

When Culture Becomes Strategy: A Commentary on Marketing Communication in Creative Tourism

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Citation: Redmond C. When Culture Becomes Strategy: A Commentary on Marketing Communication in Creative Tourism. Asian Journal of Management Sciences. 2024, Vol. 12 No. 1: 104

Received: April 05, 2024; **Accepted:** April 20, 2024; **Published:** April 26, 2024

Introduction

Tourism destinations no longer compete simply on scenery, heritage, or price. Increasingly, they compete on *experience* — and specifically, on how much agency they hand the visitor to shape that experience. This shift is at the heart of "creative tourism," a model in which travelers move from being passive spectators to active co-creators of what they consume. The study under review, which examines the organizational capabilities of local Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) in this context, offers a useful — if densely worded — attempt to map how internal organizational dynamics translate into external tourism value. This commentary unpacks the study's core argument, evaluates its methodological choices, and considers what its findings mean for destinations trying to make this transition in practice.

The Argument in Plain Terms

Strip away the academic phrasing, and the study proposes a fairly intuitive causal chain:

1. **Internal learning culture** — DMOs that invest in coordinated learning and knowledge-sharing among staff build a stronger organizational foundation.
2. **Marketing communication capability** — That internal culture doesn't stay internal. It strengthens how effectively the DMO can communicate the destination's identity and offerings to the outside world.
3. **Resource mobilization and creative tourism development** — With better communication capability, DMOs can more effectively marshal their resources to build creative tourism experiences.
4. **Value creation** — The end result is a destination where tourists aren't just consuming a fixed product, but actively participating in it.

Put simply: *how well a DMO learns internally predicts how well it communicates externally, which in turn predicts how well it builds creative tourism destinations.* This is a reasonable and, on its face, unsurprising thesis — but the value of the study lies less in the novelty of the claim and more in whether it can be empirically supported.

Methodological Choices: Strengths and Tensions

The study's mixed-methods design deserves credit. Starting with a focus group of DMO practitioners to shape the conceptual model, then testing that model quantitatively via Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), is a sound sequence — qualitative work to generate a grounded model, quantitative work to test its statistical validity. This combination guards against two common pitfalls: purely qualitative research that produces rich but unfalsifiable narratives, and purely quantitative research that tests hypotheses with no grounding in practitioner reality.

That said, a few tensions are worth flagging:

- **Scale and generalizability.** The abstract doesn't specify sample size, geographic scope, or the number of DMOs involved. SEM is sensitive to sample size, and findings from a narrow set of local DMOs (likely in a single country or region, given the "local" framing) may not generalize to DMOs operating under different institutional, funding, or regulatory conditions.
- **Direction of causality.** SEM tests whether a proposed model fits the data well, but "fit" is not the same as proof of causal direction. It's equally plausible that DMOs with strong external marketing performance *develop* internal learning cultures as a byproduct of success, rather than

the reverse. The abstract presents the causal arrow in one direction without acknowledging this ambiguity.

- **Definitional looseness.** Terms like "organizational culture," "knowledge training," and "value" are doing a lot of conceptual work here without being defined in the abstract itself. This is common in abstracts, but it matters for a reader trying to assess how rigorously these constructs were operationalized in the survey instrument.

Why the Culture-to-Communication Link Matters

Setting methodological caveats aside, the substantive insight — that marketing communication capability is *downstream* of organizational culture rather than a standalone skill — is worth taking seriously.

It's tempting for a small DMO to treat "marketing communication" as a technical function: hire someone good at social media, produce a slicker brochure, run a paid campaign. This study implicitly pushes back on that framing. If communication capability is genuinely rooted in how well an organization learns and shares knowledge internally, then investing in marketing tools without investing in internal learning infrastructure is treating a symptom rather than a cause. A DMO that doesn't have mechanisms for staff to share what they're learning about visitor behavior, creative tourism trends, or local stakeholder needs will struggle to produce coherent, differentiated external messaging — no matter how good its marketing tools are.

This has a practical implication for smaller or resource-constrained DMOs, which are often the ones managing "creative tourism" destinations (as opposed to major international tourism boards). It suggests that the highest-leverage investment isn't necessarily a marketing budget increase, but structured internal knowledge processes — regular cross-team learning sessions, systematic capture of visitor and stakeholder feedback, and training that treats communication skill as an organizational output rather than an individual hire's job description.

The Active Tourist as the End Goal

The study's framing of the tourist's role — moving from passive consumer to active participant — is consistent with the broader creative tourism literature, but it also raises a question the abstract doesn't answer: what does the DMO actually *do* differently to enable that shift? Building "organizational capabilities" is one thing; translating that into concrete visitor-facing experiences (workshops, co-creation events, local skill-sharing, participatory design of itineraries) is another. The abstract asserts a linkage between internal capability and this outcome but doesn't specify the mechanism by which internal learning becomes an activity a tourist actually participates in on the ground.

Concluding Thoughts

This study contributes a structurally sound, if abstractly worded, framework for thinking about how DMOs build the internal capacity needed to support creative tourism. Its central claim — that internal organizational learning underwrites external marketing effectiveness, which in turn underwrites the destination's ability to deliver participatory tourist experiences — is a useful corrective to marketing-first thinking in destination management. But the abstract leaves open real questions about sample scope, causal direction, and the practical mechanisms connecting internal capability to visitor-facing creative activities. Readers evaluating this work for application to their own destination strategy should treat the culture-to-communication link as a promising hypothesis worth testing locally, rather than a settled finding to be applied uncritically.