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**Understanding the Impact of the Inherited
Institutional Environment on Tourism Innovation
Systems in Resource Dependent Peripheries:**

A Case Study of the Flinders Ranges in South Australia

Thesis submitted by

Doris SCHMALLEGGER, Mag. (FH)

Master of Tourism Management, IMC Krems University, Austria

in October 2010

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the School of Business

James Cook University, Australia

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Declaration on Ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement of Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Human* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics, Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee (approval number H2906).

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This thesis is dedicated to my Dad - I miss you deeply.

List of Publications Associated with this Dissertation

The theoretical framework developed for this dissertation, as well as parts of the case study findings, have been published (or accepted) in the following peer reviewed papers:

- 1) Schmallegger, D., Harwood, S., Cervený, L., & Müller, D. (2011). Remote Area Tourist Populations and their Impact on Local Capital. In D. Carson, P. Ensign, R.O. Rasmussen, L. Huskey & A. Taylor (Eds.), *Demography on the Edge: Human Populations at the Frontier of Developed Nations* (pp. 271-288). Farnham, UK: Ashgate.
- 2) Schmallegger, D., & Carson, D. (2010). Is Tourism Just Another Staple? A New Perspective on Tourism in Remote Regions. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 3(May), 201-221.
- 3) Schmallegger, D., Carson, D., & Tremblay, P. (2010). The Economic Geography of Remote Tourism: The Problem of Connection-seeking. *Tourism Analysis*, 15(1), 125-137.
- 4) Schmallegger, D., & Carson, D. (2010). Whose Tourism City Is It? The Role of Government in Tourism in Darwin, Northern Territory. *Tourism and Hospitality Planning & Development*, 7(2), 111-129.
- 5) Schmallegger, D., Carson, D., & Jacobsen, D. (2010). The Use of Photographs on Consumer Generated Content Websites: Practical implications for destination image analysis. In N. Sharda (Ed.), *Tourism Informatics: Visual Travel Recommender Systems, Social Communities and User Interface Design* (pp. 243-260). Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
- 6) Schmallegger, D. (2010). Managing the Transition from Coach to Car Based Markets: The search for commercial value in Australia's Flinders Ranges. In B. Prideaux & D. Carson (Eds.), *Drive tourism – Trends and emerging markets* (pp. 14-35). Milton Park: Routledge.
- 7) Schmallegger, D. (2009). The Power of Loose Ties: Networking for Market Diversification in Remote Australia. In A. Fyall, M. Kozek & L. Andreu (Eds.), *Marketing Innovations for Sustainable Destinations* (pp. 286-298). Oxford, UK: Goodfellow Publishers.
- 8) Schmallegger, D. and Carson, D. (2009). Destination Image Projection on Consumer Generated Content Websites: A case study of the Flinders Ranges. *Journal of Information Technology and Tourism*, 11(2), 111-127.
- 9) Schmallegger, D., Taylor, A. and Carson, D. (2011, *in press*). Rejuvenating Outback Tourism through Market Diversification: The Case of the Flinders Ranges in South Australia. *International Journal of Tourism Research*.
- 10) Schmallegger, D. and Carson, D. (2011, *forthcoming*). Why Tourism May Not Be Everybody's Business: Overcoming Tradition in Diversifying Peripheral Staples Economies. *Rangeland Journal*.

Along with the papers directly drawn from the work on this dissertation, Schmallegger has co-authored nine other peer reviewed publications between 2008 and 2010 which are used as background information in the dissertation where relevant.

- a. Carson, D., Schmallegger, D. & Harwood, S. (2010). A City for the Temporary? Political Economy and Urban Planning in Darwin, Australia. *Urban Policy and Research*, 28(3), 293–310.
- b. Carson, D., Schmallegger, D. & Campbell, S. (2010). *Whose City Is It? A Thinking Tour of Darwin*. Darwin: CDU Press.
- c. Carson, D., & Schmallegger, D. (2010). Drive Tourism: A View from the Road. In B. Prideaux & D. Carson (Eds.), *Drive Tourism – Trends and Emerging Markets* (pp. 358-368). Milton Park: Routledge.
- d. Carson, D. & Schmallegger, D. (2009). Fishing the Big Rivers in Australia's Northern Territory: Market diversification for the Daly River. In B. Prideaux & M. Cooper (Eds.), *River Tourism* (pp. 131-146). Oxfordshire, UK: CABI.
- e. Holyoak, N., Carson, D. & Schmallegger, D. (2009). VRUM™: A tool for modelling travel patterns of self-drive tourists. In W. Hoepken, U. Gretzel & E. Laws (Eds.), *Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism 2009* (pp. 238-247). Vienna - New York: Springer.
- f. Carson, D., Schmallegger, D., Thompson, G., Jones, R. & Pilgrim, A. (2009). iVisit™: An Information Exchange Tool for Self-drive Tourists in Remote Australia. In J. Carlsen, M. Hughes, K. Holmes and R. Jones (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 19th Annual CAUTHE Conference*, 10-13 February. Fremantle: Curtin University of Technology.
- g. Schmallegger, D. & Carson, D. (2008). Blogs in Tourism: Changing approaches to information exchange. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 14(2), 99-110.
- h. Schmallegger, D. & Carson, D. (2008). Information Search and Trip Planning Behaviour of International and Domestic Four Wheel Drive Travellers in Central Australia. In S. Richardson, L. Fredline, A. Patiar, & M. Ternel (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 18th Annual CAUTHE Conference*, 11-14 February. Griffith University: Gold Coast.
- i. Schmallegger, D. (2008). *Aboriginal Tourism in Central Australia: How to reach the four-wheel-drive market*. Leipzig, Germany: VDM-Verlag Dr. Müller.

Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to use the theoretical foundations of the ‘staples thesis’ to analyse and explain how the institutional environment inherited from resource dependence influences the capacity of peripheral regions to operate as regional tourism innovation systems (RTIS). The staples thesis is a theoretical approach to explaining processes of economic growth and development in peripheral economies that rely on the export of unprocessed natural resources – the ‘staples’. It suggests that the institutional environment resulting from a long-term dependence on staples export can become locked-in to the extent that the economic system becomes unable to change. The implications of this ‘staples trap’ are that the system struggles to innovate and diversify for reasons such as the adoption of an export mentality and the continued preference for importing external (financial and human) capital over developing capital internally. The staples thesis, with its concept of the ‘staples trap’ as a form of institutional lock-in, offers considerable potential to help explain why resource dependent regions in developed countries (such as Australia, Canada, the United States, and New Zealand) often struggle to develop tourism as a successful alternative industry.

The research is based on the analysis of a case study in the Flinders Ranges – a traditional resource periphery in South Australia that has tried to diversify its regional economy over the past decades by developing tourism. The case study examined the characteristics and performance of the Flinders Ranges tourism destination from a RTIS perspective to identify how the tourism destination system has been affected by the inherited institutional environment. The research used Carson and Jacobsen’s (2005) systems-of-innovation framework for regional tourism as an analytical framework. This framework outlines a number of systemic requirements that are critical for well-functioning RTIS, including: entrepreneurship, economic competence, networks and clusters, critical mass and diverse development blocks, the production and distribution of knowledge, productive public sector contributions, a favourable institutional infrastructure, and the quality of social, political and cultural capital. Case study methods included semi-structured in-depth interviews, document and website analyses, analysis of secondary data sources, and personal observations.

The findings suggest that the institutional environment inherited from the region’s traditional staples industries (agriculture, pastoralism and mining) has clearly reduced the capacity of the local tourism system to operate as a RTIS. Locals had only limited entrepreneurial capabilities and skills in tourism due to an entrenched culture of reliance on government and external wholesalers for investment, employment, knowledge transfer and control of production and distribution. Locals had a limited tradition of networking, collaboration and knowledge

exchange because they had never learnt such practices in the past when they had to deliver homogenous bulk commodities to external wholesalers. In addition, government intervention in tourism was often characterised by an inherited ‘staples export mentality’. Government strategies aimed to convert tourism into a new export industry and continued to target large-scale development and external investors instead of building local capital. Despite these limitations, the case study found that the Flinders Ranges tourism system has undergone a number of slow but significant changes since the mid-2000s, which have increased the system’s capacity to operate as a RTIS. The most prominent changes included: an increase in the number of skilled tourism entrepreneurs; the emergence of a new networking and learning culture among local tourism operators; a new focus on local training and capacity building; and the increasing public sector support for locally driven cross-regional tourism projects. These changes emerged as a result of the in-migration of externally trained entrepreneurs and public sector leaders who introduced new knowledge, practices and attitudes to the region.

This thesis argues that peripheral regions with a long history of staples dependence, like the Flinders Ranges, require profound changes in their institutional environment to be able to operate as well-functioning RTIS. Tourism is not an ‘easy’ alternative to back up existing resource economies in times of economic crisis. Instead, it is a new industry that requires the whole system with its collective of stakeholders to fundamentally change previous ways of operating. Such institutional change is very unlikely to emerge from within the local economic system. In the case of the Flinders Ranges, institutional change was a slow and incremental process that was facilitated by 1) the import of external human capital, and 2) the willingness to gradually integrate external with local human capital so that locals could ‘learn’ new (and simultaneously ‘un-learn’ old) practices and attitudes.

The research concludes that analysing tourism destinations as RTIS under the particular light of the staples thesis offers a new and better way of explaining system dynamics and innovation capacities of destinations in resource dependent peripheries. Applying a staples thesis lens to the analysis of peripheral RTIS can add a more evolutionary institutional perspective to generic systems-of-innovation analysis in tourism, which has so far been relatively static. Building on Carson and Jacobsen’s (2005) systems-of-innovation framework for regional tourism, this dissertation provides an enhanced theoretical framework that recognises the role and impact of the inherited institutional environment in shaping tourism innovation dynamics. The framework is built around a familiar case study methodology that allows for ongoing comparative research and further theory building in the field of peripheral tourism studies.

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List of Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AWTA	Australian Wool Testing Authority
ATDW	Australian Tourism Data Warehouse
B&B	Bed and Breakfast
CEO	Chief executive officer
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DEH	Department of Environment and Heritage
FROSAT	Flinders Ranges and Outback South Australia Tourism
FRTOA	Flinders Ranges Tourism Operators Association
GIS	Geographic information system
IVS	International Visitor Survey
NRDB	Northern Regional Development Board
NT	Northern Territory
NSW	New South Wales
NVS	National Visitor Survey
OACDT	Outback Areas Community Development Trust
PACC	Port Augusta City Council
PIRSA	Primary Industries and Resources South Australia
RIS	Regional innovation system
RTIS	Regional tourism innovation system
SA	South Australia
SACBH	South Australian Co-operative Bulk Handling
SARDI	South Australian Research and Development Institute
SATC	South Australian Tourism Commission
SFRDB	Southern Flinders Ranges Development Board
SFRTA	Southern Flinders Ranges Tourism Authority
SFTA	Southern Flinders Tourism Association
SLSA	State Library of South Australia
SPCC	Social, political and cultural capital
TAFE	Training and Further Education
TRA	Tourism Research Australia
URPS	Urban & Regional Planning Solutions
USG	Upper Spencer Gulf
USGCPG	Upper Spencer Gulf Common Purpose Group
4WD	Four-wheel-drive