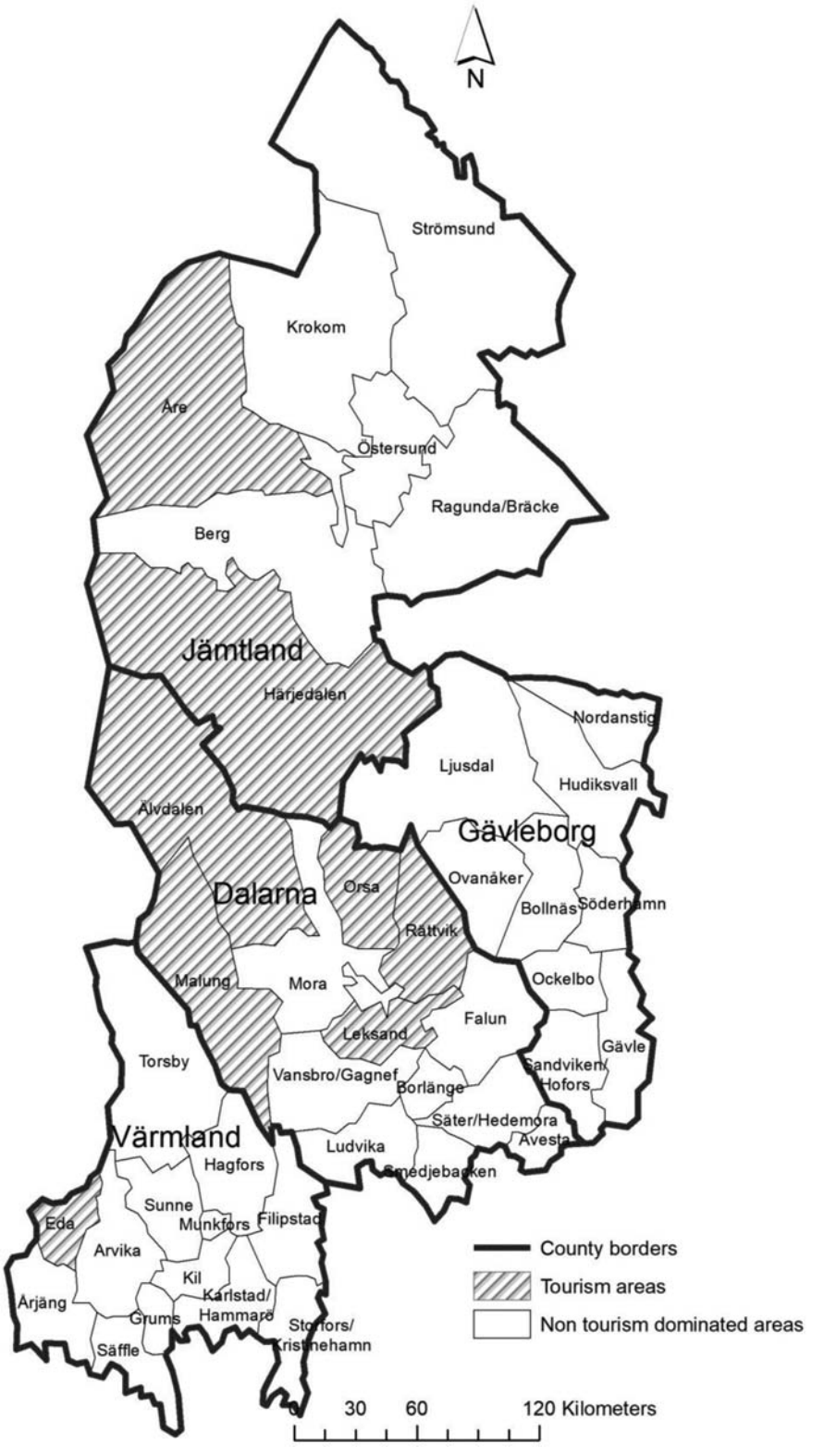

Figure 1. Tourism-dominated municipalities according to SKL's classification. Source: Gillingsjö and Ekholm (2016).

confidentiality regulations. The accommodation statistics used in our study include hotels and hostels, holiday villages, and campsites.

The recorded guest nights have been analysed by calculating the locational quotient (Johnston et al., 2000) in order to assess any redistribution of guest nights during the study period at the regional level. A location quotient of ≥ 1 indicates that a municipality, in this case, has increased its share of guest nights i.e. its relative market share of guest nights has increased. This also implies that other municipalities have lost market shares. Applied this way the location quotient can be understood as an indicator of changes in market shares over time, pinpointing winners and losers.

Changes in the scope of the local economy are monitored using employment as a proxy. In this case a location quotient has been calculated for changes in the size of employment for each municipality using the same approach as for guest nights. Association between changes in guest nights and employment in general is measured by calculating a Pearson correlation coefficient for each year during the study period.

The location quotient is calculated as follows:

$$LQ = \frac{Si_{t1}/A_{t1}}{Si_{t0}/A_{t0}} \tag{1}$$

Location quotient

where Si_{t0}/A_{t0}= Number of guest nights of a particular municipality divided by all guest nights in the region at the start of the time period studied; Si_{t1}/A_{t1}= Number of guest nights of a particular municipality divided by all guest nights in the region at the end of the time period studied.

The Pearson correlation coefficient is calculated as follows:

$$r = \frac{n(\sum xy) - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{\left[n\sum x^2 - \left(\sum x^2\right)\right] - \left[n\sum y^2 - \left(\sum y^2\right)\right]}} \tag{2}$$

Pearson correlation

Analysis

A comparison of the four counties, Figure 2, shows that the county of Dalarna has a much higher number of total guest nights compared to the rest of the group, 3.5–4 million guest nights. The lowest numbers are recorded in the county of Gävleborg where the annual number of guest nights is just above one million, whereas the regions of Värmland and Jämtland are about the same size with around 1.8 million guest nights.

When analysing the trend of the guest nights in these counties, the results show that there is a growth in all counties between 2008 and 2016 except for Dalarna. The fastest growth has occurred in the county of Gävleborg, which is the only county that does not have any classified tourism areas. Guest nights in Gävleborg have risen more than 20% over the studied period. The slowest growth, besides Dalarna, was recorded in Jämtland. The two counties with more than 65% of the total amount of guest nights produced in the study area in 2016, experienced either a decrease or a moderate increase of guest nights between 2008 and 2016.

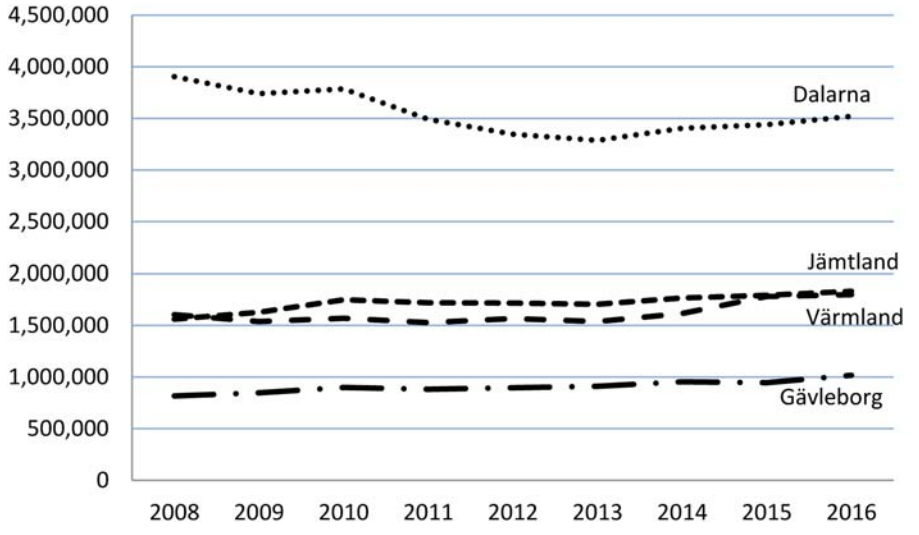

Figure 2. Guest nights produced in the regions between 2008 and 2016. Number of guest nights without SoL. Source: Statistics Sweden.

A rather large share of accommodation in Sweden is made up of privately owned cabins, which at times are rented out when they are not used by the owners. If a company provides private accommodation, like a letting agent those guest nights are included in the official statistics but not disclosed geographically beyond the regional level.

As shown in Figure 3 there is a considerable variation regarding how large this segment of private rentals is on a regional basis. The largest share of accommodation in mediated, privately owned cabins has been recorded in Jämtland and Dalarna, where the share of this accommodation type is more than one-third of the total guest nights produced in the region. The province with the lowest share of this category is Gävleborg where the corresponding figure is only around 5%.

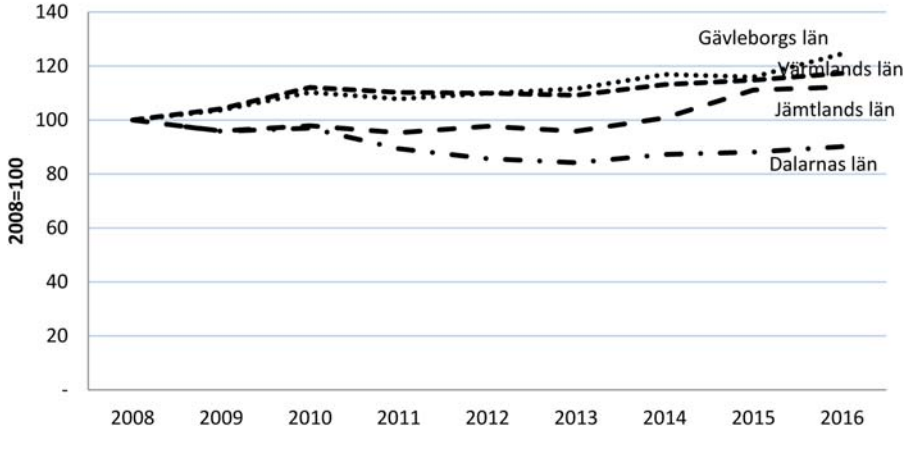

Figure 3. Changes in number of guest nights between 2008 and 2016. Source: Statistics Sweden.

Over time, the share of this segment only shows a weak positive trend in three of the regions and a declining trend in one of them. As guest nights in mediated, privately owned cabins appear to be stable over the study period, it is concluded that the decline in guest nights is not a result of possible re-classification of accommodation used (Figure 4).

The trends of the number of guest nights on the regional level shows that areas with a smaller share of winter tourism in the beginning of the period have a faster growth than other regions. This would indicate that tourism is developing more rapidly in urban areas than in traditional tourist destinations. In order to analyse this more closely, the following section looks at the relationship between economic activity in the local economy and the development of guest nights in the municipality.

The general pattern is that the growth of guest nights on the local level is closely related to the distribution of the population (Bohlin et al., 2014). Most guest nights are consequently produced in the major urban areas of Sweden, and the number of guest nights is declining in relation to the population size of the municipality. However, this general trend is not universal since tourist destinations in smaller municipalities may attract a large number of guest nights relative to their population. In our study area, the local distribution of guest nights differs from the general pattern because the majority of the guest nights are concentrated to the rural, small-sized municipalities in the area which contains tourist destinations (ski resorts). For example, the municipality of Malung produced more than 600,000 guest nights with a population of around 10,000 inhabitants in 2016. In the same year, the municipality of Borlänge – with more than 50,000 inhabitants – produced around 250,000 guest nights.

However, when looking at the growth rate of guest nights in relation to population size (see Figure 6) in our study area, it is clear that the larger urban areas are growing much faster than the smaller municipalities, where both the population and number of guest nights have decreased over the studied period. The figure indicates that the growth of guest nights is higher than the growth of the population.

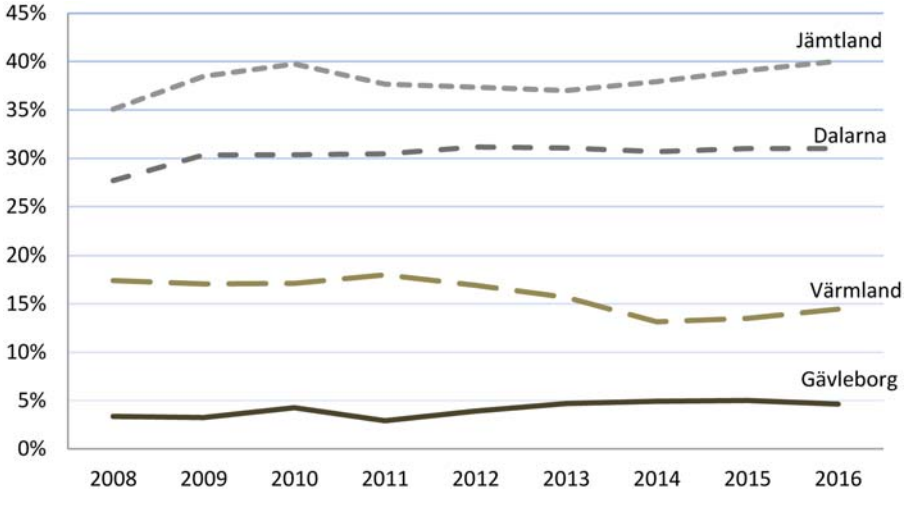

Figure 4. Guest nights produced in SoL (Privately owned Cabins and Apartments) as share of total guest nights in the regions between 2008 and 2016. Source: Statistics Sweden.

In order to analyse the relation between economic activity and guest nights, we use statistics on the number of people employed in the local economy as an indication of the economic activity on the local level. A correlation between the number of people employed at the local level and the number of guest nights was calculated for each year between 2008 and 2016.

The assumption is that the size of the general economic activity drives the tourism activity in an area. If all the guest nights were produced in the same place as the working population was located, the correlation would be +1. If things were opposite it would be – 1. The correlation coefficient is only a measurement of association between two variables and it does not specify any causality.

The correlation between the number of employees and the number of guest nights in each municipality (Figure 5) shows a relatively stable trend in all of the municipalities. The overall level of correlation is very different in the four regions. In Dalarna, for example, the correlation coefficients are negative over the period. This is because the guest nights are produced in areas where there is a low level of economic activity. This is hardly surprising since Dalarna has the largest ski resorts in Sweden and the major ski destinations in the region are located in a remote mountain area which is sparsely populated. However, the trend over time is that the growth of tourism is shifting towards more densely populated areas with high economic activity. The negative correlation between guest nights and economic activity is close to zero in 2016, meaning that the two variables are not associated any longer.

The same trend towards a stronger association between economic activity and guest nights is noticeable in the regions of Jämtland and Värmland, where already in the beginning of the period, there was a positive correlation between tourism and overall economic activity. This has become reinforced over time. In the fourth region in our study area, Gävleborg, the trend is very close to zero, but the correlation is already extremely high in the

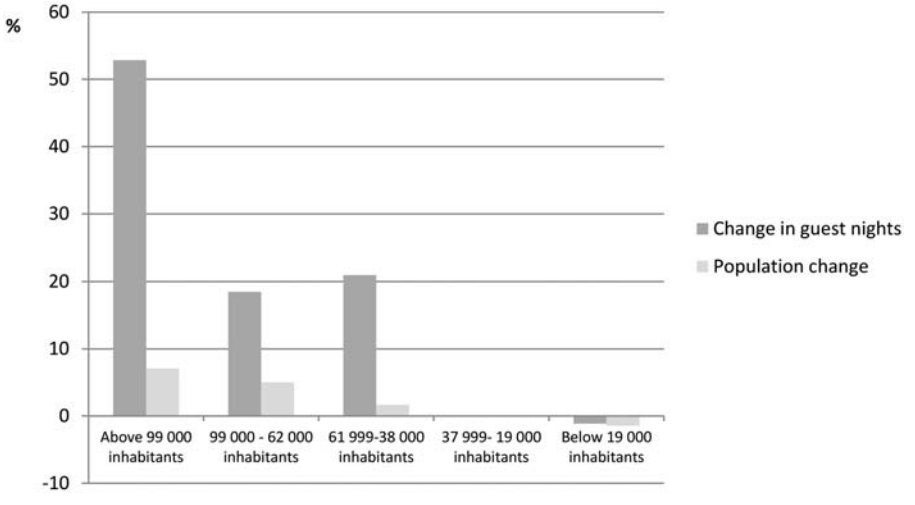

Figure 5. Change of guest nights and population size on municipality level 2008–2016. Source: Statistics Sweden.

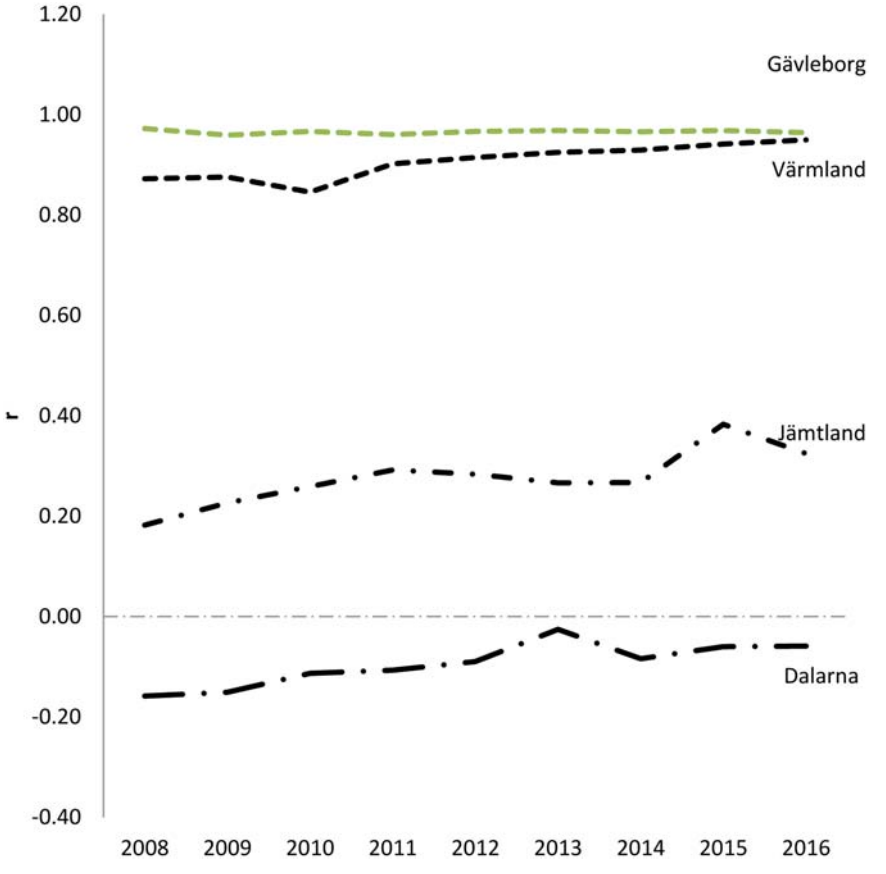

Figure 6. Pearson correlation coefficients between 2008 and 2016. Source: Statistics Sweden.

beginning of the period. The reason behind this could be that the concentration of tourism into the economic centres of the region is already near its maximum.

To investigate if the strong association between economic activity (measured as the total number employed within the economy) and number of guest nights that was seen at the regional level also exists on the local level, an analysis of changes in percentages in number of employees in the local economy and guest nights produced locally was carried out. Figure 6 plots the changes for each of the municipalities in the four regions. The Y-axis shows the change in percent in the number of guest nights between 2008 and 2016 and the X-axis shows the change in local employment over the same period.

In Figure 7, the intra-regional redistribution of guest-nights and employment measured as locational quotient on municipal level is presented. The results indicate a positive relation between the growth of employment within the local economy and the expansion of guest nights produced in each municipality. This tendency will, over time, lead to a higher regional concentration of tourism activity to areas with a relatively faster growing local economy. The size of the points in the figure indicates the relative size of the municipal labour market. In Dalarna, Gävleborg, and Jämtland, the largest labour markets have experienced the highest growth of locational quotient in both the size of

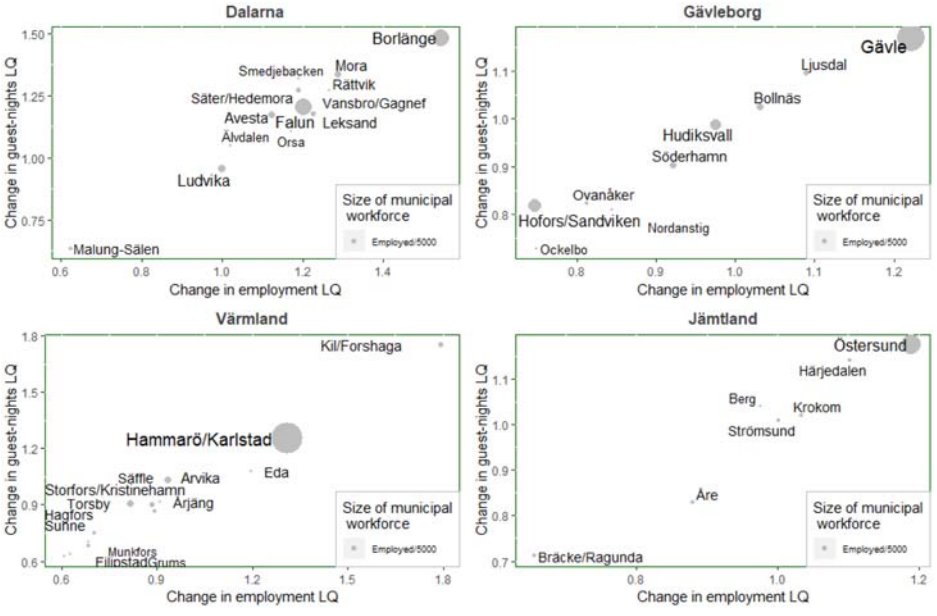

Figure 7. Changes in number of employed at municipality level and changes of commercial guest nights 2008–2016.

the local labour market and number of guest nights. In Värmland, the combined municipalities of Kil and Forshaga have a higher growth than Hammarö/Karlstad. One possible explanation behind this deviation from the main results in the other studied regions could be that even small local changes in absolute numbers might result in rather large effects in the locational quotient. However, the overall impression from the calculation of the intra-regional concentration of guest-nights and number of employees is that the largest local economy in each region is growing faster than the rest of the municipalities. This supports the proposition that economic activity also fosters the growth of tourism.

Discussion

This paper is based on Swedish data and the situation there. However, the theoretical foundation of the paper, drawing much on the writings of Krugman and others, suggests that what is the case in Sweden may well apply elsewhere. Thus, although economic development consists of both centrifugal and centripetal forces, over time the latter tends to gain the upper hand resulting in spatial concentration of economic activity. Although tourism development in some cases is resource based, and thus not ubiquitous, it is nonetheless a fact that in most situations, resources tend to be market oriented and man-made.

The general assumption that tourism is a vehicle for reducing regional disparities (Dávid & Tóth, 2012) and that most places have the potential to establish a flourishing tourism industry is challenged in this paper. Literature on the relationship between economic growth and tourism development on a national scale is a contested issue. The majority of the research indicates that there is a positive effect of tourism investments

to the national economy. This is often referred to as tourism led growth hypothesis (TLGH). The idea is that the tourism sector is by itself able to create economic growth in the whole economy. This notion has been contested by other researchers (Antonakakis et al., 2015; Aratuo & Etienne, 2019; Payne & Mervar, 2010; Tang, 2011) who argue that tourism growth is instead dependent on growth in other sectors of the economy.

TLGH has also been part of the new regional policy that emerged in Europe in the 1990s. For peripheral regions, tourism was seen as a tool for creating economic growth and structural changes in the local/regional economies in rural areas. Tourism investments were intended to become a vehicle for regional development. This policy has been questioned by several authors, because it rests on a preconception which does not contextualise the prospects for local and regional economic development. The idea of tourism as a recipe for alleviating structural problems in all rural economies is naïve (Hall, 2007) since the preconditions for growth differ. The regional investments in tourism are also often underpinned by a lack of understanding of the way the tourism industry works.

The TLGH notion that the tourism sector can accomplish economic growth in other sectors of the economy on a national scale seems to be highly questionable. This study shows that the number of guest nights is not growing in peripheral areas despite the fact that previous research has shown that the majority of the public funding of regional tourism investments has been channelled into the accommodation sector. The results from the analysis of guest night statistics indicate that the accommodation sector is being concentrated to areas closer to the market and is expanding in urban environments and not in the rural countryside.

Bohlin et al. (2014) have demonstrated that the main urban centres are those that have over time attracted growing shares of an expanding tourism sector. The contention in this paper is that tourism is not a leading industry as suggested by the TLGH (see Brida et al., 2016). On the contrary, findings confirm the economic-driven tourism growth hypothesis (EDTGH) proposed by scholars such as Yang and Fik (2014), and Falk and Hagsten (2015), which implies that tourism is fuelled by other parts of the economy and not the other way around. In a spatial context this implies that tourism growth will, by and large, coincide with urban locations where economic activity in general is concentrated. The fact that this has been largely overlooked in the discourse of regional development planning research is partly due to the fact that business travel has been excluded in analyses of tourism primarily focusing on leisure travel. The urban economy offers a number of assets that tourists appreciate and demand, such as sport arenas, theatres, concerts, and museums. The competitiveness framework proposed by Dwyer and Kim (2003) reflects on this. Thus, when centres are compared to the periphery, the former have a number of advantages which are attractive to tourists.

What we have shown here is that this is not just valid for larger metropolitan areas, but that urban areas in general have advantages over less urbanised areas. The higher up in the hierarchy a centre is situated, the more of these assets it will display. What it amounts to is infrastructure and amenities in general. Thus high-order places, using Christaller's (1966) nomenclature, will have superior connectivity in all forms of transportation compared to places of less centrality or just peripheral areas. In addition, urban locations, related to size, house a vast supply of restaurants, shopping, museums, art galleries, exhibitions, and meeting facilities suitable for congresses, conferences, and events in general,

which are available to the local market and also attractive to visitors. There will most likely be a correlation also between place in urban hierarchy and available management skills. A more diversified labour market will add advantages to large places over smaller ones. Accommodation in urban settings can be used more effectively compared to the periphery. Having both business and leisure travellers, these two markets are, to a large part, complementary in time, reduce seasonality and thus increase efficiency. Business travellers' demands are largely expressed during weekdays and leisure travellers are catered for on weekends. During major holidays, business travel is limited and the opposite goes for the leisure travel market.

In essence, urban centres house the key elements which the tourism market demands. However, this is largely a result of local demand and in some cases the result of government decisions regarding the location of public institutions of various kinds. Although the tourism industry makes use of this supply, and may contribute to its expansion by adding to the overall demand, it is the urban economy itself which initially created the basis for this supply. From a spatial competition perspective the centre will almost always have an advantage compared to the periphery. Ceteris paribus, cities will do better than peripheral tourist destinations.

Conclusions

In this article temporal changes in the concentration of tourism guest nights are explored in four selected tourism regions in Sweden. In two of them, tourism is already concentrated on the regional centres, the regions of Gävleborg and Värmland. In the two others, Dalarna and Jämtland, tourism has had its main concentration in the mountains away from the regional centres, thus showing a lesser degree of concentration. When changes over time are considered it is concluded that there is an ongoing concentration of tourism guest nights to regional centres. A correlation analysis relating business activity, using employment as a proxy, and tourism guest nights, is also interpreted to support the idea that tourism and general economic activity are indeed linked to one another. Thus on a national level it is the major centres that lead the competition. They have the largest market share and continue to grow faster than the rest. Stepping down in the hierarchy to the regional level it is also shown that regional centres exhibit the same pattern. In other words, data show that peripheral tourist destinations are not competitive in relation to regional urban centres – even the most important destinations show a lower growth rate than the regional urban centres. The latter take the lead and tend to increase their share of the regional market over time.

Future research needs to address what characterises exceptions to this general trend. In the regions we have studied there are rural locations where major investments have been made. This has resulted in many jobs and substantial number of guest nights. However, over time it appears as if the growth rate is considerably lower in the countryside location compared to those in metropolitan areas.

The implications for policymakers and planners are that future investments in tourism are a complex issue. Thus, it needs to address agglomeration aspects of investments in a destination as well as communication and accessibility aspects. A more detailed analysis of the mechanisms behind a sustainable rural tourism growth is necessary including how competition is changing disfavouring the countryside. It is important that regional growth

policies are based on local involvement. Investment strategies need to have a focus which goes beyond the local destination. Thus, investments in e.g. infrastructure, enhancing communication, and accessibility to peripheral locations have to be addressed.

Note

1. Nomenclature of territorial units for statistics used by Eurostat and European Union.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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