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Social innovations in tourism: Analysing processes, actors, and tipping points

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ABSTRACT

Social innovations consist of new forms of cooperation of individuals or organisations and they provide new solutions to societal problems. They typically evolve along three phases and have the potential to solve region-specific challenges. In the operating phase, social innovations can overcome the so-called tipping point. The tipping point is an elusive moment at which the social innovation can begin to spread or at which it could also fail. To examine the social innovation characteristics that contribute to overcome tipping points and to identify the role and motivations of actors to participate in the process of developing social innovations in tourism, we applied innovation biographies to seven social innovations in a Swiss mountain region. Data were drawn from 29 interviews with the involved actors. Our results show that social innovations in tourism that overcame the tipping point fulfil three conditions: First, new actors join the social innovations in the operating phase. Second, all the actors involved benefit from the social innovation for their own business strategy. Third, the social innovation is accepted in the region and among the actors involved and therefore does not face strong headwinds. Furthermore, developers, supporters, and promoters are important throughout the entire social innovation process. The findings suggest the need for a more comprehensive understanding of innovations in tourism that incorporates the complexity of different actors involved.

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Introduction

Innovation in tourism has been considered as a key factor for the competitiveness of enterprises, organisations and destinations and also as one of the main drivers of local development (Gomezelj, 2016; A.-M. Hjalager, 2010; Rodríguez et al., 2014). The body of literature in this field is growing and the approaches differ regarding their perspective on processes, context configurations, knowledge, technology and type of innovation (Pikkemaat et al., 2019). Still, the understanding of innovation in tourism

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is mainly technology-oriented (Gomezelj, 2016) and therefore neglects the complexity of diverse actors involved (Trunfio & Campana, 2019) and the network in which innovations in tourism are made (Kofler et al., 2018; Sørensen, 2007). The technological understanding has recently been challenged (Gomezelj, 2016; Trunfio & Campana, 2019) and the concept of social innovation in tourism is gaining interest (Aksoy et al., 2019; Batle et al., 2018). Social innovations consists of new forms of cooperation of individuals or organizations and they provide new solutions to problems (Ayob et al., 2016; Moulaert et al., 2013; Neumeier, 2012). As such, they have the potential to solve region-specific challenges (Edwards-Schachter & Wallace, 2017; Moulaert et al., 2017; Mulgan et al., 2007; Nicholls et al., 2015). In doing so, social innovations incorporate collective actions and they engage society in developing new solutions (Bock, 2016). At the heart of a social innovation lies the recognition of a social need or a societal problem (Bock, 2012; Moulaert & Nussbaumer, 2005; Neumeier, 2012). A social innovation starts spreading its solution if it overcomes a so-called tipping point. The tipping point is an elusive moment in the operating phase at which the social innovation is either widely adopted and spreads or at which it fails (Neumeier, 2012). The existing body of research on social innovations suggests that social innovations develop in three phases. The phases are especially relevant because they structure the development process systematically.

However, only a few studies have investigated the concept of social innovations in tourism. This is especially true, for the process and the actors involved. A focus on the process and the actors involved is highly relevant for two reasons. First, social innovations need to successfully pass a tipping point and only then can they fully unfold their outcomes (Neumeier, 2012). Second, the mainly technological oriented understanding of innovations tends to gloss over the complexity of diverse actors needed and included in innovation processes. Furthermore, independent of the understanding of a social innovation in general, the tourism literature agrees with the notion that more knowledge about the creation and facilitation of social innovation is needed (Trunfio & Campana, 2019). Therefore, the question on how social innovations in tourism develop and how actors involved can overcome tipping points is of great interest.

In this paper, we apply existing concepts about the development process of social innovations in tourism and examine the characteristics of these social innovations that help them overcome tipping points. Furthermore, we study the actors' role and motivations to participate in the process of developing such social innovations. In doing so, our analysis focusses on a select number of case studies of social innovations in tourism in a Swiss mountain region. We apply the method of innovation biographies (Butzin & Widmaier, 2016) and derive the development of seven cases over the past 13 years. In doing so, we draw on data from 29 semi-structured interviews with the actors involved.

Background

Social innovations in tourism

Innovations are considered to be crucial for a region's development and they are especially important for the tourism industry (Halkier et al., 2014). Still, the

understanding of innovations in tourism stems mainly from the literature on innovations in manufacturing. Therefore, a technology orientation dominates the literature on tourism innovations (Gomezelj, 2016) and a comprehensive understanding of innovation processes is missing (Sørensen, 2007). From a geographical point of view, the debates primary focus on knowledge networks and innovation systems in tourism (Booyens & Rogerson, 2017; Brouder & Eriksson, 2013; Carson et al., 2014; A. M. Hjalager, 2010; Rodríguez et al., 2014). However, studies often neglect the complex networks of actors who are engaged in developing and implementing innovations and the manifold kinds of innovation these actors engage in (Trunfio & Campana, 2019). Furthermore, innovations can take on many different forms as Trunfio and Campana have shown. In their review paper of innovations in tourism, they highlight four different types of innovations in tourism: social innovations, experience co-creation, smart destination, and e-participative governance. For them, social innovations are relevant due their potential to transform the organisational structure of destinations. Furthermore the destination resources and opportunities for innovation become visible due to the inclusive view of diverse actors such as local communities, local firms, political/institutional actors, and destination management organisations (Trunfio & Campana, 2019).

Studies of social innovations are quite heterogeneous in their understanding of what a social innovation is and how it comes to be. This is especially true for social innovations in tourism where most academic publications lack explicit definitions. Social innovations in tourism are mainly discussed in light of a social change: They are seen as an organisational change in tourism firms (Alkier et al., 2017) or as new business models that creates a social value rather than an economic value. In some studies, this is also referred to as social entrepreneurship in tourism (Sheldon & Daniele, 2017). This stands in contrast to Moulaert's critique that social innovations certainly have economic aspects, however, emphasizing them too strong, can lead to a reductionists view on the potential of social innovations (Moulaert et al., 2013). Generally, social innovations in tourisms are understood as new value propositions, new informal rules and cultures, different ways of thinking and ways to lead to institutional change (Alegre & Berbegal-Mirabet, 2016; Polese et al., 2018). They are also discussed under the assumption that this type of innovation can satisfy social needs that have not yet been met by private market provision or by the state (Batle et al., 2018). Furthermore, social innovations in tourisms can also be understood as a strategy to incorporate local communities in decision-making and planning of tourism destinations (Malek & Costa, 2015). For our study we use a definition that integrates all identified participating actors in the creation of the social innovations, and we focus on the development process rather than the outcome. Based on the bibliometric analysis of Ayob et al. (2016) we define social innovation as follows:

A social innovation consists of new forms of cooperation of individuals or organizations that lead to new ideas, of which the implementation is at least considered. In regional development, such innovations can have a positive impact on society, improve the quality of life and/or change social or power relations.

While the aforementioned studies focus primarily on a social outcome and changing social relations, a perspective on the development process of social innovations in tourism is extremely interesting but mostly missing. Studies about how social innovations in tourism came to be and which actors are involved are quite scant. Some

have argued that a focus on the social innovation process can enlarge the perspective to incorporate questions about participation, exchange, and collaboration with relevant stakeholders. It can help us understand the ways in which such innovations and the actors involved cross organizational boundaries (Voorberg et al., 2015). The latter is particularly relevant as social innovations in tourism need to be understood as managerial practices within or in between touristic actors. While it is correct that a diverse set of touristic actors need to be included, it is also crucial to consider non-touristic actors and to study tourism as one component of a destinations development (Ioannides & Brouder, 2016). Therefore, research on social innovation in the context of tourism needs to consider the diversity of actors and go beyond the tourism actors. In fact, our study considers a comprehensive understanding of collective actions addressing a regional challenge through a new configuration of multiple actors and resources. In the sense that local communities and local actors innovate to respond to problems experienced by local communities (Klein, 2009).

Process of social innovations

Several studies have examined the process of developing and implementing a social innovation (Murray et al., 2010; Neumeier, 2012, 2017). While Neumeier (2012, 2017) conceptualized three phases that range from the formation to the implementation of a social innovation, Murray et al. (2010) further took into account the scaling and diffusion as well as the impact of a social innovation in a six-stage model. The model by Murray et al. (2010) is much more detailed when it comes to the actors' execution of the tasks involved in the phases, whereas Neumeier's conceptualization highlights actor-network/participatory aspects. As the present paper's purpose is to focus on the development process and the actors involved at different phases, the model by Neumeier (2012) is more suitable because in the model, as in our research, the actors are central. Neumeier (2012) identified three phases that are important in the process of developing a social innovation. First, in the problematisation phase an actor or a small group of initial actors recognize a problem and has an idea how the problem could potentially be solved. Therefore, the problem and the initial idea lie at the core of this phase. Second, in the implementation phase, the initial actors proactively look for partners in order to implement their idea. If initial actors can see an advantage for themselves or the region, they decide to join them. Therefore, the reasons to participate are of central importance to this phase. Third, in the operation phase the social innovation is fully implemented and can reach a tipping point which is central to this phase.

This paper seeks to dig deeper in the development process of social innovations in tourism and provide answers with regards to question about the actors' reasons for participation and the differences in the individual stages of a social innovation development process in tourism.

Actors involved in social innovations in tourism

Innovations in tourism—and therefore also social innovations in tourism—result from a co-evolutionary process including public and private actors and the local

community (Gomezelj, 2016; Sørensen, 2007; Trunfio & Campana, 2019). Trunfio and Campana (2019) took a comprehensive approach and identified the following actors as drivers of innovations in tourism destinations: the destination management organisation, local firms, local community, and political/institutional actors. When focusing on social innovations in tourism, the literature has a rather limited view of actors: the only actors identified in the literature as being involved are the community (Alkier et al., 2017; Malek & Costa, 2015) and/or social tourism entrepreneurs (Sheldon & Daniele, 2017). However, this understanding of actors is not comprehensive and moreover, the tourism literature is not clear about the different roles these actors play in creating and developing social innovations in tourism. We can utilize, however, the literature on social innovations and follow the typology of actor roles developed by Terstriep et al. (2015):

- **Developers:** Actors that recognized the problem and had an idea how to solve it. They developed and implemented the idea in order to make it a social innovation.
- **Supporters:** Actors that actively helped to develop and implement the social innovation
- **Promoters:** Actors that were able to push the social innovation's development. They facilitated to operate, spread/diffuse/scale the social innovation.

Tipping point in social innovations

The tipping point—defined as a critical point in time at which the further development path of a social innovation is decided - is an elusive moment in the operating phase at which the social innovation is widely adopted and begins to spread to other regions or at which it fails (Neumeier, 2012). However, spreading can be about increasing the social impact (Deserti & Rizzo, 2020; Santos et al., 2013), increasing the number of people who have access to the social innovation (Dees et al., 2004) or increasing the number of emulations (Murray et al., 2010). On the contrary, failure means that the social innovation is not accepted (anymore) in the region (Neumeier, 2012). However, this understanding of failure or success is shortsighted in that it neglects the problem-solving characteristic of social innovations. Social innovations can be regional- and/or actor-specific solutions and as a result they can be successful even if they do not spread by simply offering solutions to local problems. Furthermore, Neumeier (2012, 2017) emphasized too little that a social innovation can also fail before reaching a tipping point. We assume that there are multiple critical tipping points in the development of a social innovation and they crystallize along the problematisation, implementation and operation phase. However, we focus on the specific tipping point in the operation phase, because a social innovation increases its capacity to provide a potential solution to a specific problem if more people have access to it and therefore if it spreads.

Methodology

For this study, we were interested in the ways in which social innovations in tourism develop in a Swiss mountain region. We examined seven case studies of social innovations in tourism. The cases were selected from an inventory that was created within a larger research project in 2019 (University of Bern, 2021). Back then, we screened

databases from regional development programmes and innovation prizes to compile the inventory. In addition, we conducted an online survey among the municipal secretaries (the senior administrative officers) of all 76 municipalities of the Bernese Oberland and a systematic online search and newspaper review between January and June 2019. In total, 979 potential cells of social innovations could be identified. With the help of 23 evaluation criteria, derived from the literature on social innovations (e.g. Ayob et al., 2016; Pol & Ville, 2009) and consisting of the following categories - collaboration, novelty, idea, Bernese Oberland, improving quality of life, changing social relationships, changing power relationships - we identified 68 social innovations, which emerged in the period between 1997 and 2018. All potential social innovations in the data were independently assessed by two researchers from the team. The intercoder reliability of the analysis was 90% (Tschumi et al., 2021). Out of this inventory we identified the social innovations in tourism. This means that, the social innovation needed to be generated by touristic actors, the social innovation is a touristic offer, or both conditions are met. We identified 41 social innovations in tourism (Wirth & Bandi Tanner, 2020). In order to get our sample of analysis we further narrowed down the selection with the following three criteria, originated in the Bernese Oberland (1) after the year 2008 (2), and still operating (spring 2021) (3). The first two criteria guaranteed a comparison among the selected cases due to the same cantonal and national regulations. Criterion 3 enabled to do biographies because actors exist for interviews. This approach yielded seven social innovations, which we then examined in more detail.

The Bernese Oberland is located on the northern side of the alps in Switzerland. The whole region has a rich touristic history dating back to the 1820s. With mountains up to 4200 meters high, the region is especially attractive for mountaineering and skiing. The region is highly dependent on tourism and about more than a quarter of employment is generated directly or indirectly by tourism. However, there is internal migration to more central areas and some out-migration from the valleys, partly due to excessively high housing prices in the core tourist communities (Höchli et al., 2013). For each of the seven case studies of social innovations we conducted innovation biographies (Butzin & Widmaier, 2016). The innovation biographies enabled us to capture social relations and contextual settings along the development process of the social innovation in question. The method is especially suitable because it allows us to collect data on each case over time and thus it gave us insights into the innovation process from key actors' perspectives. Developing innovation biographies allows for the study of time-space dynamics from a micro-level perspective and involves a number of steps (Butzin & Widmaier, 2016). The first step were narrative interviews with persons who has been strongly involved in the process of initiating and developing the social innovation in question. Once we conducted these first interviews, we were able to analyse the data and write the draft innovation biography for each case study. In a second step, we added additional information to the biography from an extensive desktop research. Through this work, we were able to identify additional involved actors. The third step was to conduct semi-structured interviews with further involved actors to receive an exhaustive biography with detailed information about the initial idea of the social innovation, the actors involved and their motivation. The three steps yielded 29 interviews (3-6 per case) with an average duration of around one hour. This resulted in seven detailed innovation biographies.

For the analysis we subdivided every analysed biography into three phases according to Neumeier (2012) and examined the differences and commonalities among the seven social innovations. In doing so, we focused on the characteristics which were the most relevant in the appropriate phase. In the problematisation phase the problem and its solution are the key characteristic, which led us to focus on the problem and the solution. In the implementation phase the reason for participating is essential, which led us to focus on the motivation of the actors. For all phases, we looked closer at the role of the diverse actors involved. In order to overcome the technology-driven perspective on innovation in tourism, it is crucial to accept the complexity of the destination, in which diverse actors interact (Trunfio & Campana, 2019; van der Have & Rubalcaba, 2016). Therefore, we investigated the roles of the actors included in all three phases. In doing so, we looked for the presence of the initiators, developers, and promoters.

The biography method allows us to explain, why some social innovations overcome a tipping point and how the actor constellation looks like in the different phases of the social innovation process. In the past, a lot has been done on finding a common definition of social innovations and explaining the formation and diffusion of social innovations. Yet these studies often lack an in-depth consideration of time and context in which the social innovation process took place.

Cases of social innovations in tourism

The following section provides information on the development process of the seven social innovation cases and assigns them into three different groups. The groups were created according to the social innovations' development paths in the operating phase. The social innovations assigned to group A remain in the operating phase and did not overcome a tipping point (yet). The social innovations assigned to group B overcame a tipping point and then failed. Those assigned to group C overcame a tipping point and succeed in the way that they spread their solution to other regions. The groups will be used to compare and contrast the cases when it comes to explaining divergence in the operating phase.

Hotel cooperation (group A)

In 2014 a group of hoteliers organized together with a consulting company informational events to inform and discuss a roadmap for a hotel cooperation. In 2016 the cooperation was founded with 11 participating hotels. The cooperation started with quick wins and the members saved money very quickly. It evolved and extended its cooperation activities. Nevertheless, it remained (is still) limited to a certain number of business activities. This hotel cooperation was the first institutionalised cooperation among hoteliers in the region. Back then, it was unique that hoteliers work that close together and that they share business figures.

Supporting program (group A)

In the mid-90s the cableway association recognized that smaller pre-alpine ski lifts faced challenges in maintenance work and in procurement of replacements parts. These smaller pre-alpine ski lifts are important for nearby larger mountain railways and cablecars. Because of their proximity to larger towns and/or villages, they provide an entry point, especially for children to start skiing. Therefore, they could develop

the guests for the larger mountain railways in the future. This mutual dependency led to the institutionalized supporting program, in which the larger mountain railways support the smaller pre-alpine ski lifts with know-how, especially regarding maintenance work and the provision of replacement parts. In turn, the pre-alpine ski lifts advertised the supporting larger mountain railway and offer special tickets for skiing these areas. The supporting program stands symbolically for the high dependency on tourism and especially winter tourism and that one wants to preserve ski tourism. Therefore, it is seen as a measure to attract future guests to ski. After the implementation of the program, the actors involved made no major changes and the program more or less remained in the form as it was implemented.

Renovation program (group B)

In 2014 the region's tourism director detected too many old and often unused second homes in the region. In 2016 he presented a program in which second homeowners received free advice on the conversion of their second home when they engage local firms. Additionally, the municipality paid a fee to lower the conversion costs. On the other hand, the homeowners committed to rent out the apartment after the renovation. The administrative work behind the rental was taken care of by a local rental agency. The program fits in this region, because the percentage of second homes of 61% is quite high (ARE, 2017). These second homes often remained unused because they were not for rent and if so, they were not attractive. Therefore, the municipality faced high infrastructure costs with low incomes from visitor tax. However, too few second homeowners used the program and the expectation of actors working within the social innovation were not met sufficiently.

Consumption-free place (group B)

In 2017 young people searched for a room for an art festival. They found a former hotel that they could use temporarily. In order to organize events, they established a democratically organized collective and they engaged on a voluntary basis. For the youth, the work in the collective was a great opportunity to bring in own concepts and ideas. However, it was challenging to coordinate these different ways of work. Furthermore, the consumption-free place can be seen as a reaction to the region's development path. The region's primary policy orientation and spatial development focus is on satisfying tourist needs and therefore ignore to a certain extent local needs, especially from the youth. Therefore, the collective's ideas could easily stand in contrast to the region's policy orientation.

Solar ship (group C)

In 2010 a local family founded a private company and started to construct a solar ship together with a chrome steel company and an electric cart company. After the first prototype created in 2011, they re-engineered the ship several times and improved it. In order to cover the expenses, the family provided charter trips. In 2017 the city's marketing department asked if the solar ship could provide a time scheduled connection in the region's lake basin. In return, the city council pays a fixed sum and acted as a door-opener for negotiation with the local shipping company to use their

landing docks. Today the solar ship operates with synchronised timetables. The solar ship stands for the circumstance that tourism has low entry barriers and for the ease for individuals become active in this sector. This case started as a collaboration between a family and two companies in the region in order to boat on the lake without causing CO₂-emissions. Through the boat service, regional parks near the lake basin are now connected and can be visited by locals and tourists.

Bilingual snow-camp (group C)

In 2015 the cantonal exchange officer who is living in a tourism destination and his counterpart from another canton presented their idea of a joint snow-camp for school classes from the French and the German speaking part of Switzerland during low season. Together with the local tourism organization, they implemented the social innovation and included the local ski school, a local sport shop and local accommodations as additional actors. Due to interests of a nation-wide foundation that supports language exchange and an association that promotes ski sport, the program has gained increased interests. In 2021/2022 the main organizational part shifted from the tourism organization to the association and the program expanded nation-wide. This case is located at the language border where the awareness of bilingualism is quite common. In addition to the goal to improve the children's language skills another goal is to teach children how to ski. This also indicates the high dependence on winter tourism, especially because the children were seen as potential visitors in the future.

Museum (group C)

In 2008 a private person who owned a second home in a mountain village was bothered by the closure of shops in the village and as a result by the bleak view of empty storefront windows. She founded together with five other private persons a museum association with the aim to enliven the storefronts. They started an exhibition free of charge in five shop windows spread over the village. The exhibit items were borrowed from the locals as the association does not own a collection. In 2017 the local sport museum closed and for the region high valued exhibits were in danger of being liquidated as well. After a long process, in 2020 the preservation of the exhibits was secured together with the nation's premier Alpine museum located in Bern. Due to the regions strong history in tourism and mountaineering there exist many valuable exhibits that now belong to the museum's own collection.

Findings

Development phases of the social innovations in tourism

The following chapter is organized along the three development phases of social innovations in tourism (we denote them phase I-III). [Figure 1](#) provides a structure of the results and illustrates the development process of social innovations in tourism as derived from our case studies. All our cases went through the problematization and implementation phase and reached the operating phase. There, they developed

in three different development paths (A-C). The following section provides the key characteristics of the social innovations in each phase and we discuss why some succeed and others fail and a third group continues without scaling at the moment of the tipping point in the operating phase.

Problematization phase

In the problematization phase we identified two types of problems that were the impetus for the social innovations: The first type are regional problems. Regional problems initiated the following four social innovations. First, the consumption-free place tries to tackle the problem of too few (cultural) places for younger people living in the region. Second, the renovation program tries to tackle the problem of too many old and empty second homes. Third, the bilingual snow-camp tries to tackle the problem of too few guests during low seasons. Fourth, the museum tries to tackle the problem of too many closing shopwindows and therefore a deadly looking village. The second type of problem are actor-specific problems that arose in the following three social innovations: First, the hotel cooperation tries to tackle hotel-specific challenges as for example the cost intensive business. Second, the supporting program for smaller pre-alpine ski lifts by larger mountain railways tries to tackle the problem of lack of knowledge and mechanical spare parts for smaller lifts and meanwhile the decreasing number of skiers which is a problem for the larger mountain railways. Third, the solar ship tries to tackle the problem, that the founder family could not enjoy the view of the lake anymore, because another building was built right in front of their house. [Table 1](#) summarizes the problem and the central idea of the examined social innovations and highlights the initial idea with which the problem was approached.

We further examined the initial actors who recognized the problem and had the idea of the social innovation and we refer to them as developers (Terstriep et al., 2015). Interestingly, all but one developer, were individuals. In two cases the developers were not directly affected by the problem. In the bilingual snow-camp the initial actor was a teacher living in a tourism destination. Due to the fact, that he was anchored in the region, he was aware of the low utilization problem during low season but as a teacher, he was not directly affected by it. In the hotel cooperation the initial idea came from the local tourism director active at the time. While he was

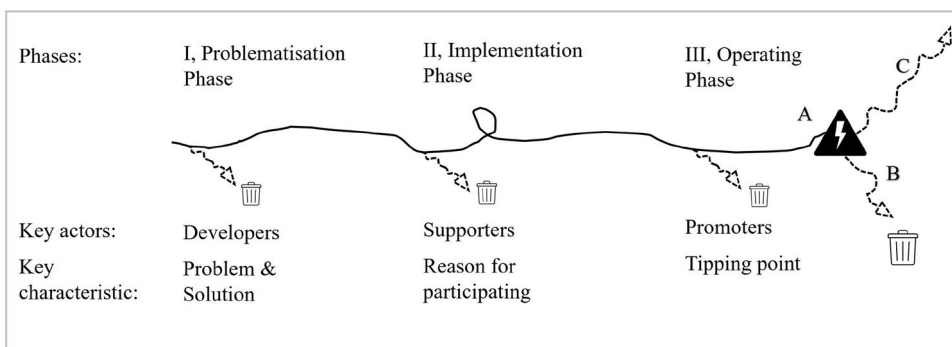


Figure 1. Simplified development process of social innovations in tourism (Source: Author.).

Table 1. Summary of the problem and initial idea (Source: Author.).

| Social innovation | Problem | Kind of problem | Initial idea |
|--|--|--|---|
| Consumption-free place Renovation program | Few places for youth Too many empty, old second homes | Regional/local problem Regional/local problem | Temporary use of space Support second homeowners with consulting service for renovation |
| Museum | Empty shop windows gave the impression of a dead village | Regional/local problem | Reanimate empty shop windows and regional storytelling |
| Bilingual snow-camp for school classes | Low utilisation during low seasons | Regional/local problem | Snow camp for school classes from different language regions |
| Hotel cooperation | Tough economic circumstances for the hotels | Actor specific problem | A hotel cooperation |
| Supporting program | Lack of know-how and mechanical spare parts | Actor specific problem | Cooperation between large and small skiing destinations |
| Solar ship | No direct view of the lake | Actor specific problem | A renewable energy ship |

certainly interested in a healthy regional hotel industry, it was not his main task to establish a hotel cooperation. Therefore, he suggested the idea to a fellow hotel owner and left the implementation up to this person. In sum, across all cases individuals are central developers in this first phase of the social innovation process.

Implementation phase

In the implementation phase, supporters joined the social innovation and contributed to the implementation of the initial idea. The supporters were individuals, groups of individuals, and firms. Their contributing activities were similar to their professional work. As example a company that constructed handrails out of chromium steel, helped in manufacturing a ship hull out of chromium steel. There, the expertise to work with this material, is used in a new scope. In this sense, the social innovation could be seen as a new application field of the ordinary work. We found that low entry barriers for the supporters exist due to social innovation's informality and low risk to one's own business. This circumstance simplified the entry of the supporters into the social innovation.

Our results indicate three main motivations for the participation of the supporters in a social innovation process: First, in all but one social innovation the supporters reported an elusive, non-measurable benefit. They considered that there has always been an advantage and mutual benefit in working together. Although they were not able to quantify this benefit, a basic benefit and a positive attitude towards the cooperation was expected. This could be exemplified with the statement of a supporter-actor of the solar ship: ' [...] You can not say how many orders it has brought me. But another statement says: If I do not do anything, then I know that no orders will come. And everything I do in one direction will eventually bear fruit.' This quote is from a specialised small and medium-sized enterprise, located in the region. Second, in more than half of the social innovations the work within them suited the actors' own day-to-day business and the collaboration fitted their own business strategy and objectives. Therefore, the social innovation might even have been supportive to achieve one's own business goals. As example the snow-sport school in the bilingual snow-camp social innovation taught snow sport lessons to school classes instead of mixed groups

or private lessons. Third, in two social innovations the supporters reported personal interests and enthusiasm for the idea as main reason to participate. This could be exemplified by a quote given from a collective actor in the consumption-free place social innovation: 'I just noticed that I was really missing that. So, on a grassroots level, enlightened conversations, having an impact and networking, that is what I really missed. And then I simply found, hey, somehow I would like to help out.' The quote illustrates the regional problem of missing places and activities for the younger generation and it emphasizes the willingness to participate and to improve the current situation. Surprisingly, at the beginning of a collaboration at any phase of the social innovation process none of the main reasons were related to financial benefits. However, in the development process of two social innovations, financial benefits occurred due to cost savings and ultimately became the main motivation for participate over time. This is especially exemplified in the hotel-cooperation where the actors could re-invest their savings in renovation of the hotel.

Overall, we found that the supporters were strongly convinced of the social innovation and furthermore motivated by the expected benefit for their own's strategy. In addition, they expected to contribute to solve the initial problem.

Operating phase

In the operating phase, we found that the social innovations developed in three different ways around the tipping point and therefore could be divided into three groups (Figure 1: Group A-C). Our results show that it is in the operating phase that tipping points play a crucial role. Two social innovations did not overcome a tipping point and remained in the operating phase (Figure 1: Group A). These two are the hotel cooperation and the ski-lift supporting program. Both social innovations were accepted and used by a small group of actors. Furthermore, in the operating phase both social innovations provided a benefit for the actors included. This can be seen in the hotel cooperation where the actors involved is a small group of hoteliers. The hoteliers reported the cost savings as most important benefit, followed by an informal, honest exchange and support, especially during uncertain situations. In the other example—the ski-lift supporting program—eight bigger mountain railways and around 22 smaller pre-alpine ski lifts participate in the social innovation. For the bigger mountain railways, the benefit laid in the higher publicity due to the presence at the smaller pre-alpine ski lifts and in easier entry-points for skiing due to the closer proximity of the pre-alpine ski lifts to metropolitan areas. For the pre-alpine ski lifts the benefit laid in easier access to replacements parts and the access to knowledge regarding administrative work for the technical security. Interestingly, after questioning if the two examples did not want to scale, they denied and argued that they benefit from it as it currently is. Overall, these two examples are successful in their own way, even though they did not overcome the tipping point.

Two social innovations reached a tipping point and failed in the way that they were not been able to establish themselves on a wider base and were increasingly rejected by the actors involved (Figure 1: Group B). Despite that, there were additional reasons for their respective failure that mainly originated in actor motivation and behaviour. As example, they consisted of actors who differed in terms of consensus, strategic intentions, and belief in broader benefits for themselves and the region.

These actors therefore failed to maintain the spirit and motivation to work in and for the social innovation. In addition, their intentions offended the region's political landscape or at least some of the region's powerful actors. These reasons for failure were exemplified in the temporary use of an area as a consumption free space. In the second example of a social innovation that failed, the missing benefit for the actors involved seemed to be the main reason. On the one hand, too few second homeowners made use of the renovation program, which in turn diminished its importance. On the other hand, companies from the building industry did not profit as much as they expected and therefore wanted to change the social innovation in particular aspects that were not negotiable for the tourism actors. In addition, the region's political actors did not agree with the actions of the destination management organisation and the social innovation lacked political support.

Three social innovations overcame the tipping point and succeed in the way that they began to spread (Figure 1: Group C). They were characterised by the following three conditions: First, in the operating phase new actors joined the social innovations. These actors count as promoters as defined in the previous theoretical section of this paper (Terstriep et al., 2015). The promoters were public actors or organised as public legal partnerships and they contributed to the social innovation in providing financial guarantees, political power, manpower, networks, and/or knowledge. For the solar ship the promoters provided financial guarantees and acted as a door-opener for negotiations with the local shipping company to use their landing docks. For the bilingual snow-camp the promoters provided manpower and a network to scale the innovation. For the museum, they provided knowledge to teach the former actors how to handle a historically valuable collection.

Second, all the actors involved gained from the social innovation. Interestingly, we noticed that none of the promoters was affected by the initial problem that gave rise to the social innovation. Nonetheless, the promoters' motivations were slightly different to that of the initiators and developers. We found that they were primarily motivated by the expected benefit for their own business strategy, and they were strongly convinced by the social innovation. For example, the promoter in the bilingual snow camp reported:

'... just at the moment when they decided they wanted to take it [the snow camp] to the next level, they came to us and then we were just on fire again. [...] And so, it was clear to us from the beginning, it is exactly in our sense and corresponds to our ideas and I know what they need, what we can do and that fits.'

In addition, the promoters expected a contribution to solving the initial problem. In this case the problem of low utilisation during low seasons, which was tackled by this social innovation, is a problem which is present in many touristic regions. Therefore, the promoters wanted to spread the solution (or at least a part of the solution) to other touristic mountain regions.

Compared to the elusive, non-measurable benefit that was presumed by the supporters in the implementation phase, the promoters in the operating phase were clearly more convinced that the social innovation benefits them or the region.

Third, the social innovation was accepted among the actors involved and in the region and therefore did not face strong headwinds. The acceptance in the region

can be exemplified with the following two quotes from the mini museum and the solar ship:

‘...The [locals] help, you can talk to them, they provide material. One woman just said that [...] she still had her great-grandmother’s wedding dress, children’s items [...] [and] [...] a postcard album. [...] I think a lot of things will come to light.’

This quote needs to be read in the context of a small mountain village, where the social innovation revived empty shop windows with exhibitions on the regions’ history. In the case of the solar ship, acceptance is illustrated by the captain’s reaction of another shipping company that recognised the solarship as an important contribution to the touristic value of the region in form of a complementary touristic offer:

‘Now even the captains [from another shipping company] come out when passing by and wave. That is also a sign of greatness. The first few years they did not even look down. Now they have even put us very prominently on their homepage.’

Discussion and conclusion

The results of this study indicate that social innovations in tourism can overcome a tipping point in the operating phase if the initial promoters of the innovation step up and take action, the involved actors observe a benefit, and if regional encouragement exists. Furthermore, our analysis particularly of the operating phase and the role of actors in the tipping point showed that the specific constellations of promoters include public and/or public funded actors. These findings expand current knowledge about the key factors that play a role in successful social innovations (eg. Neumeier, 2017; Oeij et al., 2019). In particular, we present detailed knowledge about the characteristics of social innovations when it comes to the tipping point. Especially, the findings that the promoters were crucial in the operating phase enhance current knowledge on the role of the promoters (Terstriep et al., 2015) with knowledge about the point in the process by which promoters are particularly relevant. The fact public and/or public legal partnerships play a critical role as promoters in the social innovation process in tourism is especially relevant for policy makers who want to support social innovations in tourism. It can thus be concluded that innovation policy in support of social innovations in tourism does not simply mean providing money. Rather policy efforts could be directed directly or via public legal partnerships and efforts could act as a promoter in the operating phase. In doing so, policy can provide financial guarantees, political power, manpower, network, and/or knowledge.

In our innovation biographies we found three different development paths for social innovations at the tipping point. Such a differentiated perspective on the possible outcomes during operating phases of social innovations is important as it was previously lacking in the literature ((Neumeier, 2012, 2017).

Another important finding is that the different actors played specific roles in each phase of the development process of social innovations in tourism. Individuals acted as developers in the problematization phase, individuals and local firms as supporters in the implementation phase, and public or public legal partnerships as promoters in the operating phase. Despite that, the findings show that supporters were primarily motivated due to an expected, elusive, non-measurable benefit,

personal interests and enthusiasm for the social innovation, and the work within the social innovation suited the actors' own day-to-day business. Compared to that, the findings show that the promoters were primarily motivated by the expected benefit for their own strategy, they were strongly convinced of the social innovation, and they expected a contribution to solve the initial problem. These results confirm current knowledge that innovation in tourism occur in co-evolutionary processes among public and private actors (Gomezelj, 2016; Sørensen, 2007; Trunfio & Campana, 2019).

Further, it has been suggested that the actors for innovations in tourism are institutional/political actors, local firms, local community and the destination management organisation (Trunfio & Campana, 2019). This does not fully appear to be the case in our study. Although institutional/political actors, local firms and local community were also present in our study and played different roles as outlined above, our study identified the destination management organization only in one case as an actor within the social innovation process. This was the bilingual snow-camp in that a destination management organization played the role of a supporter. This inconsistency may be due to the way the field of activity of a destination management organisation is defined and perceived. If a destination management organisation focuses only on marketing activities, they miss out on working on ongoing projects in the region. However, as we concluded above, destination management organisations organised as public or public/private partnerships could play an important role as promoters in social innovations in tourism if they change their role towards regional developers and step into action as a such.

It could be argued that the social innovations studied for this project were very heterogenous and are therefore difficult to compare. Indeed, there are fundamental differences as one group of social innovations represent touristic offers while others do not. However, this reflects to a certain point the multiple forms of social innovations (Ayob et al., 2016). Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that we only examined social innovations that succeed or failed after reaching an operating phase because we were interested in the actors evolved in the sensitive situation around tipping points. However, there is no single successful path for the development of a social innovation (Oeij et al., 2019). Therefore, a social innovation can also fail before reaching a tipping point and it is questionable if the specific findings on failure of a social innovation in tourism can also be adapted to the problematisation and an implementation phase. Furthermore, the failure of a social innovation in the sense that it does not exist anymore, does not mean that it had no impact. We rather need to emphasize that the social innovation does not have its direct impact anymore and slowly disappear. Despite that, the possibility of overcoming a tipping point does not mean that social innovations need to overcome a tipping point and spread. A social innovation could be a solution to a specific local problem, which is not present in other regions. Therefore, there could be no incentives to spread. Scaling is not the ultimate goal here, but the goal is to solve an issue and therefore, the social innovation can still be considered as successful. Furthermore, a linear or chronological notion of time is inherent in the discussion of the three phases and the tipping point and we acknowledge the limitations of such a perspective. We would like to refer to Lippmann and Aldrich (2015), who illustrate in an interesting chapter about the role of time in the

study of entrepreneurship that one would also need a non-linear approach. For the study of social innovation process and the role of critical moments, future research should theorize and measure the ways in which nonlinear, heterochronic, and uncertain temporal contexts may influence the development process. Despite that, the classification in success or failure at the time of the study and therefore only represent a snapshot. A successful social innovation as identified for this study, could still fail and a failed social innovation could still reawaken and succeed at a later stage.

This study only focuses on the phase, the tipping points and particularly the role of different types of actors. Yet, besides the critical role these actors play in the innovation processes, there are also other factors that are important such as social capital (Trunfio & Campana, 2019), collaboration and knowledge exchange (Carson et al., 2014), social networks (Sørensen, 2007), etc. Future research should be undertaken to investigate the effect of these aspects on social innovation processes in tourism. A particularly interesting question could be to what extent collaborations and networks play a role in overcoming tipping points. Such a perspective would allow an orientation towards actor constellations and knowledge exchanges. Furthermore, future studies could focus on the regional outcomes social innovations in tourism have and how they contribute to regional development. In general, the concept of social innovations provides a useful framework to conduct comprehensive research on innovations in tourism.

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