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MICRONATIONS AND TOURISM: A MULTI-CASE STUDY RESEARCH

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Extended Abstract

Purpose: *This paper aims to contribute to understanding to which extent micronations are different from other tourism destinations, identifying some factors that singularize them, which act as inputs that influence their policies on tourism development as well as their outputs. This is a largely unexplored field in the tourism literature.*

In general, micronations are tiny territories claimed by their owners or inhabitants that operate independently from established governments. They create their leadership structures in their constitutions and establish their official symbols like coats of arms, flags, passports, stamps, currency/coins, and national anthems. In Timothy's words (2003, p. 93), they refer 'to a small place, which proclaims to be a sovereign entity, usually through a declaration of independence by an eccentric and charismatic leader, but which has not received international diplomatic recognition.'

It is essential to distinguish micronations from microstates, which are small-sized but officially recognized independent states, and from unrecognized states, which, despite their geopolitical significance and control over actual territories, lack recognition from the broader international community.

As a note, Google, in its 'Micronations World Map', signals 80 at the end of 2023. Regardless of their origin and geographical locations, many of them have tried to promote tourism, not as a source of revenues and economic development only, but as an element for reinforcing their supposedly own/different identity - 'a propaganda stratagem', in Timothy's words (2021, p. 136)-. Despite this fact, this is an almost fully untouched research domain. By way of proof, also at the end of 2023, a search in 'article title, abstract, keywords' crossing the terms 'micronation' and 'touris*' only released one document in Scopus (Bicudo de Castro & Kober, 2018), and not within the category of tourism. This is the same and only article reported by Web of Science doing the same search by topic.*

Methodology: *For the empirical part of this work, carried out between August 2023 and January 2024, a multi-case study was designed to know more about the connection between a bunch of micronations conveniently selected, their strategies for tourism development and their outcomes. From a methodological point of view, to control certain variables, a set of micronations in different parts of the globe were selected (geographical location variable), and/or based on their origin: the reason for their founding and their age (consolidated vs relatively recent). To this end, a panel of experts, all of them authors who have published on micronations, were contacted by email, obtaining the responses of 8 of them. As a result, a sample of 18 micronations was selected.*

Consistently with the research gap above-mentioned, this is a theory-building study that has tried to find relevant factors from the tourism perspective and put them together in an

exploratory model with the potential to be tested in a future hypothetical-deductive investigation on micronations. For this purpose, mostly qualitative methods were used to collect primary and secondary data, to enable data triangulation (Jick, 1979) and increase research validity (Gibbert et al., 2008).

The main source of primary data was a semi-structured questionnaire (this option was chosen based on the difficulties of arranging personal interviews and the impossibility of participant observation), made up of 16 sections (36 items in total), specifically: Informant's position, Sovereignty legitimacy, Spatial range, Territory size, Population, Year of foundation (age), Importance of tourism and why, Main actions to attract tourists, Limitations or challenges, Expectation of more tourists, Person/department in charge or chance of having it shortly Organization and statistics, Profile and characteristics of visitors. Informants were encouraged to add any comment/clarification concerning their answers to each item; for this reason, open-ended questions were included after each of them.

It was prepared using the Google Form tool and sent through email, together with a letter where the author introduced himself, and explained the reason for this research and its aims, as well as to guarantee the anonymity of their responses. When scales were presented to respondents, 7-point semantic differential or Likert scales were used.

6 valid responses were gathered, from the following micronations (the four firsts are North American -located in the territory of the USA- and the other two Europeans -between brackets, their locations and foundation years-): Republic of Molossia (Nevada, 1977), Republic of Slowjamastan (California, 2021), Republic of West Who (Colorado, 1969), Kingdom of Talossa (Wisconsin, 1979), Principality of Seborga (Italy, 1963), and Principality of Aigues-Mortes (France, 2011). Some of them are described in Moutinho et al. (2023).

Finally, the typology of this research (Aurini et al., 2022) can be classified as follows:

**Ontology: interpretivist, in reference to the diverse subjective realities of people in command of the selected micronations.*

**Epistemology: qualitative, mainly because of its emphasis on understanding the various meanings of tourism for them.*

**Axiology: to a certain extent, the findings are the object of the researcher's subjective interpretation.*

Findings: *In response to the question of how micronations differ from a tourism perspective, the three next aspects have been identified as particularly relevant taking into account the existing literature:*

**Micronations have usually been clustered based on attributes such as sovereignty legitimacy, spatial range, size (in terms of territory and population), and age. However, only the type of population, instead of its size (that is, those where their citizens live in the territory claimed or those where their citizenship is disseminated geographically), seems to affect how tourism is approached. This dual typology of the population in micronations, which can be linked with its physical vs virtual existence (Timothy, 2021), becomes evident in the descriptions of micronations offered by some sources, although without considering its tourism implications.*

**Regarding the typology of visitors, seeing the attributes that attract them (novelty, adventure, and smallness rise as the main sources of attraction), our findings are aligned with the profiles outlined in the literature (Timothy, 2003). The same happens with the actions usually implemented to attract tourists, such as tours, events, taking selfies, creation of coins, banknotes, stamps, etc. (Streich, 2021).*

**In terms of limitations or challenges for tourism development –mostly smallness (small territorial size, population, number of attractions and services) and remoteness, as well as the*



scarcity of financial resources and collaboration-, our findings are consistent with those already mentioned by Timothy (2003). Nonetheless, a wider span of factors has been identified, including remoteness and scarcity (of resources and collaboration), where smallness plays, at the same time, a twofold role: as a source of attraction and as a factor that constrains its potential for tourism development. Besides, the lack of international recognition, underlined by that author as ‘the most glaring issue’ (p. 95), does not seem a significant concern at this time, being perhaps replaced by the limited collaboration with other institutions. To facilitate the cooperation among micronations, a biennial summit known as MicroCon has been held since 2015.

Research implications/limitations: *Concerning tourism development in micronations, looking forward to external issues or tourism trends (Moutinho & Vargas-Sánchez, 2018), some of the factors that will contribute to the expansion of tourism in micronations are the increasing popularity of experiential travel; the rise of the sharing economy; the advance of online marketing; and the global growth of the tourism industry. More specifically, this study has underlined the importance of novelty and adventure as the main sources of attraction for micronation visitors.*

About internal factors or micronation’s characteristics, smallness (small territorial size, small population, small number of attractions and services), remoteness, and scarcity of financial resources and collaboration have been the most significant ones revealed in this exploratory research in terms of limitations or challenges. Nevertheless, smallness is, at the same time, one of the main attractions for visitors, only overcome by the search for novelty and adventure.

With these inputs, as a practical contribution in terms of marketing policy and the destination image to be induced, the profile of visitors to look for is mainly defined by those searching for memorable experiences characterized by their distinctive character due to the novelty that a micronation represents, linked to an adventure in a usually small and remote territory. At the same time, this target stands out for their prior knowledge about the micronation they visit.

It is also worth noting that the type of population in a micronation (where its citizens live, concentrated in the territory claimed or, conversely, disseminated geographically, that is its territorial or non-territorial character) seems to influence its approach towards tourism.

Despite its inductive character, an obvious limitation of this study is its exploratory nature based on a few selected cases, which cannot represent the whole universe of micronations. Other variables could have also been considered. Thus, moving into the next step of the scientific method with the design of a hypothetical-deductive investigation, further research avenues can be suggested, such as the analysis of the profile of the micronation’s founder or key person (his/her motivations, leadership style, etc.) and its influence on the definition of the role of tourism development in the corresponding micronation.

Originality/value: *In addition to the contribution to trying to bridge the gap of knowledge in this domain caused by the scarcity of specific studies focused on the intersection between micronations and tourism development, to the best of our knowledge, some variables have been treated in this study for the first time, namely the expectations of more tourists, how tourism is organized (beyond the set of actions carried out in this area) and a deeper insight on the profile and characteristics of visitors.*

Firstly, concerning the expectation of more tourists, except in one case, where this expectation is unclear, all the studied micronations are focused on tourism development (because of the importance they give to it) and anticipate as likely, very likely or certain the increase of visitor



flows. Even in one case where tourism has had a low importance until now, in the future, it is considered likely the reception of more visitors.

Secondly, except in one case, where tourism is attributed a minor importance and unlikely will change, all of them had a person in charge of tourism management or looking for somebody for this task when primary data were collected.

Thirdly, once underlined that middle-aged people (between 30-50 years old) dominate the visitors' demographic profile, what stands out the most among the tourists' characteristics is their general knowledge about micronations, especially the ones they visit. In addition, conversely, the little attraction they seem to experience towards educational activities and sustainable destinations/activities.

Keywords: micronation; tourism policy; tourism development; multi-case study.

Type of paper: Inductive research

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