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Research Paper

The role of history and identity discourses in cross-border tourism destination development: A Vogtland case study

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ABSTRACT

Cross-border tourism governance processes have remained complex despite increasing permeability of European borders in the last decades. While it has been suggested that the presence of cross-border socio-cultural connections may alleviate border-related tourism management complexities, no detailed studies have been conducted yet to explore this assumption. This paper analyses the role of socio-cultural relations and history and identity discourses in destination development of the cross-border Vogtland region between the federal states of Saxony and Thuringia (Germany). Results of the mixed-method case study indicate that even though financial incentives remain central for cooperation, mobilising an identity discourse facilitates cross-border tourism governance in three ways: through (i) reducing the perception among stakeholders that administrative borders pose barriers for cooperation; (ii) internal stimulation of discussion of socio-economic and identity futures, and (iii) external presentation of a univocal destination image, thereby reducing marketing ambiguity and re-fuelling internal regional identity performativity. These effects are critically dependent on political decisions and the integrative institutionalisation of diverse stakeholders' voices in the destination development and management process. Capitalising on place identities may facilitate cross-border destination development but may also create pitfalls to safeguard the regional integration of stakeholders in this process.

1. Introduction

Despite globalisation tendencies that have resulted in the increased crossing of international borders in European contexts, the barrier effect of borders to inclusively manage borderland tourism destinations has remained present to various degrees. Both cross-border institutional 'under-mobilisation' resulting from multi-scalar incompatibility of national tourism systems, and institutional 'over-mobilisation' due to parallel and uncoordinated development of a multitude of cross-border cooperation platforms, have been identified as possible obstacles to establish structural cross-border tourism dynamics (García-Álvarez & Trillo-Santamaría, 2013; Ilbery & Saxena, 2011; Stoffelen, Ioannides, & Vanneste, 2017; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2017). Accordingly, the tourism literature 'reveals a lack of success in the many attempts to create cross-border governance structures' (Blasco, Guia, & Prats, 2014, p. 160), and best-practice case studies of structural cross-border destination management are scarce. Nevertheless, the development of tourism remains a central strategy of many transnational and within-country borderlands to boost their socio-economic structures (Blasco et al., 2014; Timothy, 2001), and inter-destination collaboration is increasingly seen as an important driver for destination competitiveness

(Fyall, Garrod, & Wang, 2012; Zemła, 2014).

The persisting complexity of cross-border governance, combined with the socio-economic potentials that could be uncovered, reflect the necessity to find ways to facilitate inclusive cross-border destination development and management practices. One possible factor that has been argued to enable cross-border contact is the presence of socio-cultural similarities between borderland communities. Cultural connections and shared sense of place have been noted in previous research to facilitate interaction and the effectiveness of cross-border governance practices (Björkman, Stahl, & Vaara, 2007; Blasco et al., 2014; Boman & Berg, 2007; Chaderopa, 2013), even though some scholars found that socio-economic and cultural differences in borderlands are also imperative for cross-border cooperation (Klatt & Herrmann, 2011). Additionally, history and identity can function as strategic policy tools to foster the creation of an extra-regional consciousness among communities, and to discursively justify cross-border development plans (Paasi & Zimmerbauer, 2016; Scott, 2013). Tourism is regularly seen as a catalyst for this process through the sector's tendency to strategically shape and standardise identity narratives as well as the tangible (spatial) and intangible (symbolic) organisation of border landscapes (Gelbman & Timothy, 2010; Stoffelen et al., 2017). In other words,

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tourism has a direct but complex role in processes of bordering through which borders and borderland histories are discursively (re)constructed, confirmed and institutionalised (Brambilla, 2015; Laine, 2016; Timothy, Saarinen, & Viken, 2016). This way, the tourism sector actively contributes to the functional and imaginary organisation of border(land)s, thereby acting in both practical cross-border connectivity and symbolic identity construction (Prokkola, 2011). Considering this context perhaps surprisingly, the multifaceted role of cross-border history and identity connections in tourism destination development has received limited attention so far (Blasco et al., 2014). Insights in the temporal and socio-cultural features of cross-border tourism cooperation could provide a first step towards overcoming border-related obstacles for region-building and, by extension, regional development through tourism in borderlands. Building on this proposition, we pose two questions in this paper:

- How do socio-cultural connections and shared history facilitate the structural character of cross-border tourism destination development processes?
- How does the political mobilisation of cross-border historical and socio-cultural aspects of place safeguard or undermine the stakeholder integration in cross-border tourism development?

This paper aims to answer these questions through a mixed-method case study in Vogtland, which constitutes a cross-border region between the German federal states of Saxony and Thuringia (see Fig. 1). Previous research has shown that also within-country borders can pose significant, although sometimes less recognised, hindrances for tourism governance in terms of planning and financing (Lovelock & Boyd, 2006; Timothy, 2001). For this reason, Stoffelen et al. (2017, p. 137) critique ‘the often taken-for-granted transnational region-to-region unit of analysis in most cross-border tourism research’. Bordering processes through tourism development, hence, situate across a range of scales and territories, and are also significant though relatively under-researched in within-country settings. Vogtland provides an interesting study area in this regard. A shared history and regional identity is central in the tourism discourse in this region, supporting the intensifying inter-destination collaboration dynamics of the last decade. This process has culminated in the establishment of a cross-border Vogtland destination management organisation (DMO) in 2015 that spans two

German federal states. Interestingly, other cross-border tourism practices in the direct surroundings of Vogtland have remained relatively marginal and purely project-based, raising questions about the success factors of the Saxonian-Thuringian Vogtland destination development process. Through this case study, the paper aims to analyse how the presence and political performativity of cross-border socio-cultural connections impact the establishment of integrative cross-border destination development and management.

2. The use of identity in (borderlands) tourism development

Research on the functioning of history and identity in regional cooperation processes has recently picked up steam, partly fuelled by the assumption that acting upon regional identity could lead to regional socio-economic benefits (Paasi, 2013). One focal point on this issue has been the importance of safeguarding the representation of stakeholders and their place identities – the socio-cultural construction of meaning of people in interaction with the spatial settings of an area (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000) – in regional development or sustainability governance. Governance, in its most general form defined as a ‘system of governing’ and the ‘basis of collective action’ (Bramwell, 2011, p. 459), has a range of conceptualizations including market-led, state-led, community and network foci (Hall, 2011). It is operationalised in the context of regional identity in tourism cooperation mostly from a perspective of stakeholder integration in decision-making processes. These relational approaches stress that the creation of inclusive networks respecting the diversity of stakeholders’ place identities functions as a precondition for the socially and spatially balanced dispersal of tourism impacts throughout destinations, thereby countering rather neoliberal, growth-oriented development policies (Adiyia, 2017; Oliver & Jenkins, 2003; Saxena & Ilbery, 2008; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2015). For example, Kerstetter and Bricker (2009) argue that the incorporation of diverse place meanings in management processes fosters the conservation of the elements of place that are important to both residents and tourists, thereby providing an important basis to reach sustainability aims. Moreover, insights in contrasting visions could highlight potential management bottlenecks. Consensus building in this process centres on understanding why differences exist, which influence they may have on resource management, and which strategies could be developed to bridge them (Yung, Freimund, & Belsky, 2003).

Fig. 1. The administrative delineation of Vogtland.

Shared local identities and visions on the desired future of a specific environment may facilitate the involvement and commitment of local stakeholders in decision-making processes. These relational governance processes can function in the creation of local institutional thickness and, hence, enforce inclusivity in economic development plans (Coulson & Ferrario, 2007).

Previous research has indicated that cultural affinity may be an important factor for the establishment of such governance processes across administrative borders (Blasco et al., 2014). Saxena and Ilbery (2008) show for the English-Welsh borderlands that the mismatch between local visions on the area and cross-border marketing campaigns hinders the establishment of integrative cross-border networks. They conclude that local tourism networks and relationships are profoundly shaped by the specific socio-cultural contexts of the borderlands. Boman and Berg (2007) argue, through their comparative study on the Estonian-Russian and Romanian-Moldavian borderlands, that shared historical-cultural identity can indeed stimulate cross-border cooperation. These identity elements are, however, dependent on governance structures that mobilise historical-cultural backgrounds into social action. The facilitating role of a shared identity for cross-border cooperation is, hence, dependent on how it is incorporated in cross-border institutions (Boman & Berg, 2007). Also from a business perspective, social integration mechanisms such as common training programs, shared teams and company visits by employees may eliminate cross-border cultural differences and facilitate cross-border capability transfer through the creation of trust and shared mindsets (Björkman et al., 2007).

These cases highlight the political nature of governance and identity processes in regional cross-border frameworks. In the current trend of European cross-border cooperation largely influenced by EU spatial policy (Jakola, 2016), regional identities have become prime planning and marketing instruments to improve the regional competitiveness (Paasi, 2013). Stimulating cross-border identities may be a policy tool to create cross-border social capital, which is regularly strived for in borderlands to increase the cross-border trust of stakeholders and hence the effectiveness of cross-border governance practices (Mirwaldt, 2012). Ramutsindela (2013, p. 48) even raises the question ‘whether regions should first be created in order to allow people to identify with them or whether existing regions, which have some regional consciousness, should be used as a stepping stone’ for specific regional policies. In this context, ‘it is possible that (...) an identity of the cross-border region has been produced (...), but it has not yet been transformed into a cross-border regional identity (in other words, people have not yet interiorized this discourse)’ (García-Álvarez & Trillo-Santamaría, 2013, p. 107).

Tourism development, from this viewpoint, could strategically spatialise memories of history and identity in borderlands for symbolic political-economic purposes (Prokkola, 2010). Through memory politics (Zhurzhenko, 2011), where specific cross-border history and identity accounts are selected and commodified, tourism may function as a policy tool to reach cross-border cooperation goals, increase the ‘imaginary’ regional cross-border awareness of community stakeholders, or foster the representation of these stakeholders in borderland destination management (Gelbman & Timothy, 2011; Scott, 2013). Following this logic, tourism has been noted to function as an agent in regional politics in borderlands to push and legitimise policy goals of increasing the cross-border socio-economic competitiveness (Scott, 2013; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016a). For these reasons, regional identity building has become a deliberate aim of many European cross-border tourism projects through rewriting the touristic representations of borderland histories (Prokkola, 2007).

This discussion shows that the relations between the inclusion of place identities in destination management and the political positioning of the region through identity narratives are highly intricate. To grasp these complexities and interplays, Prokkola, Zimmerbauer and Jakola (2015) argue that spatial identity in cross-border contexts should be

studied from the manner in which it is materialised and performed. This takes place, for example, through ‘processes of narrativisation’ within regional projects (Prokkola et al., 2015, p. 105). Applied to tourism, these reflections highlight the value of a process-based comparison of political, institutional and community aspects of tourism practices to explore the multi-dimensional role of history and socio-cultural relationships in cross-border destination development.

3. Study area and methodology

The Vogtland cross-border region, located between the federal states of Saxony and Thuringia (Germany), provides interesting settings for exploratory research on the role of socio-cultural and historical connections in cross-border tourism destination development. A decade of heightening collaboration between the Saxonian Vogtland and Thuringian Vogtland destination management organisations has culminated in the establishment of the cross-border Vogtland DMO in 2015. This long-term, intensive cooperation is remarkable considering the absence of structural cross-border tourism governance dynamics in the surrounding borderlands of southern Saxony, southern Thuringia, northern Bavaria and the northwest of the Czech Republic (BermanGroup, 2013).

The shared cross-border history and identity of Vogtland has had a prominent position in the DMO merger and the subsequent destination marketing. Analysis of cross-border cooperation motivations, the evolution from initial cooperation to the DMO merger, and the factors that facilitated this process, sheds light on the concrete role of these socio-cultural reflections in the cross-border Vogtland destination development. Therefore, our empirical research centred on two aspects. First, we reconstructed the evolution of cross-border tourism dynamics in the last decade, focusing specifically on the discursive position of the Vogtland history and identity in this process. Second, we spatially explored the presence of a cross-border Vogtland place identity among inhabitants and DMO members, and the performativity of this identity for tourism purposes through policy means. The first aspect built on the analysis of policy documents concerning tourism development and management in Vogtland for the period 2004–2015. Additionally, five semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with policymakers who were connected to the destination merger. Despite the small number of interviews, a relative saturation was reached regarding the cross-border decision-making process. Of the involved tourism institutions in the DMO merger, only the state-wide tourism agencies of Saxony and Thuringia were unsuccessfully approached for interviews. The first four interviews were conducted prior to the merger in 2013 and 2014. The interviews covered destination management structures in the respective Saxonian and Thuringian regions, the evolution of cross-border tourism contacts, and the history and identity as present in the area and as discursively used in the cross-border tourism cooperation. In the fall of 2016, an additional interview was conducted with the new Vogtland DMO. This interview focused on recent experiences with cross-border destination management, with mediating between Saxonian and Thuringian stakeholders, and with the DMO's actions to gain support among the community and the organisation's members.

All interviews were transcribed and returned to the interviewees for member-checking. The transcripts were thematically processed in a circular coding process using NVivo®10. This started with pattern coding (Saldaña, 2009), where a structured list of thematic nodes was initially defined on the basis of the policy document review. The nodes were subsequently updated when additional themes emerged during the coding of the interview transcripts. Combining the pattern coding scheme with the conceptual framework of the study, we created a hierarchical coding blueprint and re-coded the data accordingly. Next, we created a document to structurally represent the coded interview data. It consisted of summaries of the content of each node, which were triangulated with specific findings from the policy document analysis. Finally, the empirical content was cross-referenced with excerpts from

the literature review of this paper.

Additionally, two quantitative questionnaires were used to spatially explore the regional identity structures of Vogtland. The first questionnaire consisted of a survey on the support for Vogtland identity discourses among high school pupils and their families in Thuringian Vogtland in 2005. The data resulting from this survey, which was conducted by the high school pupils as part of an educational project under supervision of the Greiz district office, was made available to the authors and was subsequently re-analysed for this paper. In total 711 surveys were completed and used for descriptive spatial analysis through the postal code of the respondents' residence. Descriptive statistics were collected using SPSS®24. To get a longitudinal perspective on the Vogtland identity structures, the authors explored the possibilities to conduct a survey with an identical set-up in both the Thuringian and Saxonian parts of Vogtland in 2016. After almost two years of negotiation, it was concluded that this survey could not be completed in Saxony due to legal barriers. Following disagreement among regional stakeholders on the value of conducting the survey solely in the Thuringian part of Vogtland, the survey was cancelled altogether.

A second questionnaire was conducted in 2015 among the members of the new cross-border DMO. This survey aimed to explore the members' place identity structures as well as their assessment of the DMO's merger process. Questions on the regional identity, the area's geographical description, and support for the regional branding were copied from the 2005 community survey to foster comparison of the results. Questions regarding the merger were composed as following from the main issues and policies identified in the earlier conducted interviews. Since the interviews did not allow to check for the support for the merger among regional stakeholders, open-ended questions were included where the respondents could explain their visions in detail. A web survey, which guaranteed the respondents' anonymity, was created and shared with the DMO members in their monthly informative member email. After two reminders in subsequent emails, 60 completed surveys were returned, representing a response rate of 19.7% (19.2% in Saxony, $n=46$; 21.9% in Thuringia, $n=16$). The responses were descriptively analysed similar to the Vogtland community questionnaire. Due to low absolute sample sizes, no statistical tests were done to check for significant differences between the Saxonian and Thuringian members. In a final phase, the questionnaire results were collated with the qualitative analytical document to triangulate the different data sources. Detailed analysis of the analytical document resulted in the identification of key themes and processes of the cross-border institutionalisation of tourism, identity and history in Vogtland, as will be discussed in the sections below. Quotes were selected on the basis of their informative value for the identified larger processes.

4. Institutionalisation of Vogtland as a historical identity region

The historical Vogtland area dates back to the Middle Ages when the first land reclamations were done by administrators of the Holy Roman Empire. Trade rights, right of law, and the first 'Vogt' (bailiff) title were issued in the 13th century, first in the north around the town of Weida, and later to the south to Plauen, Hof (currently in Bavaria) and Aš (currently in the Czech Republic). The area remained a unity until 1572, after which the Vogtland area was administratively divided until the present date (Der [Vogtlandatlas](#), 2007).

In the late Middle Ages, a common cultural area with specific politics, traditions, dialect and cuisine was established. Despite the administrative separation, the cultural connection remained present until the Iron Curtain was erected. In the Czech parts, the forced removal of the original German-speaking inhabitants after World War II and the subsequent immigration of people from Central and Eastern Europe erased the traditional Vogtland identity. The Vogtland feeling in Bavaria degraded as the Iron Curtain separated Bavaria and the German Democratic Republic. Yet in Saxony, the Vogtland concept became

strongly institutionalised after 1989 through the development of the Vogtland administrative district. The interviewees mentioned that the regional identity remained strong and that the Vogtland culture, tradition and dialect are still present in Saxony. In contrast, the post-1989 administrative district in Thuringian Vogtland was simply called after the town of Greiz, reflecting and reinforcing the spatial difference in institutionalisation of the historical Vogtland concept (Dwif-Consulting, 2008, 2009):

Then came 'die Wende'. The regional counties were dissolved and the federal states of Saxony and Thuringia were created [*replacing the counties Gera and Chemnitz in the study area*]. The 'Vogtländer' [Vogtland people] in Saxony then said: 'We're not Saxonians. We don't want to be Saxonians. We're Vogtländer.' Simply to differentiate themselves from the rest of Saxony. In Thuringia, people were proud to be Thuringians. 'We're not county Gera anymore. We're now Thuringians. We're a federal state now!'. (Regional district)

Interviewees pointed to the spatially embedded character of these socio-cultural reflections. Vogtland's landscape is diverse with agricultural plains in the north and forested hills in the south. Because of the strong Vogtland institutionalisation in Saxony, the Vogtland concept is mostly connected to the forested and hilly region in the south, also in place identity constructions (Dwif-Consulting, Sandstein Kommunikation, & Kommunalentwicklung Mitteldeutschland, 2013). This was noted in interviews as hindering the acceptance that Vogtland also includes Thuringian parts, even though the region's origin is located in present-day Thuringia:

The Saxonians can't really imagine that the part in Altenburger Land [*a northern part of historical Vogtland*] is also Vogtland. [They say] 'Why? It looks very different.' So that's difficult. (Regional district)

Since both Saxony and Thuringia were located in the former German Democratic Republic, no tourism organisations existed prior to 1989. The first regional destination management organisation in Saxonian Vogtland was established in 1991 as *Tourismusverband Vogtland* (TVV). Until 2014, TVV was one of six DMOs that functioned as a networking organisation between the local public and private sector members and state-wide tourism institutions in Saxony. In Thuringian Vogtland, tourism management was divided between two local DMOs; one in the north (*Tourismusverband Ostthüringen*) and one in the south (*Fremdenverkehrsverein Vogtland-Ferienland Thüringen*). According to interviewees, these organisations were not valued positively by tourists, managers and other tourism stakeholders. For this reason, both organisations merged in 2004 to form the new DMO *Thüringer Vogtland Tourismus* (TVT), hence centring the management and marketing on the historical Vogtland notion:

A concept that was used earlier was Tourismusverband Ostthüringen [*translated: tourism association East Thuringia*]. It doesn't work. The east, of the east! 'East Thuringia'. A terrible word. So that the people who dealt with tourism relatively quickly referred again to this historical Vogtland definition. (Regional district)

5. From cooperation to merger: intensifying cooperation

Low-key informative exchange between TVT and TVV arose almost directly after the establishment of TVT in 2004. As a reaction to widespread parochial attitudes, which resulted in attempts to create multiple very small marketing entities, the economic development ministry of Thuringia restructured the state's tourism management system to search for more competitive destinations (Dwif-Consulting, 2008). This process provided incentives for the TVT and TVV to establish contact. Even though the absolute results of these actions

were marginal due to funding shortages, cooperation between the organisations was initiated. A rhetoric developed that TVT and TVV both reflected on the authentic (because historical) Vogtland concept, thereby duplicating efforts and potentially confusing tourists:

The idea was to bring Vogtland as a touristic concept back to the forefront. And the Saxonians said 'we are Vogtland' and we [in Thuringia] said 'we are Vogtland'. Then the tourist asks 'who is'? (...) So we've said, 'we should do it together'. (...) When that works out, also the visibility is more authentic. Then it's not an artificial entity that I somehow try to assemble. (Regional district)

The first structural cooperation, a consequence of financial motives and subsequently interpreted from a historical perspective, developed in 2005 with annual marketing and project agreements. The quest for financial rationalisation of Thuringian destinations and the weak competitive position of TVT and TVV motivated the destination agencies to subsequently increase their cooperation. In an attempt to find solutions for the TVT, the Greiz district office issued an explorative study in 2009 to analyse the consequences of a hypothetical DMO merger between TVT and TVV. This study, which built on the 2008 tourism strategy from the Greiz district that first coined the option of creating one cross-border destination (Dwif-Consulting, 2008), concluded that potential advantages of a cross-border DMO merger outweigh potential disadvantages, with the precondition of gaining the complete support of all stakeholders in the area (Dwif-Consulting, 2009).

In 2011, the Thuringian state presented a new strategy to deal with the state's low financial and competitive position of tourism by 2015. This plan centralised the state-wide tourism organisation into a leading coordination centre. Regional agencies such as TVT had to reorganise to become financially independent (Dwif-Consulting, 2008, 2009; Freistaat Thüringen, 2011). Simultaneously, also TVV's financial position became pressing. Framed by the 2020 tourism strategy of Saxony, DMO funding is issued on the basis of performance indicators, with competitive destinations receiving more funds from the state (Freistaat Sachsen, 2011). Hence, when the 2020 Saxonian and 2015 Thuringian tourism directories came and the lower competitive positions of TVT and TVV became financially urgent, the contact between both was already made and pre-studies about a merger had already been conducted. Additionally, both state strategies allow, and potentially co-fund, DMOs to establish durable collaborative ties with adjoining areas in other German states (Freistaat Sachsen, 2011; Freistaat Thüringen, 2011). Following the financial pressures and the shared use of the Vogtland history rhetoric, the TVV and TVT board members decided to continue collectively in 2012 (Tourismusverband Vogtland, 2012).

The Vogtland destination-building process started with a conceptual phase in which the point of departure for the merger was outlined. The narrative of this phase's end report (Dwif-Consulting et al., 2013) includes both strategic and symbolic descriptions of the foreseen merger outcomes. On the one hand, the report refers to the Vogtland history and identity from a financial perspective. Developing a cross-border DMO should increase the mobilisation of financial resources through cost-effective structures, synergy effects, increased member support, and improved external visibility of the Vogtland destination (Dwif-Consulting et al., 2013; Tourismusverband Vogtland, 2012). On the other hand, the report intensively reflects on the shared identity of the *Vogtländer* that can be preserved and revived through the new DMO, as illustrated by the following excerpt:

A new DMO Vogtland should strive for a joint tourism development and marketing of the Vogtland region, [so that] (...) the tradition of the *Vogtländer* can continue to live and revive in a formerly connected area. (...) Tradition, authenticity and the particularity of the *Vogtländer* characterise their hospitality and make them

special (Dwif-Consulting et al., 2013, p. 10).

Hence, the Vogtland history and identity was seen to lead to the rationalisation of marketing units, and to smoothen cross-border contact through institutionalising a 'natural' unit with an implicit socio-cultural connectivity. Also the interviewees argued that the presence of the shared Vogtland history and identity facilitated the merger process:

I believe this Vogtland identity (...) and history connects one more than when it would just be the natural conditions or so [that are shared]. It simply makes it easier to carry out such a [cross-border cooperation] process. (TVV)

The implementation phase of the destination-building started in 2013. Three semi-independent working groups, consisting of the TVV and TVT managements, state organisations, and external consultants, were created to develop a new organisational structure, financial model, and brand (Tourismusverband Vogtland, 2014b). The members of TVV and TVT could participate through discussion meetings and attendance of the working groups. At the end of the implementation phase, the members had the final vote whether or not to proceed with the merger (Tourismusverband Vogtland, 2014a). After their approval, the cross-border Vogtland DMO started in the January 2015 (see Fig. 2).

6. Awareness creation, internal marketing, and stakeholder participation

Considering the weaker socio-spatial institutionalisation of the Vogtland concept in Thuringia than in Saxony, the interviewees expected difficulties in gaining community support in Thuringia for the cross-border cooperation process. Already in 2005, the Greiz district administration organised a survey with high school pupils and their families to get an indication of the support for the newly developed Thüringer Vogtland brand. The mapped survey results (see Fig. 3) reveal a north-south gradient in the area's geographical description, regional identity support, and the valuation of the Thuringian Vogtland brand. These indicators are most strongly supported in the areas bordering Saxonian Vogtland. In contrast, Ostthüringen was more frequently used in the area's geographical description among respondents in the district's north. The averages and quantiles of the observations differ markedly between the indicators, as could be observed in the legend ranges in Fig. 3. The Ostthüringen geographical description is more widely used among the respondents than the (Thuringian) Vogtland description, as reflected in the higher average. The smaller quantiles of the Ostthüringen geography indicator further indicate a more uniform distribution than for the Vogtland geography and identity questions. These findings suggest that the 2004 incorporation of the local Ostthüringen DMO into the Thuringian Vogtland DMO may not have been uncontested for the Greiz community members.

Following from the survey results, the Greiz district office identified the need to increase the support for the (Thuringian) Vogtland identity and regional branding in the north of the area. Together with the TVT, the district aimed to grow this support among TVT members and Greiz district inhabitants in a step-by-step process between 2005 and 2013. After the merger plans became official, the interviewees still expected lower support among TVT members than among TVV members. They argued that the lower Vogtland identity in Thuringia and the higher relative increase in membership and marketing fees for the TVT than for the TVV could alienate Thuringian stakeholders. One example where this has happened is the city of Gera (see Fig. 1). As one of the larger cities in Thuringia it is currently marketed individually. Recently there has been interest from the city to join the Vogtland DMO but it has not managed to cover the membership fee yet due to municipal financial constraints.

The new round of internal marketing from 2013 onwards, now covering the whole cross-border region, consisted of a 'discovery card'

Fig. 2. Timeline of the merger of Tourismusverband Vogtland (TVV) and Thüringer Vogtland Tourismus (TVT) to form the cross-border Vogtland DMO.

(Entdeckerpass) with which DMO members could visit other attractions in Vogtland free of charge; intensive use of the Vogtland logo to increase the brand's internal exposure; and explicit attention to regional specificities such as Vogtland heritage and cuisine. Additionally, the interviewees stressed the competitiveness effects of marketing Vogtland as a cross-border unit. This convincing of the stakeholders about the positive impact of the merger was identified in the interviews as one of the main difficulties in the cooperation process:

The most difficult is actually to convince the members on both sides that [the merger] is for their benefit. Because they don't just need to be convinced that this bring advantages, they have to spend money on it. And when I have to spend [their] money, I always have to explain why. (Regional district)

We definitely noticed that there's a barrier of some kind for members who need more time, information or discussion with each other and with us to really live this identity of Vogtland as a destination. (...) This will be a big [task] for the next years. (TVV)

Considering the decisive power of the TVT and TVV members to decide on the merger plans in 2015, measures were taken to encourage their participation in the destination-building process. However, the interviewees noted that responses were generally passive. They attributed this to a low willingness of the members, but also to failing efforts of the TVV and TVT management. Even though the members could attend the working groups, and the plans, projects and publications were discussed in meetings, the merger was described as remaining mostly informative rather than co-creative:

The problem in general is that there's really too little [reaction from the members]. I often have the feeling that it by-passes [them] somehow. (...) I think it's from both sides: from us as the association and from the members too. Too little has happened in the last years. (TVT)

In essence it [the merger] was [simply] delivered to the members. (Regional district)

These remarks are confirmed by the 2015 DMO members survey. Only cautious conclusions can be made due to relative low sample sizes (see Table 1). Simultaneously, the low response rate reflects the

relatively passive stance of a large part of the DMO members. As expected by the interviewees, the participative nature of the Vogtland DMO merger was valued relatively lowly. When asked for an explanation, most respondents were rather negative regarding the experienced possibilities to contribute to the destination-building, even though some indicated that they, in fact, did have influence:

As an individual, you hardly had anything to say. You only get a view of the progress without being able to intervene actively. (Saxonian respondent)

A contrary opinion would certainly not have influenced the procedure. (Thuringian respondent)

We were involved in this process, asked about our opinions and could at any time submit proposals. (Saxonian respondent)

Considering the spatially polarised results of the 2005 community survey, cautious remarks in policy documents and interviews regarding the internal support, and relatively negative participation assessments, other indicators in the DMO members survey reflect unexpectedly positive attitudes. When given the option to explain their valuation of the linking up of TVV and TVT, the rhetoric of the respondents was remarkably similar to the rhetoric of the TVV and TVT interviewees and policy documents. The respondents highlighted both economic and identity aspects. Only a minority argued that joint marketing could erase the specificities of both areas:

It's positive, because from history Thuringian and Saxonian Vogtland are closely related. (Saxonian respondent)

[The cross-border destination creates a] stronger appearance as a region, better marketing because of the larger area, and more attractions. (Thuringian respondent)

It's positive that Vogtland increases in size and finally becomes more well-known. It's negative that the structures are very different and the special features of the individual regions are not paid attention to. (Saxonian respondent)

Despite the intensive internal marketing, most respondents (78,4%) answered that their opinion about the merger had not changed during the merger process, with the majority of this group remaining positive

Fig. 3. (a) The respondents' identification as (Thuringian) Vogtländer; (b) (Thuringian) Vogtland in the respondents' geographical description of the area; (c) Ostthüringen in the respondents' geographical description of the area; (d) The valuation of the Thuringian Vogtland logo as a representing the area's identity on a five-point scale (1: not at all suitable, 5: very suitable). The numbers indicate the total respondents per postal code area. Source data: © Landkreis Greiz, 2005. Data processing and mapping by the authors, 2016.

(62,5% compared to 30,0% neutral and 7,5% negative). Due to the inability to conduct a follow-up survey in 2016, it proved impossible to assess the longitudinal impact of the internal marketing and identity-building practices of TVV and TTV among local inhabitants.

7. Discussion

Understanding the role of history and socio-cultural connections in cross-border tourism governance requires the temporal reconstruction of the narratives through which regional identities are materialised and

Table 1

Survey results on cross-border identity and tourism management in Vogtland. * between brackets the percentage on 'Vogtland' only. - Five-point-scale (1: very negative, 5: very positive). 2015 survey and data processing by the authors.

Source: data 2005 survey: © Landkreis Greiz.

	Greiz community survey 2005 (Thuringia)	Vogtland DMO survey 2015 (Saxony + Thuringia)		
	Total (n = 710)	Total (n = 60)	Saxonian part (n = 46)	Thuringian part (n = 14)
% identifying as (Saxonian/Thuringian) <i>Vogtländer</i> *	32,7 (19,6)	91,7 (86,7)	97,8 (95,6)	71,4 (57,1)
% Vogtland or a variation on Vogtland in regional geographical description*	48,5 (24,2)	88,3 (68,3)	89,1 (73,9)	85,7 (50,0)
Average valuation of the logo as a representation of the regional identity	3,08	3,60	3,67	3,38
Average valuation cross-border marketing as a representation of the regional identity	–	4,15	4,02	4,50
Average valuation of the merger idea	–	4,00	3,95	4,15
Average valuation of participation possibilities in the merger	–	3,11	3,02	3,38
Average rating strength tourism policy and management	–	3,36	3,35	3,38
Average rating strength destination	–	3,31	3,29	3,38

performed (Prokkola et al., 2015). In Vogtland, the cross-border destination-building process reveals the multi-faceted and intrinsically politicised nature of history and identity discourses in borderlands tourism (Paasi, 2013; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016a). During the evolving Saxonian-Thuringian Vogtland cooperation, financial motives were central to create a critical institutional mass to undertake action and subsequently steer the cross-border cooperation direction. Despite the Vogtland discourse, support by the overarching institutional tourism systems on both sides of the border proved important to succeed in merging TVV and TVT. Without the compatibility of the multi-level tourism governance systems of Saxony and Thuringia, which is identified in the literature as a key obstacle to establishing durable cross-border tourism dynamics (Ilbery & Saxena, 2011; Stoffelen et al., 2017), the cross-border Vogtland destination-building would have been challenged.

The destination agencies and regional districts that cover Vogtland use memory politics for legitimisation of these economically inspired cross-border practices. Yet apart from this economic rationale, their discourse on the history and identity of Vogtland facilitated the cross-border destination merger through (i) lowering the perceived barrier effect of the administrative Saxony-Thuringia border among key stakeholders (Boman & Berg, 2007); (ii) the internal stimulation of discussion of socio-economic and identity futures, and (iii) the external presentation of a univocal destination image of Vogtland, thereby reducing marketing ambiguity and re-fuelling internal regional identity performativity (Scott, 2013). The regional policy to create internal awareness and external symbolic representation of Vogtland is aimed to lead to a circular effect that fuels both the institutional-economic foundation and the community cohesion.

The Vogtland destination-building shows that regional structures and identities can be simultaneously acted upon when latently present, and actively stimulated through policy means (Ramutsindela, 2013). The materialisation and performativity of the Vogtland history and identity for tourism management and marketing acts to establish institutionally thick interlinkages between political, administrative and community spheres across the border (Coulson & Ferrario, 2007). The destination's narrative 'lubricates' tourism governance practices to bridge the gap between tourism development and marketing on the one hand and broader socio-spatial settings on the other hand (Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016b). The merger of TVV and TVT into the cross-border Vogtland DMO, as such, has cross-border region-building effects (Paasi, 2013). Through the DMO creation, the cross-border region gets a territorial shape with the spatially confined, border-crossing management and marketing entity, and a symbolic shape through its discursive Vogtland emphasis. The underlying memory

politics embed the Vogtland concept internally and externally, and hence institutionally shape the region. The symbolic confirmation and presentation of the Vogtland regional identity to the region's inhabitants and tourists provide a political pathway to confirm the longevity of the destination's management entity at the intersection of Saxonian and Thuringian tourism legislations and finances, and establish the region in the social consciousness of the region's inhabitants.

The governance system behind the destination merger, therefore, ensures the linking up of the cross-border destination-building with broader region-building processes. However, as the 2005 Greiz community survey indicated, Vogtland's region-building through institutionalising the historical cross-border socio-cultural connections is not automatically inclusive for all stakeholders involved. Capitalising on regional history and identity accounts for cross-border region-building runs the danger of being selective in terms of identification (Prokkola et al., 2015). This selectivity is reflected by the Ostthüringen versus (Thuringian) Vogtland dialectics among the Greiz community as measured in 2005, and in terms of spatially grounded notions of place, as reflected by the role of the diverse Vogtland landscape in place identity creation. For the Vogtland DMO members, the interviews and survey results indicate that the regional inclusivity of cross-border Vogtland memory politics is dependent on integrative actions of key institutional actors (Boman & Berg, 2007; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016b), but also on the proactive stance and the adoption of these actions by the local stakeholders themselves.

8. Conclusion

This paper aims to explore the role of cross-border history and socio-cultural connections to overcome administrative borders in a framework of integrative tourism destination development and management. Through analysis of the Vogtland destination-building across the German federal state borders between Saxony and Thuringia, we found that capitalising on place identities may facilitate cross-border destination development but cannot work miracles. The Vogtland case study indicates that political mobilisation of cross-border history and identity may lower the perceived barriers of administrative borders among institutional tourism stakeholders, unify their strategic economic and management orientation, and facilitate internal region-building through socio-cultural coalition construction. Such memory politics are as much future oriented as historically grounded, and thereby intrinsically power-laden (Paasi, 2013; Zhurzhenko, 2011). Therefore, the facilitating effects of a shared cross-border history and identity on tourism management across borders remain dependent on: (i) the discursive actions of empowered stakeholders, and hence the way in

which the emplaced history and identity accounts are practically performed by these actors as part of regionally inclusive politics (Prokkola et al., 2015); (ii) the structural organisational arrangements of tourism on both sides of the border, consisting of the cross-border institutional alignment possibilities and the top-down planning and financing scope (Ilbery & Saxena, 2011; Stoffelen et al., 2017). The presence of cross-border socio-cultural connections does not automatically result in the structural bridging of administrative borders when these borders are institutionally hard, but it can alleviate the process when organisational leeway for cooperation has already been provided. Structural cross-border tourism destination management cannot be seen in separation from its discursive-institutional enactment and multi-level governance embedding (Boman & Berg, 2007).

The political mobilisation of cross-border historical and socio-cultural aspects of place for tourism purposes faces an intricate balance between external homogenisation of destination images and internal contestations of this presented identity of the region (Paasi, 2013). The selectivity of the simultaneous de-bordering and re-bordering of destinations through memory politics, as present in Vogtland, may create pitfalls to safeguard the regional integration of stakeholders. The widely noted prerequisite for achieving spatially and socially balanced regional development through tourism, namely smoothening destination-level power imbalances through integrating all stakeholders in destination governance practices (Oliver & Jenkins, 2003; Saxena & Ilbery, 2008; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016b), also applies to cross-border contexts. Considering territorial borders' identity-shaping role, memory politics in a context where cross-border tourism destination development is aimed to be integrative for all stakeholders requires at least as much internal socio-cultural alignment work as border-crossing institutional bridging (Fyall et al., 2012; Zemła, 2014). In other words, performativity of identity should also imply negotiation among stakeholders. Governance processes should, therefore, be critically approached and conceptualized as an analytical lens to link up cross-border destination development with broader bordering and region-building processes.

While the cross-border cooperation literature has touched upon the interrelations between the concepts of region, identity and borders fairly elaborately (e.g. Boman & Berg, 2007; Paasi, 2013) its extension towards tourism contexts remains limited to a few studies (e.g. Prokkola, 2007). This paper has opened a debate on the triangular relations between cross-border region-building, tourism development, and identity. It has shown that future studies are aided by a multi-dimensional analysis of place identities among community stakeholders and institutional brokers, and their political embedding. Future research should also focus on host-guest interactions in terms of regional identity creation, and explore how comparative or contrasting place meanings impact cross-border region-building processes. This proposition also entails inherent methodological and interpretative challenges to balance between concepts, data collection methods, and different positions of stakeholders in practical cross-border actions. The explorative nature of the presented research, finally, leaves room for additional conceptualisation of identity, inter-destination collaboration, region-building and bordering in tourism contexts.

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