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Collaboration gaps and regional tourism networks in rural coastal communities

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ABSTRACT

Tapping into and creating broad networks is integral to connecting communities and destinations to wider flows of tourists and ensuring local benefits from tourism development. However, little research has probed how communities build these connections. This article examines how tourism stakeholders perceive and practice the work of network-building and assess the challenges they face in pursuing this work in regional tourism development. Drawing on survey and focus group data from Atlantic Canada, we identify “collaboration gaps” between the perceived value of network-building and related social practices. Social practice theory is used to analyse tourism network-building and explain why collaboration gaps exist and persist. Our analysis found three gaps: between meaning and practice; vertical collaboration gaps related to the scale of network-building; and horizontal collaboration gaps related to the range of actors involved in tourism networks. These collaboration gaps can be addressed through a focus on meaning, competencies, and materials as means to foster successful collaborations and overcome gaps.

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Regional development; tourism networks; rural tourism; collaboration; Canada–Newfoundland and Labrador

Introduction

Building environmentally sustainable tourism depends on generating socially sustainable tourism networks that ensure host communities benefit from tourism development (Alonso & Nyanjom, 2017; Tucker, Gibson, & Vodden, 2011; Casanueva, Gallego, & García-Sánchez, 2016; Cusick, 2009; Hazra, Fletcher, & Wilkes, 2017; Lindstrom & Larson, 2016; Manaf, Purbasari, Danayanti, Aprilia, & Astutu, 2018; Mei, Lurfald, & Brata, 2017; Van Den Bergh, 2014). While network-building is considered important by tourism stakeholders and has been the focus of much research, relatively few tourism operators consciously engage in the day-to-day work of network-building. Likewise, researchers presume networks exist, offering insight into “how” they operate without focusing on “why” they occur. Social practice theory, as articulated by Shove and coworkers, offers tools for identifying “collaboration gaps” that help account for why collaborations work or fail. Her works offers insight on the mechanisms driving socially sustainability tourism development and community wellbeing. Addressing such collaboration gaps is key to building sustainable tourism

more broadly (environmentally, economically, and socially), but has not been widely adopted by tourism researchers or practitioners (Alonso, Kok, & O'Brien, 2018; Lamers, Duske, & van Bets, 2018; Lamers, van der Duim, & Spaargaren, 2017). Drawing upon Shove's work, we argue that sustainable tourism research can benefit from paying greater attention to the relationship between meaning, competences, and materials in promoting successful network-building and collaboration for sustainable tourism development.

This article examines regional tourism development in the Atlantic Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). We draw on survey and focus group data from four study regions: Bonne Bay, the Northern Peninsula, the Labrador Straits, and the Burin Peninsula. We ask the following research questions: How do participants interpret the meaning of network-building and collaboration? What do current practices of tourism network-building and collaboration look like? Who are the key carriers of collaboration and network-building? Our results identify collaboration gaps between the perceived value of network-building and current practices of network-building, which are concentrated among relatively few tourism and government actors at the local and regional level. We further ask how these collaboration gaps can be explained. Here, the importance of competences and materials take prominence as elements that help translate the meaning of network-building into social practice.

This article also makes a methodological contribution by using a mixed-methods approach examining quantitative and qualitative data from a survey and a series of focus groups with tourism operators and key stakeholders. Much research on tourism collaboration and network-building adopts either a quantitative or qualitative approach. However, this article shows that mixed-methods approaches can engage a broader range of participants and perspectives, providing a richer understanding of the practices of tourism network-building and collaboration.

Tourism collaboration and network-building

Tourism is an increasingly important pathway for sustainable economic and community development in rural and remote communities worldwide (Hall, Muller, & Saarinen, 2009; Hussain, 2015; Rockett & Ramsey, 2017). For tourism to contribute to community sustainability, "tourism should be integrated primarily with regions, communities and their development goals, not the other way around" (Hall et al., 2009, p. 127). This sentiment is corroborated by research in rural, coastal, and island communities where the successful implementation of sustainable tourism programs relied on contributions from local stakeholders (Lindstrom & Larson, 2016; Manaf et al., 2018). Not all tourism in rural and remote areas is community-based. However, if rural and remote places are viewed simply as a backdrop to a tourism sector that is disconnected from host communities, then tourism development will likely fail to realize its potential to contribute to social sustainability.

The absence of collaboration and network-building in rural regions may hinder these areas from attaining their tourism objectives (Mei et al., 2017; Van Den Bergh, 2014). Mei et al. (2017) explored opportunities and challenges for networking and collaboration among operators in the Taste of National Tourism Routes (TNTR) in Norway. They found that barriers to networking and collaboration, including willingness to engage, actual involvement, and trust among operators, hindered the TNTR program. Van Den Bergh (2014), studying the Veerse Meer region in the Netherlands, similarly found that differing viewpoints and a regard for collaboration as "ineffective" constrained network-building and challenged tourism development in the region. Sustainable tourism development requires collaboration among multiple stakeholders to negotiate varying community interests and different understandings of tourism sustainability (Cusick, 2009). Thus, gaps in the ability to collaborate lead to socially unsustainable tourism.

Community-based partnerships and cooperatives are valuable for engaging community interests using local environments and culture as resources for tourism-based economic development

(MacDonald & Jolliffe, 2003; Sullivan & Mitchell, 2012). These may be the kinds of practices that bridge collaboration gaps. Community-Based Tourism (CBT), however, is not synonymous with tourism in rural and remote regions. Rather, it is an approach that foregrounds the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration to leverage tourism for community sustainability (Mayaka, Croy, & Cox, 2018; Salazar, 2012; Zapata, Hall, Lindo, & Vanderschaeghe, 2011). In their study of rural communities in Bali, Blapp and Mitas (2018) define CBT as: “[economically], environmentally, socially, and culturally responsible visitation to local/Indigenous communities to enjoy and appreciate their cultural and natural heritage, whose tourism resources, products, and services are developed and managed with their active participation, and whose benefits from tourism, tangible or otherwise, are collectively enjoyed by the communities” (p. 1289). Reggers, Grabowski, Wearing, Chatterton, and Schweinsberg (2016) further argues that CBT is unique insofar that “the tourist is not given central priority,” but rather is viewed as a participant in a “symbiotic relationship” with host communities (p. 1142).

Much research on CBT is focused on communities in the global south, especially in rural and Indigenous communities. Gascón (2013) notes that commonly identified challenges include making CBT economically viable, creating tensions within communities due to the uneven distribution of benefits, and ensuring meaningful local community control vis-à-vis government and tourism sector interests. Wang, Cater, and Low (2016) identify a similar set of barriers to tourism collaboration in the Qinghai Province in China, including lack of leadership, internal and external leadership conflicts, exclusion of community residents, and failure to share the benefits of tourism development. Conversely, Zapata et al. (2011) draw from research in Nicaragua to suggest that CBT can create meaningful community benefits in terms of employment, economic security, and enhanced social cohesiveness, particularly when CBT complements other forms of economic activity and when driven by “bottom-up” community-based initiatives.

Social network approaches also provide valuable conceptual tools for examining collaboration for tourism development. Social network analysis (SNA) provides a set of theoretical and methodological tools for mapping and analysing the formation, persistence, and dissolution of social ties (Crossley, 2011; Knoke & Yang, 2008; Scott, 2000). SNA provides insight into the structure of social relationships, including networks of individual and organizational-level networks of collaboration and conflict. SNA has been used across a broad range of substantive areas and academic disciplines, including a wealth of studies related to environmental sustainability (e.g. Barnes et al., 2017; Fisher, Waggle, & Leifeld, 2013; Hadden, 2015; Ingold & Fischer, 2014; Saunders, 2013).

Casanueva et al. (2016) argue that social network approaches are under-utilized in tourism studies, but studies of relationships among tourism entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurial tourism stakeholders are emerging as a core concern within network approaches to tourism research. Hazra et al. (2017) find that tourism destinations are embedded in networks of various government authorities, individual business operators, and “ancillary service providers” such as telecommunications providers, each with different interests and levels of power. From this network perspective, the successful management of tourism destinations depends on coordinating flows of resources and knowledge among these stakeholders. Alonso and Nyanjom (2017) identify a range of stakeholders and diverse community perspectives towards tourism development, from pro-development “tourism advocates” and “brand developers” to critical or resistant “reluctant followers” and “conservative residents.” This work shows the importance of collaboration among these groups for successfully enacting the goals of sustainable community tourism development.

Applied research in NL has also focused on network-building and collaboration. In the Northern Peninsula region, regional networks among tourism operators and promoters, communities, and provincial tourism agencies facilitate connections to broader tourism flows by improving resource and information sharing. The practice of creating new network connections and working relationships is referred to as “network weaving,” with key actors engaged in the work of network-building and forging connections termed “network weavers” (Tucker et al., 2011).

The challenges of sustainable tourism development cannot be explained solely by analysing social networks, since some challenges are beyond the scope of network-building and collaboration. However, research on CBT and social network approaches highlights the importance of collaboration and network-building for sustainable tourism development. This literature also identifies challenges to collaboration and network-building. We contribute to this literature by identifying collaboration gaps between the perceived value of network-building and the social practices of network-building. Previous research does not fully explain why these collaboration gaps emerge or persist. Instead, we turn to Shove, Pantzar, and Watson's (2012) version of social practice theory to help understand the persistence of collaboration gaps and identify potential solutions.

Social practice theory

The understanding that network-building is vital to sustainable tourism development is becoming well-established. However, a network perspective largely focuses on how people work together, failing to adequately address why stakeholder collaborate. On this front, the literature can benefit from greater engagement with social practice theory. There are multiple versions of social practice theory, sharing roots in the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens (1984) and the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1998), which emphasize the co-constitution of agency and social structure (Lamers et al., 2017; Shove & Walker, 2014). We work from the version of practice theory developed by Elizabeth Shove and coworkers (Shove & Walker, 2014; Shove, Watson, & Spurling, 2015; Shove et al., 2012). This work has gained traction in research on transformations of environmental practices (i.e. Duncan et al., 2018; Ryghaug & Toftaker, 2014; Schäfer et al., 2018). Although, it has been less visible within tourism studies, various authors highlight its usefulness for supplementing theory on sustainable tourism research because it helps push beyond the limitations of narrow, individualizing consumer choice approaches to tourism sustainability (Bramwell, Higham, Lane, & Miller, 2017; Hall, 2013; Luzecka, 2016; Verbeek & Mommaas, 2008).

Practice theory explores moments of stasis and transition from "within social practices and between them" (Shove et al., 2012, p. 1). Although, social practice theory is not explicitly concerned with issues of tourism development, it offers a conceptual framework to consider how network-building is translated into practice. The successful development of new social practices relies on three inter-related elements. First, the social meanings of a given practice must shift so that participants value the practice. Second, participants must have the necessary competences (skills, techniques, and know-how) to carry it out, or must be willing and able to develop the new competences required to engage in the practice. Third, participants need access to the materials and resources (financial capability or specific technologies) needed to participate. Social practice is also a generative phenomenon, in turn producing meaning, materials, and new competencies (p. 120).

Much of the research by Shove and coworkers focuses on shifting pro-environmental behaviour in response to climate change (Shove & Walker, 2014; Shove et al., 2012, 2015). They argue that even if pro-sustainability social practices are valued (i.e. there is a change in meaning), without the requisite skills or access to materials, new pro-environmental meanings will not become "sticky" and "congeal" into "bundles" of complimentary social practices that persist over time. This framework is applicable to network-building for tourism development. For network-building to become integrated into the practices of tourism operators and other stakeholders, it must be valued. However, developing this social practice also requires that tourism stakeholders have the necessary competences and materials for collaboration and network-building. This may require new training and mentoring, access to financial and human resources, or the use of new communication technologies.

Tourism studies research has mostly employed social practice theory to help analyse the environmental practices of tourists. Iaquinto (2015) uses practice theory to examine sustainability practices among backpackers in Australia. This perspective is useful for illuminating that backpackers often engage in more sustainable practices during travel than at home, but this is often more about the social and material context of backpacking as a practice, and less often about eco-intentions. Elsewhere, Iaquinto (2018) notes that the technological systems that backpackers use also dictate the “pace” and sustainability of travel, with travel by ground working to facilitate engagement in more sustainable tourism practices, while the faster pace of air travel obstructs more sustainable tourism practices.

Others have focused specifically on tourists’ flying behaviour as one of the most difficult and problematic aspects of tourism sustainability (Hanna & Adams, 2019; Kantenbacher, Hanna, Miller, Scarles, & Yang, 2019; Luzecka, 2016). Hanna and Adams (2019) argue that shared meanings about tourism are invoked to legitimate the ecological costs of air travel, thereby creating barriers to implementing pro-environmental changes in tourist practices. Luzecka (2016) similarly finds that shared meanings and institutional incentives support the long-haul travel practices of gap year youth, working against more sustainable alternatives. Transportation practices are also the focus of Smith, Robbins, and Dickinson’s (2019) study of the constraints and barriers to alternative transportation (public transit, cycling, walking) use by tourists in the New Forest region of the UK. They note that issues related to materials and competences create barriers and make transportation alternatives feel inaccessible to tourists.

While practice theory is increasingly used to understand the sustainability practices of tourists, less research is using social practice theory to examine the sustainable tourism practices of tourism operators and stakeholders regarding tourism development. Examining culinary tourism in Peru, Alonso et al. (2018) use practice theory to examine how different shared meanings lead to the uptake of food sustainability practices among restaurant owners and operators. Others use practice theory to examine the work and decision making of Arctic expedition cruise leaders and workers (Lamers et al. 2017, 2018). While not drawing explicitly on Shove et al.’s version of practice theory, Mayaka et al. (2018) show how re-orienting our analysis towards everyday practices provides insight into the social dynamics of CBT. They examine CBT in rural Kenya, focusing on practices of community participation to better understand the relationship between community participation and benefit-sharing. They note that a practice perspective entails “a move away from the degree of participation within predefined spaces toward how communities create participation and the contexts in which such participation takes place” (Mayaka et al., 2018, p. 418). Rather than fixating on the outcomes of collaboration, it is important to emphasize “the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of tourism-oriented social practices” (p. 419). Participation depended on embeddedness within “local trust relationships” with other community members, as well as with external stakeholders (p. 428). This research demonstrates the value of adopting a social practice perspective on CBT because it focuses on how local context shapes the everyday work of tourism collaboration and network-building.

Bartiaux and Salmón (2014) connect social practice theory and SNA to examine a range of pro-environmental household practices among Belgian survey participants, including tourism-oriented practices like holidaying nearby and avoiding plane travel. They argue that the role of social networks and social interaction is less well developed in practice theory, so there should be more connection between practice theory and network-oriented approaches. Practice theory is applicable to our regional case studies because NL is marked by both social change and inertia, which for Shove et al. (2012) provides fertile ground for analysis. The province continues to transition from a primarily resource-driven economy to a hybridized one, where the demands of tourism development and extractive industries co-exist. At the crux of these shifts are tourism operators and stakeholders for whom collaboration is an integral aspect of connecting communities to broader flows of tourists. Tourism stakeholders in these regions believe that network-building is essential. As our results demonstrate, adopting a practice theory perspective to

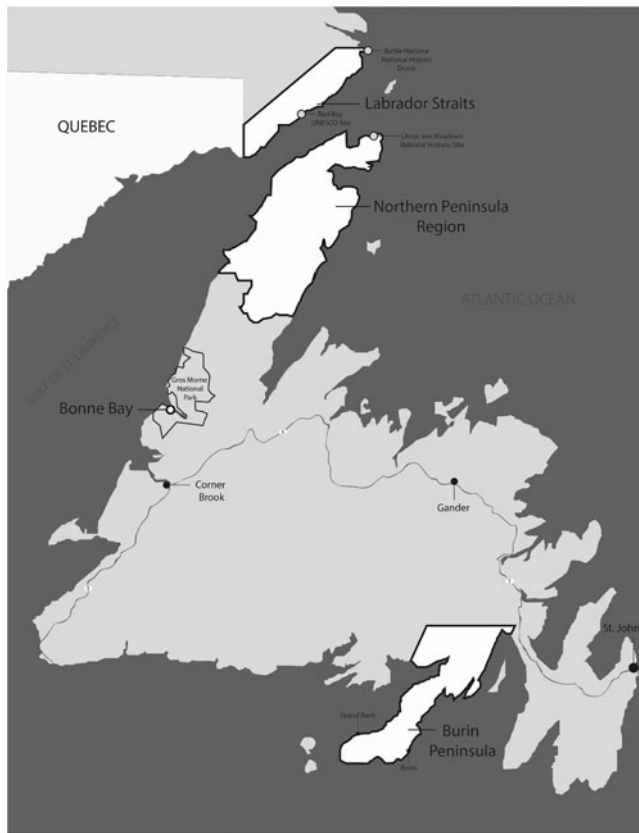


Figure 1. Map of study regions.

tourism development is productive because it allows us to identify and understand the collaboration gaps that create challenges for carrying out network-building practices at the level of the office and the community.

Materials and methods

Study regions

This study focuses on four sites in Atlantic Canada: Bonne Bay, the Northern Peninsula, the Labrador Straits, and the Burin Peninsula (see [Figure 1](#)).

All four study regions are predominantly rural and remote cold-water tourism destinations. As is characteristic of the province overall, these regions rely on a mixture of history, culture, and nature-oriented recreation to draw visitors (Stoddart & Sodero, 2015; Rockett & Ramsey, 2017; Sullivan & Mitchell, 2012). They are part of three designated tourism regions, each represented by a destination management organization (DMO): Bonne Bay and the Northern Peninsula in the Western region (Go Western Newfoundland), the Labrador Straits in Labrador (Destination Labrador), and the Burin Peninsula in Eastern Newfoundland (Legendary Coasts of Eastern Newfoundland).

Despite these similarities, there are also stark cross-regional differences. Bonne Bay is a well-established tourism area, serving as the location of Gros Morne National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site that is among the most visited destinations outside the provincial capital city of St. John's (Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation,

2017). The other regions are emerging destinations. The Northern Peninsula, located north of Bonne Bay, hosts the L'Anse aux Meadows UNESCO and National Historic Site devoted to the history of early Norse settlement in the area. However, it receives far less traffic than the Bonne Bay region. The Labrador Straits, which consists of the southern coastal portion of Labrador, is the most remote of the regions and has two main attractors: the Red Bay UNESCO site, devoted to early Basque whaling settlements, and the Battle Harbour National Historic District, devoted to the history of the Labrador cod fishery. The Burin Peninsula is closer to St. John's. While lacking the national parks, national historic sites, or UNESCO sites of the other regions, it has a range of historic tourism attractors, such as the Seaman's Museum in Grand Bank and the historic district of the town of Burin.

The four study regions approach tourism development at different scales and from distinct demographic, spatial, and economic contexts. That diversity corresponds well with our research questions. By acknowledging how regional differences in network-building are perceived in distinct communities throughout the province, we can better analyse which organizations and actors are embraced or neglected in these networks, and the specific barriers that inhibit these networks from forming or thriving. We worked with community partners in each region who were familiar with the local tourism field, including: Trevor Bungay (Department of Tourism, Culture, Industry and Innovation, Government of NL - TCII), Joanie Cranston (Bonne Bay Cottage Hospital Heritage Corporation), Mark Lamswood (Go Western Newfoundland), Randy Letto (Destination Labrador), Anne Marceau, Jamie Pye (TCII), and Joan Simmonds (Great Northern Peninsula Heritage Network). Community partners assisted with reviewing and commenting on research design, including providing feedback on research instruments and sampling frames for the study. They also assisted with outreach and recruitment.

Mixed-methods approach

This project uses a mixed-methods approach with two phases, including an online survey followed by focus groups in each study region. This mixed-methods approach was beneficial for two reasons. First, for two regions (Bonne Bay, Burin Peninsula), the focus groups drew more participants than the online survey. Conversely, for the other two regions (Labrador Straits, Northern Peninsula), the online survey sample was larger. However, total participant engagement was higher for the focus groups than the survey. Second, the majority of focus group participants were affiliated with local or regional tourism organizations/committees or municipal or regional government offices, while the survey drew a sample that was balanced between private tourism operators and public/community tourism stakeholders. There also appeared to be little overlap between survey and focus group participants. As discussed previously, this mixed methods approach differs from much literature on tourism collaboration and network-building.

Online survey

A sampling frame of 225 tourism operators and tourism-related organizations in the four study regions was created using three strategies. First, relevant organizations from the research team's prior work in these regions were included. Second, additional web searching for tourism operators and organizations was conducted. Third, the sampling frame was circulated to community partners for feedback and suggested additions. The sampling frame included potential participants occupying a range of roles in the tourism sector, including guiding/guide outfitting operations, accommodation services, arts and culture organizations, food services, heritage organizations, tourism organizations, and municipal tourism committees. We launched the survey in September 2016, with follow-up emails sent to participants in October and November. In total, 34 people completed the online survey – a 15% response rate. However, response rates vary by

region as follows: Bonne Bay (7%), which has the largest number of tourism operators of the regions; Burin Peninsula (43%); Labrador Straits (36%); and the Northern Peninsula (22%). The small sample size and relatively low response rate for the Bonne Bay region is a limitation of our data, especially as this is the most established region in the study. Focus group participants suggested that because the Bonne Bay region is a more established tourism destination, operators may have been busy, less interested in the developmental side of tourism, or that the area has been over-researched. Bonne Bay participants also suggested that they prefer to engage in face-to-face discussion over surveys. Due to our sample size, we focus on descriptive analysis of survey results as opposed to hypothesis-testing or more sophisticated statistical techniques.

The survey asked questions about the participants themselves. When participants self-categorized their organization, the largest proportion (41%) chose accommodation services. The second-most selected category was tourism organizations (24%), followed by heritage organizations (15%). Participants from outfitting operations (9%), arts and culture organizations (6%), food services (3%), and municipal economic development or tourism committees (3%) comprised the other sectors in the survey sample. Women (54%) were slightly more represented than men (46%), and a majority of respondents fall between 41- and 68-year old. Although, the survey sample is small, it provides data from a meaningful cross-section of tourism operators and other key stakeholders.

Survey questions focused on several main areas. The first set of questions examined participants' perceptions of tourism development in their region and the benefits or challenges it creates for host communities. The second set of questions, which is the focus of our analysis, focused on the frequency and scope of social network-building and collaboration in regional tourism development, as well as how participants perceived those collaborations. Questions included: "How often do individuals and organizations work together on tourism development in your region?"; "Which describes your past involvement with tourism planning and initiatives?"; "In your experience, how important is collaboration among individuals and community organizations to succeed in tourism development in your region?"; and "How often do you personally initiate collaboration initiatives, that is work with other stakeholders or groups?" For each of these questions, answer categories were structured using five point Likert-type scales ranging from never/not involved/not very important to all the time/very involved/very important.

We then asked a series of questions about frequency of collaboration with each of five distinct types of organizations: tourism organizations, businesses, government agencies, Indigenous groups, and environmental organizations. This helped us examine the "horizontal" dimension of collaboration and network-building, or the reach of networks across multiple sectors. For each of these sectors, we asked about collaboration at four different social scales: local, provincial, national, and international which helps us examine the "vertical" dimension of collaboration and network-building, or the reach of networks across these scales. For this series of questions, we also used a five point Likert-type scale with the following answer categories for frequency of collaboration: never, occasionally (a few times a year or less), every couple of months, monthly, weekly or more often. Finally, the survey asked open-ended questions where participants could reflect more freely on collaborations, conflicts, assets, and challenges that are unique to their respective regions.

Focus groups

We conducted the focus group phase of the project in October 2017. Focus groups built on survey data by allowing tourism operators and stakeholders to respond to the survey findings in an open-ended, unstructured manner. Focus group recruitment used two strategies. First, we re-contacted and invited all survey participants. Second, our community partners extended the pool of participants by circulating invitations to their contacts.

We conducted four focus groups in Bonne Bay (19 participants), Burin Peninsula, (14 participants), Labrador Straits (two participants), and Northern Peninsula (seven participants). Focus group methodologists differ in their opinions of the ideal participant size but suggest a range anywhere from 4 to 15 (Goss & Leinbach, 1996; Kitinger, 1995; Morgan, 1998). Our initial target was six to 12 participants in each focus group. In two cases (Bonne Bay and the Burin Peninsula), we received RSVPs that fell within this range, but the number of people that arrived to participate was higher. Conversely, in one focus group (Labrador Straits), we received RSVPs for seven participants, but only two arrived and we opted to proceed with the event.¹ In total, 42 participants joined the focus groups.

Non-profit organizations were well-represented in the focus groups (10 participants, 24%). These included organizations with mandates ranging from business development to heritage tourism. Municipal government was the second most represented group, with eight participants (19%) attending from town councils and staff. Tourism operators, including accommodations, tour companies, and culinary tourism accounted for seven participants (17%). Seven participants (17%) were from federal government agencies, particularly from Parks Canada. Provincial government accounted for six representatives, namely TCII (14%). Other participants included representatives from DMOs, Indigenous business development organizations, media, and the arts. Of the 42 participants, 57% were female and 43% male. An important qualification is that many participants' affiliations are fluid due to the small nature of many of the communities that they represent. In some of these communities, community leaders wear many hats, with one person often helping run a tourism business, serving on town council, and overseeing a local heritage association or museum. Due to this pluralism practiced by rural community leaders, it is difficult to say how many roles any given participant plays in their respective community, with participants choosing to give the affiliation they perhaps felt was most relevant for the focus group discussion.

Each focus group started with a short presentation of survey results and open-ended conversation about these findings. We then shifted to semistructured conversations about processes of network-building for regional tourism development. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours. One research team member served as discussion moderator, another team member served as a dedicated note-taker, while a third team member was present for logistical support and to serve as an additional observer. Morgan (1998) sets out four different analytical strategies for focus groups, including: verbatim transcripts of audio recordings, analysis-based directly on the audio recordings (without transcripts), notes-based analysis based on field notes of the sessions, and memory-based analysis. We adopted a notes-based approach, where detailed notes were taken during the discussion. The research team debriefed following each session, allowing for field notes to be augmented with additional relevant details. We also chose a notes-based approach to better ensure the confidentiality of participants. Notes for each session were imported to NVIVO software for qualitative analysis, where thematic coding and analysis was carried out by the first author. This follows a similar approach to focus group data collection and analysis used in previous research on tourism development in NL (Stoddart, Catano, & Ramos, 2018).

Limitations

A considerable limitation is the relatively small survey sample size and descriptive nature of our statistical analysis. These limitations are offset by the focus group data. However, as a result we have not engaged in hypothesis-testing or more sophisticated statistical analyses of the survey data. Another potential limitation is that the study focuses on local settings in rural and remote cold-water tourism regions. While our case areas are small, the social practice dynamics we identify may be applicable across a range of other rural, remote, and island tourism destinations,

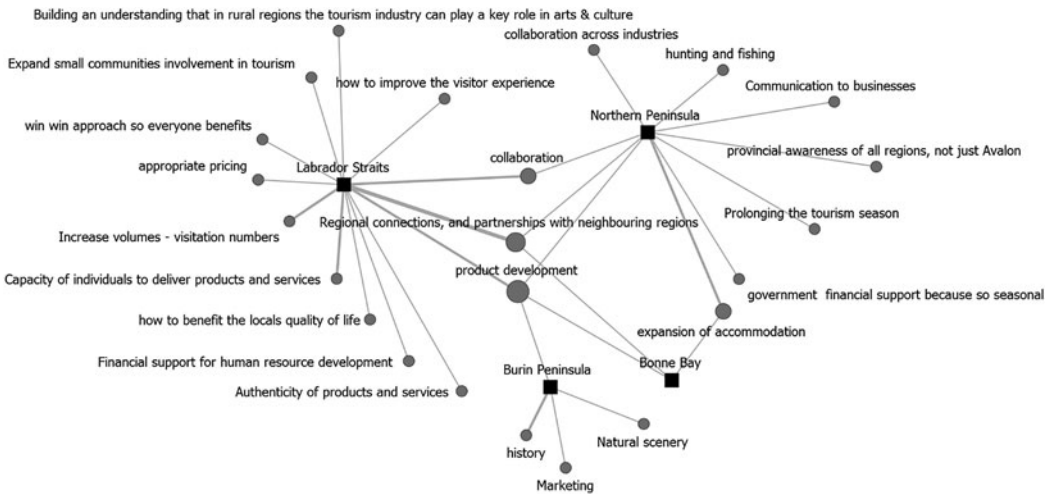


Figure 2. When it comes to building regional tourism networks, what should be the main areas of focus?

such as Iceland, Scotland, or the Azores islands. Future research would benefit from extending the international comparative scope of this line of inquiry to better understand social practices of collaboration and network-building, as well as the collaboration gaps related to sustainable tourism development.

Results

Meanings of collaboration

Meaning, competences, and materials are the key elements required to solidify new social practices, such as practices of tourism collaboration and network-building (Shove et al., 2012). They are the core ingredients of “why” people collaborate, or the mechanisms that create collaboration gaps. We begin exploring how these relate to the four cases and how they can be applied to tourism collaborations by examining participants’ views about the meanings of social practices, then turn to related issues of carriers, competences, and materials. For survey participants, collaboration is interpreted as extremely important. About 97% answered the question, “How important is collaboration among individuals and community organizations?”² with the response that it is “somewhat” or “very” important. Participants embrace the meaning of network-building and collaboration as a valuable social practice (Shove et al., 2012).

To better understand the specific practices that constitute collaboration and network-building for participants, we asked an open-ended question about what they believed should be the main areas of focus for building regional tourism networks. These responses are mapped onto the sociogram (social network diagram) in Figure 2, which shows connections between thematic responses, (grey circular nodes) and the region of respondents (black square nodes). Node size is adjusted for centrality (how well the node is connected to other nodes) and tie width reflects how frequently the nodes are linked.

Participants from all four regions emphasized “product development” as the main area of focus for building regional tourism networks. The second most frequent theme was “regional connections, and partnerships with neighbouring regions.” Participants from Bonne Bay, Northern Peninsula, and Labrador Straits considered regional connections to be key focus for regional tourism network-building. Similarly, the general theme of “collaboration” linked participants from Northern Peninsula and Labrador Straits. One respondent identified the main area of focus as a need “to involve many industries together ... fisheries with tourism and culture ...

bringing businesses together.” This attention to togetherness was buttressed by concerns about access to materials and the development of competences. As another participant wrote, the key to building regional tourism networks requires a focus on:

Financial support for human resource development. Product development will not happen without support for individuals in the cultural sector. Nunatsiavut [Inuit] government has invested heavily in arts and culture with excellent results. Individuals in the cultural sector need guidance to develop tourism products and experiences. It is difficult for an artist to also be a business, but not impossible. Support for businesses providing tourism products and experiences. Guidance for the development of experiences. Real practical guidance.

Focus group data further emphasizes that regional collaboration and tourism development initiatives are valued in terms of meaning. Additionally, the Burin Peninsula focus group identified key themes that are especially important in that region. A lack of awareness among operators of sites outside their home communities was identified as a challenge for this region. To address this, participants recommended creating strategies to increase regional awareness within the tourism sector and building greater regional tourism awareness among residents. Another key theme from focus groups, especially in the Burin Peninsula and Labrador Straits, was the need for better promotion of these areas. This was discussed with reference to provincial promotion and marketing efforts, with a sense that these regions are often at the margins of provincial promotion efforts.

The elements that participants describe, which constitute the work of collaboration and network-building, require competences and materials, as well as carriers, in order to be realized and to cohere into bundles of social practices that persist through time. However, the meanings that participants ascribe to collaboration and network-building are consistent with prior research on the importance of regional network-building for tourism development (Alonso & Nyanjom, 2017; Tucker et al., 2011; Cusick, 2009; Hazra et al., 2017). A more complex picture emerges when we turn to questions about the actual work of collaboration and network-building.

Carriers of collaboration

Individuals are “carriers” of the social practices they use in their everyday lives. As carriers, they can recruit others to social practices or help diffuse social practices. Using an open-ended survey question, we asked participants to identify the five groups or organizations with whom they currently work or partner, which helps us identify the main organizations where individuals are working as carriers of practices of collaboration and network-building. These responses are mapped onto the sociogram (social network diagram) in [Figure 3](#). This shows connections between organizations, (grey circular nodes), which are clustered into sectors (tourism, heritage, other businesses, government, Indigenous, and education) and the region of respondents (black square nodes). Node size is adjusted for centrality (how well the node is connected to other nodes) and tie width reflects how frequently the nodes are linked. Government agencies are prominent collaboration partners across our study regions, including regional DMOs, TCII, and Parks Canada (Gros Morne National Park, in particular). A range of tourism sector actors also feature as collaboration partners, including Hospitality NL, the Heritage Run Destination Association, and unspecified “other local, regional attractions.” Collaboration with non-tourism businesses, heritage organizations, Indigenous groups, and educational institutions is less evident, although, this is more visible among Labrador Straits respondents.

Focus group participants also highlight specific organizations or groups where individuals work as carriers. In Bonne Bay, participants often refer to Parks Canada as an excellent partner for collaboration. Other key groups included DMOs, the provincial tourism organization Hospitality NL, TCII, UNESCO, the Gros Morne Cooperating Association, and Qalipu Mi’kmaq First Nation. In the Labrador Straits, specific organizations mentioned included UNESCO, Nunacor (the business development organization of the NunatuKavut Community Council), Battle Harbour, and the Quebec-Labrador Foundation. In the Burin Peninsula workshop, specific organizations included the Heritage Run Tourism Association and the Wave Energy Research Centre.

Survey and focus group responses reflect social practices of collaboration that we explore further in the next section: strong networks of local collaboration centred on government and tourism sector partners, but increasingly diffuse networks of collaboration moving to the provincial and national scales, or to other sectors. This shows that while there is a shared meaning that collaboration for tourism development is important, this does not cohere into bundles of practices of network-building and collaboration.

Collaboration gap 1: between meaning and practice

To further examine participants’ work as carriers of practices of collaboration and network-building, we asked how often they initiate collaborations with other stakeholders or groups (see Table 1). While almost all participants view collaboration as very or somewhat important, roughly 87% believe collaboration is something that happens “not very often” or “sometimes.” When asked how often they personally initiate collaboration, 45% responded that they “never” or “not very often” initiate collaboration, and only 10% responded that they do it “all the time.” Put in practice theory terms, although collaboration is valued as meaningful, this meaning is not congealing into strong practices of collaboration and network-building (Shove et al., 2012).

When asked to describe their past involvement with tourism planning, 62% of participants reported that they were “somewhat” and “very” involved in tourism planning and initiatives (see Figure 4). Yet,

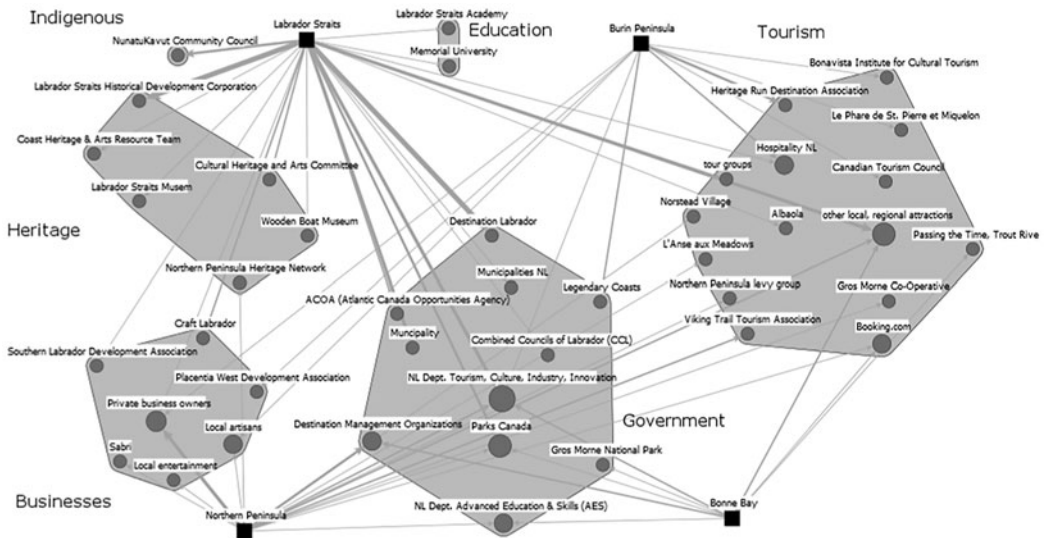


Figure 3. What are the top five groups or organizations you work or partner with?

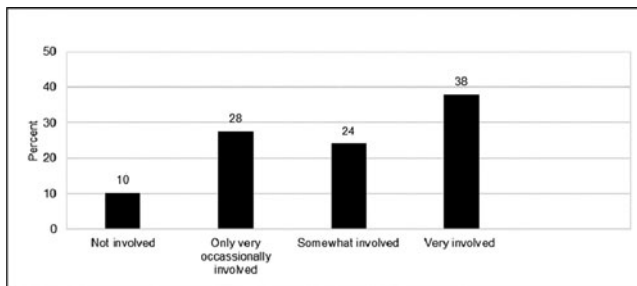


Figure 4. Which best describes your past involvement with tourism planning?

Table 1. Collaboration and network building in regional tourism development.

	Never (%)	Not very often (%)	Sometimes (%)	All the time (%)	I am not sure (%)
How often do individuals and organizations work together on tourism development in your region?	3	27	60	7	3
How often do you personally initiate collaboration initiatives with other stakeholders or groups?	20	28	36	12	4

38% describe their past involvement with tourism planning and initiatives as either “not involved” or “only very occasionally involved,” a pattern that does not show substantial regional variation. This further suggests a gap between the meaning of collaboration and the smaller number of participants who are actively working as “carriers” of collaboration and network-building practices.³

This identified collaboration gap between meaning and practice may not be particularly novel. Similar differences between the importance ascribed to collaboration and actual engagement in cooperation may be common across a range of business settings. However, by further exploring these collaboration gaps through the lens of practice theory, with its attention to competences and materials, we gain a better understanding of why this collaboration gap exists and persists than is possible through more individualized attitude-behaviour gap approaches. The collaboration gap between meaning and practice is particularly important for creating socially sustainable projects of tourism development. If the load of network-building falls on a small group of people, this limits its effectiveness and the capacity and ability of tourism stakeholders to extend their collaboration networks through vertical and horizontal dimensions. This collaboration gap is an issue for the social sustainability of tourism development, which also must be integrated into broader understandings of tourism sustainability.

Collaboration gap 2: the vertical dimension

The “vertical” dimension of participants’ collaboration and network-building practices refers to how these networks link regional tourism operators to each other, as well as to provincial, national, and international organizations and groups. The issue of scale is important for thinking about tourism development because tourism practices rely on connecting local communities and environments to extra-local movements of people. Tourism is a prime example of an economy based on connecting the local and the global. [Table 2](#) summarizes the responses.

Responses cluster around tourism organizations, businesses, and government at local and provincial levels. Twenty two percent of participants work with local tourism organizations “every couple of months,” with a combined 22% collaborating “monthly” or “weekly or more often.” The number of reported collaborations decreases slightly at the provincial level but remains high relative to lower levels of collaboration with national or international organizations.

Focus groups also addressed scale issues. Most collaboration practice is dedicated to building regional tourism development initiatives. This indicates that national or international collaboration is perceived as less vital than the regional or provincial scale, so the meaning of vertical collaboration is less salient than the meaning of collaboration in general. However, the idea that it is important to increase international connectivity through tourism development practice was raised in the Bonne Bay and Northern Peninsula focus groups. This broadly regional and provincial focus is consistent with previous findings by members of the research team, suggesting that

Table 2. How often does your organization work with other organizations or individuals on issues related to tourism development?

	Never (%)	Occasionally (%)	Every couple of months (%)	Monthly (%)	Weekly or more often (%)
Local (community/regional)					
Tourism Organizations	22	33	22	7	15
Businesses	33	41	4	11	11
Government Organizations	30	44	15	4	7
First Nations or Indigenous Groups	59	26	4	4	7
Provincial					
Environmental Organizations	65	23	8	4	–
Tourism Organizations	19	48	11	15	7
Businesses	64	24	4	4	5
Government Organizations	37	30	11	11	11
First Nations or Indigenous Groups	73	15	4	–	8
National					
Environmental Organizations	62	27	8	4	–
Tourism Organizations	64	32	–	4	–
Businesses	80	16	–	–	4
Government Organizations	48	26	15	7	4
First Nations or Indigenous Groups	92	4	4	–	–
International					
Environmental Organizations	84	12	4	–	–
Tourism Organizations	76	12	–	12	–
Businesses	80	12	–	–	8
Government Organizations	84	8	–	4	4
Environmental Organizations	96	4	–	–	–

it is a persistent characteristic of tourism collaboration practices in NL (Tucker et al., 2011, Carter & Vodden, 2018).

Collaboration gap 3: the horizontal dimension

The “horizontal” dimension of network-building practices refers to the reach of collaboration networks across different sectors. Participants were asked about collaboration with tourism organizations, other businesses, government agencies, Indigenous groups, and environmental organizations. As noted above, the main “carriers” of collaboration practices are primarily government agencies, businesses, and tourism organizations (Table 2). By contrast, the survey data indicate a lack of collaboration between participants and Indigenous groups and environmental organizations. These low levels of collaboration are consistent at all levels: local, provincial, national, and international.

At the local level, roughly 85% of participants “never” or “occasionally” work with local Indigenous groups; only 7% of participants work with Indigenous groups “weekly or more often.” At the provincial level, 8% show similar levels of collaboration. The Labrador Straits region is an exception, where we see virtually all reported collaboration with Indigenous groups. This reflects the active role played by Indigenous governments in this region. Further, focus group participants in the Labrador Straits and Bonne Bay noted the increasing importance of Indigenous tourism. The importance of working with Indigenous groups in general was noted, including engagement with specific groups such as Nunacor and the Qalipu First Nation, who are becoming increasingly involved in tourism development. For example, as noted in the Labrador Straits focus group, Nunacor has been involved in community-level tourism initiatives and are scaling up their activity related to Indigenous tourism development. Nunacor is seen as a “big asset to the coast” and is viewed as an important partner for

future collaboration. This indicates regional differences in the meaning ascribed to practices of Indigenous collaboration for regional tourism development.

Provincial tourism development has focused heavily on nature-based tourism attractors and activities: national parks, hiking, and boat tours with whale, puffin, and iceberg viewing. There have been geo-tourism initiatives in eastern Newfoundland focused on sustainable tourism which have linked environmental and tourism organizations. As such, we would expect to see collaboration across these sectors. A similarly low rate of collaboration with environmental groups was reported, however, with 88% of respondents noting that they “never” or “occasionally” work with local environmental groups. Respondents from the Labrador Straits and Burin Peninsula more often indicate collaboration with local, provincial, national, and international environmental groups. These findings are consistent with prior research on tourism-environmentalism networks in this province, which found that despite alignments around tourism sustainability discourse, this often does not translate into inter-organizational collaboration practices (Stoddart & Nezhadhossein, 2016).⁴

Explaining collaboration gaps: competences and materials

The collaboration gaps identified here are not unique to a social practice theory view of tourism development. Similar gaps between meaning and practice have been identified through attitude-behaviour gap approaches, while similar gaps in vertical or horizontal collaboration networks are described in governance studies. However, the social practice theory approach is especially productive for moving beyond documenting the existence of collaboration gaps to explain why their existence and persistence is intimately bound up with issues related to competences and materials. As practice theory highlights, even if social practices are valued in terms of social meaning, without the requisite competences or access to materials, these practices will not take hold or persist over time. For network-building to become integrated in the practices of tourism operators and stakeholders, it is not enough for these practices to be valued. Tourism operators and stakeholders must also have competences and materials like financial resources, human resources, or communication technologies for collaboration and network-building.

Focus group participants identified major barriers to network-building, including difficulty getting people to engage, particularly a lack of engagement from operators, as well as available time. Open-ended survey questions also asked participants to identify challenges to network-building and collaboration. Figure 5 provides an overview of responses (circular grey nodes), which are linked to participants’ regions (black square nodes). Two major types of challenges stand out: limited human resources and competences and the need for greater financial supports (or materials).

For participants from the Northern Peninsula, Labrador Straits, and Burin Peninsula, the most frequent responses concerned issues of human resources. For example, one participant mentioned human resources alongside structural improvements, noting that there is a “desperate need for more entrepreneurs and aspiring businesspeople. More acceptable accommodations meeting traveller’s needs.” Participants from Labrador Straits emphasized challenges associated with the capacity of volunteer and community groups. One participant expands on the challenge of human resources, particularly in relation to volunteers, in the excerpt below:

The region’s population is small, and aging. In the past, tourism development relied heavily on volunteers. Previous volunteers are getting older and retiring. Younger volunteers are few because of out-migration of young people and changing attitudes towards volunteer work.

Conversations about human resource challenges came up repeatedly across focus groups. Key issues related to human resources include: the capacity of volunteers and community groups to engage in tourism development projects; the need to draw more entrepreneurs and

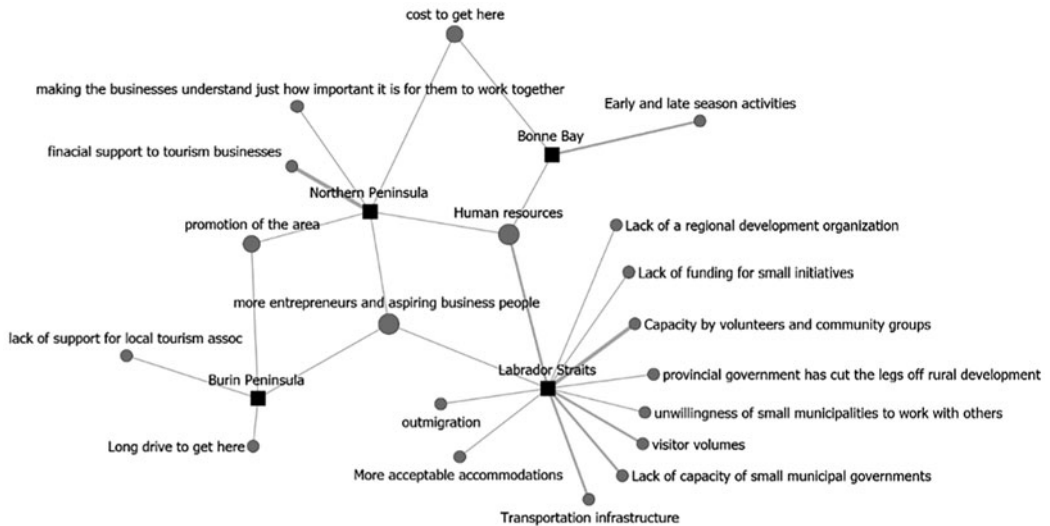


Figure 5. What would you say is the region's greatest challenge to tourism development?

businesspeople into the sector; the need to attract and retain more youth in tourism; the need to better balance the mix of volunteers, workers, and entrepreneurs within tourism development; and the need to better support local tourism associations. The specific issue of youth engagement in tourism has been examined previously, with researchers finding that the “short seasons and low earnings” often make it difficult to attract youth to the sector or leverage tourism to retain youth in rural NL (MacDonald, Neis, & Grzetic, 2006, p. 195). In talking with participants about how to address these challenges, we heard that new retirees are a potential resource for contributing to regional tourism development, both as businesspeople and volunteers.

Participants, particularly from the Northern Peninsula, also identified “financial support to small businesses” as a significant challenge to regional tourism development, with a participant explaining there is “no financial support to tourism businesses to upgrade facilities and quality standards. It’s difficult to achieve that standard that tourism expects without financial support because we are so seasonal!” Another participant identifies a challenge in “the lack of funding for small initiatives, for example, funding for small craft workshops. Lack of capacity of small municipal governments, and unwillingness of small municipalities to work with others.”

The issue of financial resources also came up in focus groups. There was agreement about the need for financial supports for tourism development, with one participant suggesting that the answer to challenges related to limited volunteers “is core funding for organizations to allow hiring of paid employees for tourism development work, but this is disallowed by federal/provincial funding agencies.”⁵ However, the idea of limited financial resources was also challenged. Some participants noted that resources exist, but many operators and tourism stakeholders lack the competences to navigate the bureaucratic and legal requirements for funding support. Thus, training and mentorship along these lines would be valuable.

Participants focused on human resources issues – the ability to hire, train, pay, and retain workers and volunteers – as a primary challenge to implementing social practices of collaboration and network-building. Lack of financial supports and the need to better use existing supports were also identified as challenges to tourism development. From a practice theory perspective, these are the main competences and materials needed to translate the highly valued meaning of collaboration and network-building into bundles of social practices that can ensure the social sustainability of regional tourism development.

Discussion

Collaboration and network-building are essential to ensuring the social sustainability of tourism development, which is necessary to ensure that tourism meets the economic and environmental sustainability needs of host communities (Tucker et al., 2011; Casanueva et al., 2016; Cusick, 2009). A social practice perspective on tourism development illuminates that while network-building is widely viewed as important, relatively few participants are heavily engaged in the practices that constitute network-building and collaboration or understand why they succeed or fail. Furthermore, tourism collaboration practices are mostly oriented at local and regional levels. Practice theory helps us identify collaboration gaps, where the valued meaning of collaboration is failing to translate into bundles of everyday practices, often due to issues related to competences and materials. These collaboration gaps should be addressed to ensure the social sustainability of tourism, which is central to the broader project of sustainable tourism development.

This article identifies three collaboration gaps. The first was between a shared perception – or meaning – of the high value of network-building and a lack of sustained engagement in the social practices of network-building. This is a core gap influencing others. The second was a horizontal collaboration gap in terms of the range of actors engaged as networking partners. The third was a vertical collaboration gap in terms of the reach of networks across local, provincial, national, and international social spheres. By connecting social practice theory to studies of tourism collaboration and network-building, our analysis shows that it is not enough for tourism stakeholders and community members to share the meaning of network-building as important if barriers to implementing collaboration as a social practice are not addressed. Developing new social practices requires the combination of social *meaning* (or valuing a new practice), *competences* (i.e. the knowledge and skills) to carry out the practice, and the necessary *materials* (or resources and technologies) to engage in the practice.

Drawing on the insights of practice theory helps identify why collaboration gaps emerge and ways to address them. Participants identified human resources as a key factor limiting the ability to engage in collaboration and network-building. For others, the availability or accessibility of financial resources is also a limiting factor. In practice theory terms, these are challenges related to developing competences (human resources) and accessing the necessary materials (financial resources) in order to translate the meaning of network-building into the day-to-day work of making collaboration a core part of regional tourism development. This indicates that initiatives from government, tourism development, or rural and regional development agencies do not need to convince stakeholders of the importance of network-building. Rather, such initiatives are better focused on developing the necessary competences and tools for accessing resources for network-building.

As tourism development re-works local histories, cultures, and environments, a range of perspectives are necessary to ensure that these developments are both culturally appropriate and environmentally sustainable. Expanding the opportunities and spaces for collaboration with local or regional-level Indigenous and environmental groups can help bridge horizontal and vertical collaboration gaps. Collaborative network-building provides ways for settler communities to improve relationships with Indigenous organizations and benefit from growing global demand for Indigenous cultural tourism (Lynch, Duinker, Sheehan, & Chute, 2011). Cultivating relationships with environmental groups can draw in organizations working at larger scales, bringing rural operators into contact with the institutional resources and enthusiasm of provincial or national-level environmental organizations and eco-tourism markets. Other strategies for addressing vertical collaboration gaps were suggested in focus groups. For example, exhibitions or performances can be toured outside of NL to build national and international awareness of local destinations.

Tourism development can be leveraged for social sustainability, in addition to economic and environmental sustainability. Achieving this, however, is facilitated by strong tourism networks and practices of collaboration. Engaging with social practice theory provides insight into

practices of network-building because it helps us identify collaboration gaps, understand why these gaps persist, and illuminate strategies for addressing them.

Notes

1. While two participants for the Labrador Straits group falls below the normal range for focus groups, it is important to emphasize that findings were not based on the focus groups in isolation but were based on both survey results and focus groups. While the low number of Labrador Straits focus group participants is a limitation, it is offset by a 36% survey response rate for this region. Furthermore, given the remoteness and travel costs associated with carrying out fieldwork in this region, it was not feasible for the research team to return for additional focus groups.
2. Throughout the project, the definition of “collaboration” was “individuals and organizations working together on tourism development projects in your region.”
3. One possible interpretation for the lack of engagement in social networking among tourism businesses actors is that a perceived need to be competitive leads to disconnection from other businesses in the region. However, this interpretation is not explicitly supported in our data, where there is widespread agreement that network-building is important for regional tourism development. This poses a useful question for further research.
4. The lack of collaboration with environmental groups may reflect social or political divides between more conservation-oriented environmental groups and more development-oriented business actors. However, our data do not offer any insight into whether this speculative interpretation is valid. This also poses a useful question for further research.
5. An important distinction is that while funding is often available for specific projects, core funding for tourism development organizations is generally not available.

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