▲ Hochschule Harz

Bachelor's Thesis

TOURISM NETWORKS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

A CASE STUDY OF NETWORK MEMBER PERCEPTION FOR ADVANCING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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1 Introduction

1.1 Problem Statement

Tourism networks are emerging new organizations that add to traditional regional destination management organizations (RDMOs) to support complex destination development. These impact networks (also called destination management studios) seek to reflect the holistic structure of tourism because they can unite a wide variety of stakeholders and align their visions in working towards a successful and for all participants sustainable destination. In Oregon, they were a recommended outcome of the destination management studio - a program conducted by Travel Oregon to address challenges in a destination and develop a plan to solve them through a series of workshops. (Travel Oregon, 2022).

Impact networks are complex structures that rely on a living-systems approach, self-organization and emergent strategies (Ehrlichman, 2021, p. 62-79). Their application in destination development allows tourism stakeholders to respond to and deal with an increasingly complex world (Van der Zee & Vanneste, 2015). Tourism networks therefore present a solution in addressing the complex challenges that cannot be solved by a single entity.

Travel Oregon, as a semi-independent state agency for tourism, established three tourism impact networks within the state of Oregon:
- North Coast Tourism Management Network in 2018 (Travel Oregon, 2021)
- Oregon South Coast Regional Tourism Network
- Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance in 2016
  (Travel Oregon, 2022)

These networks have varying levels of staff support with a maximum two full-time workers dedicated to its maintenance. In the case of the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance (CGTA), the network was at first only facilitated by a member of the AmeriCorps program "Resource Assistant for Rural Environments" (or RARE for short). Later, the board of the organization decided to hire a network director.

The board, consisting of nine voting members, oversees the actions of the employees or contractors by volunteering their time in exchange for voting power over the actions of the network (CGTA, 2019). Aside from the network director and the board, the organization relies on members to self-organize, take initiative and implement projects that are drafted in the action teams.

A network is only as good as its members. Impact networks are built on involving actors with different ideas on how to solve one or multiple issues while being able to agree on the desired outcome (Ehrlichman, 2021). The network needs to be able to continuously engage the members based on the common vision and push towards the adoption of this vision across the whole community. In the case of the CGTA, it's the implementation of sustainable tourism (CGTA, n.d.-b).

1.2 Objective and Research Question

Tourism networks can be a tool to tackle the complex challenge of increasing sustainable tourism in a destination effectively, as previously explained. This research is going to specifically concern the aspects of the tourism network Columbia River Gorge Tourism Alliance that members perceive as the most helpful to advance sustainable tourism.

The research specifically leans on the concept of acceptance. Acceptance, in this context, means the agreement that something is satisfactory and right (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.b). Acceptance theory is a well-established field of research that offers various models to explain the process of accepting new ideas or products. A fitting theoretical framework is chosen to evaluate the reasons behind network members becoming active participants and thereby accepting the network.

RQ. Why do members accept the CGTA as a tool to advance sustainable tourism development in the Columbia River Gorge?

While sustainable tourism has been an ongoing trend and conversation topic in the industry, it challenges especially small and medium enterprises to restructure their limited resources. Evaluating why tourism stakeholders chose a tourism network can give a deeper insight into the benefits of tourism networks for sustainable tourism development. Additionally, the findings can support already existing networks increase their number of active participants by strengthening their value proposition.

2 The CGTA and Its Members

2.1 Definition of the CGTA as a Sustainable Tourism Impact Network

Networks carry a number of different names: "alliances, coalitions, collective impact initiatives [or] consortiums" (Ehrlichman, 2021, p. 48) and their application in the field of tourism is not new. Costa et al. (2008) date back the research into networks and businesses as far as the late 1980s with an increased interest in the tourism realm beginning at the start of the 2000s.

Tourism, as a phenomenon experienced across multiple stakeholders is a suitable environment for a network approach. Tourists experience their travels as a whole, rather than differentiating by businesses. A coordination between actors within a geographical location can lead to a meaningful improvement of the customer experience (Halme & Fadeeva, 2000). Halme (2001) adds that this results in a linking of interests that can be solidified in the form of a network.

Van Der Zee and Vanneste (2015) found that studies in the tourism network realm can be differentiated by the kind of network benefit they are evaluating. Especially in the beginning, many studies focused on networks that promote unified tourism marketing across a region (Scott et al., 2007). Other studies found that the network approach is also largely beneficial for destination development. Halme and Fadeeva (2000) even concentrated on the benefits of tourism networks for sustainable development, finding that networks are a great way for small to medium-sized enterprises to further their impact, especially in rural areas.

The Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance is an example of a sustainable tourism network located in the Columbia River Gorge, a section of the Columbia River between the Sandy and Deschutes River that includes the first National Scenic

Area (CGTA, n.d.-c). The area is uniquely suited for a tourism network because of its jurisdiction of two states and six counties which doubles the already complex land management infrastructure of the rural area.

The Columbia River Gorge Visitors Association (CRGVA) preceded the CGTA, a marketing network of traditional tourism businesses in the Gorge (Travel Oregon, 2017). The success of the promotion ended up creating an issue of congestion and overtourism. As a response, Travel Oregon brought together over 250 stakeholders of the region who developed a vision of a Gorge that was a successful tourism destination without impeding on the livability of the locals or destroying its beautiful natural resources. To kickstart the implementation of the 15-year vision, the CRGVA was replaced with the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance, formalized in 2016 (Harper, 2020). This reflects the overall development away from purely marketing destinations but rather actively managing them.

Understanding the management principles that guide the CGTA today and its value proposition for members is the foundation of evaluating why they accepted the network as a tool. The network can be split up into two identities that work together to guide the day-to-day functionality as well as the overarching decisions:

- The CGTA operates along the principles of an impact network according to Ehrlichman (2021).
- The CGTA is a sustainable tourism network.

2.1.1 CGTA as an Impact Network

The Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance was structured as an impact network coming out of the destination management studio led by Kristin Dahl and the network grew under the leadership of Renee Tkach (Travel Oregon, 2017).

This was inspired by Ehrlichman's work surrounding impact networks. The latest edition of his work is referenced here although it is younger than CGTA itself. The edition was updated with more examples while the theoretical basics remained the same.

Ehrlichman (2021) conceived impact networks to describe a natural phenomenon that occurs in society all the time. We understand the word to encompass a group we are familiar with consisting of our friends, families and co-workers with whom we share information (cf. Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.a). In an organizational context this is similarly true. Hoteliers may connect with local food vendors, national food suppliers, cleaning companies and customer service trainers. This creates a web of connections (or network) that they will also use to solve their problems.

Impact networks formalize these "webs" and connect loose ends to solve more complex issues that a single actor cannot solve on their own, often in one specific geographic location. Through convening a broader mix of stakeholders, possibilities and ideas can arise that would not have been conceived otherwise (Ehrlichman, 2021).

In other words, Ehrlichman (2021) seeks to centralize a purpose among different organizations and individuals. This can be compared to a collective culture as described by Hofstede Insights (n.d.) where people see themselves as part of a group and prioritize those needs over their individual goals. This is relevant as the CGTA operates within the most individualistic country according to Hofstede's research: the United States of America. Network members are therefore likely to be unfamiliar with the "network mindset" (Ehrlichman, 2021). The goal of promoting collective culture is in line with promoting knowledge creation like shown by Wang et al. (2011).

According to Ehrlichman (2021) there are three different types of networks (cf. Table 1). After deciding to hire a network director, the network started to center action with several projects to achieve tangible results (Harper, 2020). The action has to be tied to the network's purpose and comes through collaboration out of the network. The CGTA's structure was built to accommodate these fluid changes (cf. Ch. 2.2, p. 11). It can therefore be categorized as an action network, promoting not only the exchange of information but also the execution of projects.

Table 1. Overview of Network Types

Network Type	Main Purpose
Learning Network	Information exchange, connection
Action Network	Action, information exchange, connection
Movement Network	Connecting multiple learning and action networks

Source: Own Illustration Based on Ehrlichman, 2021, p. 45

This is in line with Halme's (2001) findings concerning the functionality of sustainable tourism networks. When breaking down the learning process in successful sustainable tourism networks, she finds that positive tangible results are required to lead to an ongoing learning process of the stakeholders (cf. Fig. 1). The CGTA's network director realized that in her own work (Harper, 2020). Those findings indicate that projects organized through the tourism network play a significant role in the acceptance of the members. This will play a role in the research to follow.

Figure 1. Framework for Learning in Sustainable Tourism Networks
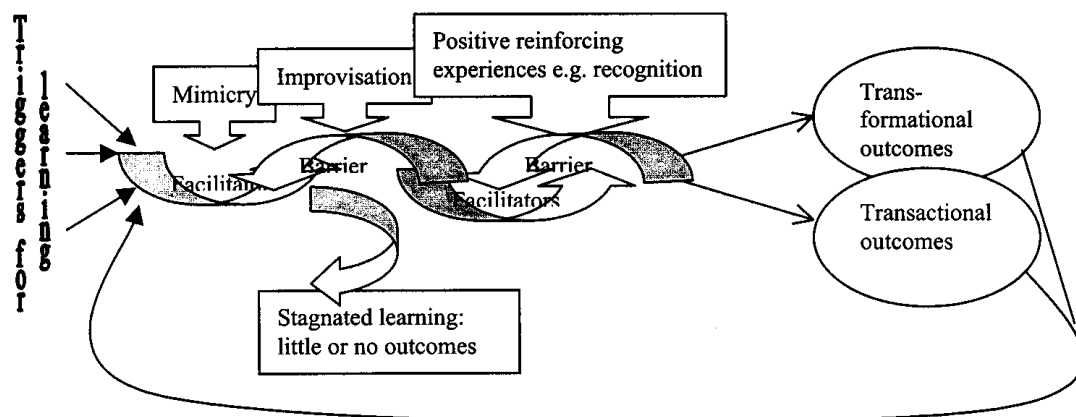
Source: Halme, 2001, p. 105

2.1.2 The CGTA as a Sustainable Tourism Network

The idea to use tourism networks to advance sustainable tourism is not new, even if it is not widely implemented in the United States. Many studies focus on examples in Europe or tropical beach destinations that navigate overtourism through tourism networks (Halme & Fadeeva, 2000; Van Der Zee & Vanneste, 2015). The network can therefore lean on findings from this research while having to adapt them to its new environment.

The advancement of sustainable tourism lies at the center of the CGTA's purpose, defined as "optimizing the positive impacts of the visitor economy while protecting the land" (Harper, 2020). Not only does this mission statement center the destination management but it specifically focuses on turning the tourism in the region into a sustainable economic force.

The goals for this mission statement are clarified in the 15-year vision statement. However, the vision statement stands to be accomplished by all actors in the Columbia River Gorge. The only written document that solidifies the role of the CGTA is its Statement of Intent. The statement outlines the goal

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of the network to be "developing the region as a world-class sustainable tourism economy" (CGTA, n.d.-b).

Sustainability is understood to be reached through:

- "Protecting and enhancing the scenic, natural, cultural and recreation resources."
- "Continue to enhance the visitor experience."
- "Understand and manage the impact of tourism on local communities and their economies."
  (Harper, 2020)

Furthermore, the network demonstrates its sustainable values through its impact areas. The Statement of Intent identified those immediate focus items at the time of the founding of the network. The impact areas of the CGTA have gone through multiple changes since its founding in 2016 but are as of writing this paper as follows:

- Car-Free Visitor Transportation
- Culture
- Culinary + Agritourism
- Outdoor Recreation
- Welcomability
- Visitor Dispersal
  (Source: CGTA, n.d.-a)

Figure 2. Venn Diagram Overview of the CGTA's Action Areas
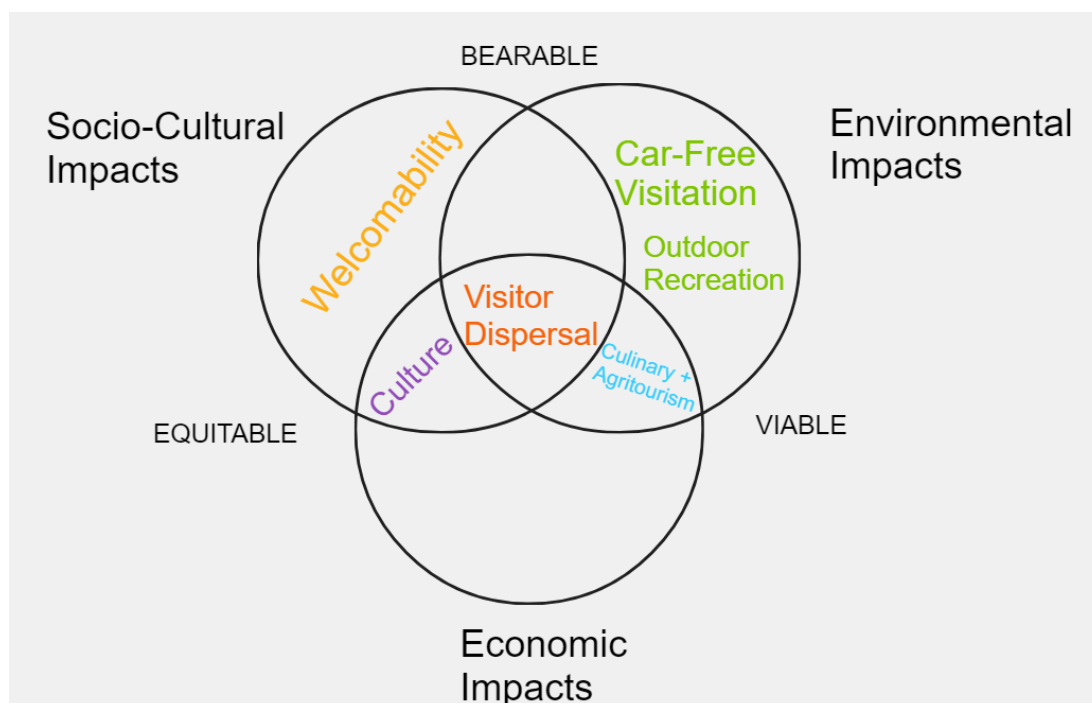
Source: Own Illustration

The triple-bottom line provides a framework for sustainable tourism as a standard established by the United Nations' World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, n.d.). The impact areas can be sorted into the factors of sustainability in the form of the Venn diagram. Figure 2 shows that no impact area is solely focused on the economic benefit of the local community. This underscores the argument that the purpose of the CGTA is solely the sustainable development of the Columbia River Gorge. Culture, culinary + agritourism, and visitor dispersal efforts involve some economic promotion of local businesses to prevent profits from going to external companies. They also focus on the preservation of local culture, the strengthening of the local food system to reduce transport emissions and the minimization the impact of large numbers of visitors has in one location.

2.2 Structure of the CGTA

The structure of the CGTA results from its identity as a sustainable tourism impact network as conceived by Ehrlichman (2021). His goal was to increase and accelerate the exchange of knowledge and allow for effective collaboration while avoiding traditional hierarchical structures that erode trust (Ehrlichman, 2021). In addition to that, the flat structure lends itself well to tourism in which decision-making powers reside in individuals rather than algorithms or other technologies (Halme, 2001).

Figure 3. Structure of the CGTA
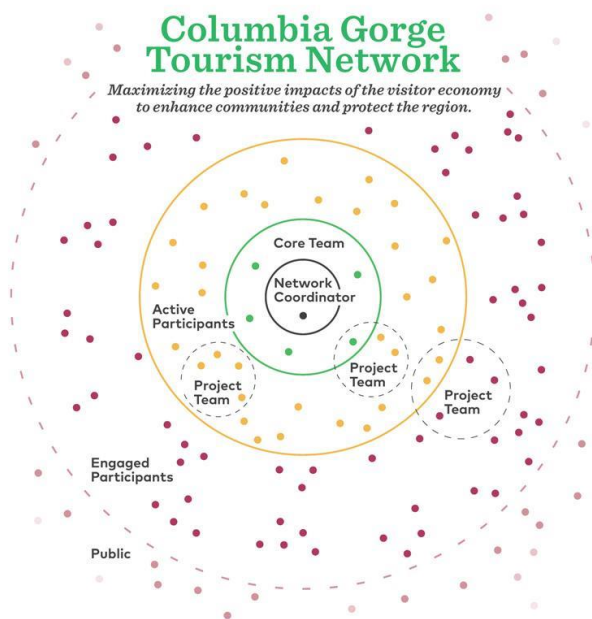
Source: Reed, 2022

The organizational chart in Figure 3 reflects the flat structure. Rather than depicting a top-to-bottom organization with one-way communication lines, the members of the organization are ordered in concentric circles that overlap. Movement between the circles is explicitly encouraged. Project teams within these circles and bridging several circles allow everyone to participate.

The organizational chart in Figure 3 shows five different roles that stakeholders can take within the network from the network coordinator to the public. This necessitates a definition of what a network member is. While the roles of network members were defined when the network was founded, the meaning has shifted in practical application. Therefore, the following description in Table 2 is an attempt to categorize the different membership types based on practical experience.

Table 2. Membership Types and Responsibilities

Membership Type	Characteristics
Public	- Members are not directly aware of the network but depict the environment the network acts within.
Engaged Participants	- Members participate in the annual summit. - They might benefit from one or several of the network projects. - Members might have participated actively in the past or plan to in the future.
Active Participants	- Members attend monthly meetings regularly and/or - They are actively involved in at least one project team.
Core Team	- Members are advisors to Network Coordinator on important decisions during monthly meetings. - Participants represent and champion the network publicly, e.g., at conferences or at other public

	convenings.
Network Coordinator	- The coordinator facilitates monthly meetings within action teams. - They lead some project teams as needed and complete project work as discussed with the project team. - They establish new relationships and engage new participants. - The coordinator also oversees the funding of the network and its projects. - They represent the network and its ideas at public events like conferences or award shows. - They are often the connector between network members, field daily communication requests with network members and weave new connections.

Source: Own Illustration based on CGTA, 2019

Not depicted in the organizational chart are board members. The CGTA has an overseeing board which has to be consulted on major decisions, e.g., funding decisions or letters of support. The board convenes every two months to share updates and vote on major decisions. Board members can and are encouraged to be active participants outside of the board activities.

For the sake of this research, it was evaluated that "network members" in the context of the research question must be at least "active participants" in order to have a better understanding of the network. Since the goal of this research is to better understand the reasoning behind the acceptance to further attract

active participants, it would be beneficial for members to be from a variety of organizations both private and public.

2.3 The CGTA's Value Proposition

There has been some research into sustainable tourism networks. Van Der Zee and Vanneste (2015) found a general set of benefits that were found across several studies: "innovation, learning, quality improvement and sustainable economic development" (cf. Van Der Zee and Vanneste, 2015, p. 22). These categories are too general for the sake of this research. Scott et al. (2007) focused on small and medium-sized enterprises in sustainable tourism networks and noted an increase in innovation and knowledge sharing led to better business performance.

The CGTA's benefits are better compared to the findings of Halme (2001) that noted: alignment of values and business action, increased sense of community (especially in rural areas), better information, collective action against or for decisions that affect business, optimization of resources and costs among others. This reflects part of the CGTA's value proposition.

There are several documents that outline the value proposition of the CGTA. The holistic goals that the network hopes to support are outlined in the 15-year vision (CGTA, n.d.-c) and the Statement of Intent (CGTA, n.d.-b). The former shows a vision for the Columbia River Gorge as an entire region. It is the goal that all tourism stakeholders should strive towards but whose implementation is not only the CGTA's responsibility.

The Statement of Intent (CGTA, n.d.-b) on the other hand concerns the CGTA's role in sustainable tourism development in the Gorge. It outlines the goals the organization has for creating a more sustainable tourism destination by "protecting and enhancing the scenic, natural, cultural and recreation

resources of the Columbia River Gorge and neighboring Cascades, while highlighting our local communities off the beaten path" (CGTA, n.d.-b). Members can expect this to outline the goals they strive towards when joining the network.

Furthermore, the partnership form (CGTA, 2020) outlines several specific benefits that organization and/or individuals can expect when joining the network:

- Powerful bi-state network
- Collaboration and relationship building
- Raise destination profile nationally and internationally
- Government advocacy
- Support fundraising for their projects
- Education of the public around natural and cultural resources
- Conversion to sustainable tourism

It can be inferred that these benefits will appear as answers to the research question since these are specific benefits of the tourism network as a tool. The list was established in 2020 based on the experience of members in the network. While it is not based on a specific survey, it underwent multiple revisions in board meetings and can be seen as a representative impression. The following research will focus on the relation of these benefits to sustainable tourism development and their importance to member acceptance.

3 Diffusion of Innovation

3.1 Definition of Acceptance

Acceptance is a commonly used term in everyday language but is also seen as a social phenomenon and of interest within business research. Today, it is most used to evaluate the acceptance of the public of new technology, e.g., artificial intelligence technologies. Research often centers around the acceptance of new products or marketing tactics (Klosa, 2016).

Acceptance is a widely used term that shows a lack of clear definition. The Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.b) defines acceptance as "general agreement that something is satisfactory or right." This definition is too broad for practical application within the scope of this paper.

Researchers have defined acceptance as "intention to adopt an application" (cf. Chismar & Wiley-Patton, 2002, p. 1) or "a phenomenon that reflects, to what extent potential users are willing to use a certain system" (cf. Ausserer & Risser, 2005, p. 3). Neither of these definitions account for an actual behavior change. Rather, they equate the intention with the action.

To better reflect reality and to account for the theoretical models brought forward in Ch. 3.2 (pp. 17 – 21), this work will see acceptance to have an attitudinal and behavioral component as brought forward by Müller-Böling & Müller (1986). The attitudinal component is explained to consist of a feeling that is consistently evoked by the research object and the cognitive or rational mindset concerning the research object. Lastly, the behavioral aspect is the observable behavior.

This definition by Müller-Böling & Müller (1986) is more suited to this research as interviewees are already members of the tourism network, i.e., they already

exhibit the observable behavior of acceptance. A more complex definition of acceptance allows for a more in-depth understanding of the members' mindsets.

3.2 Theoretical Explanations for Acceptance

When evaluating why members accept the network as a valuable tool to advance sustainable tourism, it is beneficial to first understand how acceptance happens. There are several different models that will be touched on in this chapter before one is chosen to build the basis for the further research.

3.2.1 Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action by Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) is a cognitive theory to understand how acceptance occurs in human behavior. The theory consists of the components already mentioned in the definition but connects them into a sequence of consequences as shown in Figure 4 (LaCaille, 2013).

Figure 4. Theory of Reasoned Action
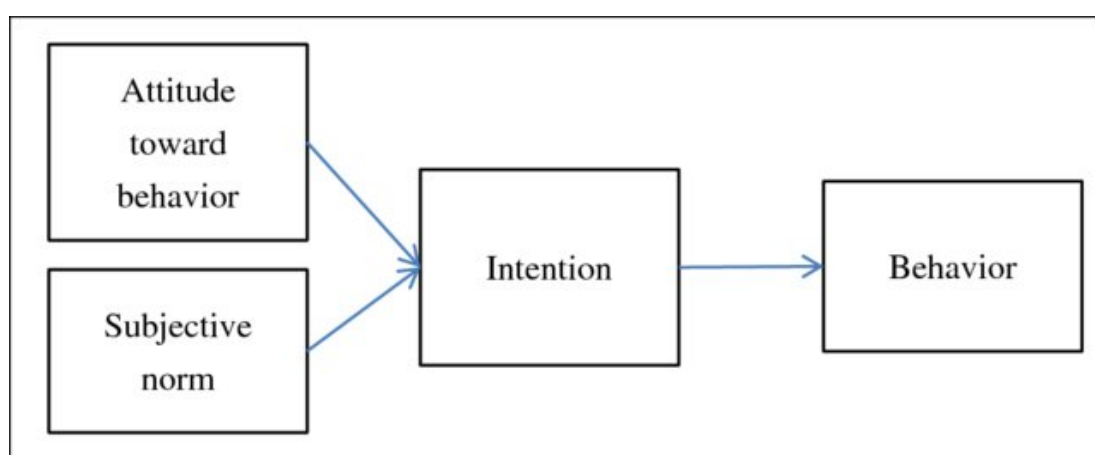
Source: Ajzen & Madden, 1986, p. 454

According to the theory, we are able to predict behavior by a precedent intention that is created both through the attitude towards the behavior and the subjective norm. The former refers to the stance the individual has on the discussed behavior while the latter refers to how they predict people in their environment like friends, family or colleagues might perceive them for engaging in the behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

This model of explaining acceptance is greatly simplified. Many people would not struggle to come up with intentions that they have had for years, for example learning a new language, that they have failed to follow through with. The Theory of Reasoned Action, while well-established and revolutionary at the time (Sniehotta et al., 2014), is outdated now and insufficient in reflecting the reasons behind the acceptance of the tourism network.

3.2.2 Theory of Planned Behavior

The Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991) is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action, adding several elements to explain the emergence of a behavior. The subjective perception and attitude are now preceded by behavioral beliefs and normative beliefs.

The behavioral control, and its perception and beliefs by the individual are new elements. This prevents the equation of intention to actual behavior (Ajzen, 1991). For example, many people intend to reduce their carbon emissions but lack the actual behavioral control when presented with the opportunity of a cheap flight. It is therefore determined to be capable of reflecting more complex decisions.

Figure 5. Theory of Planned Behavior
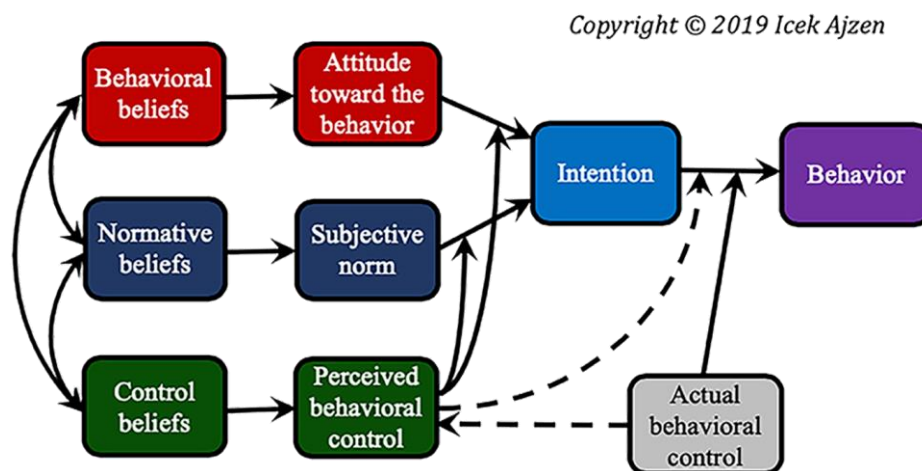
Source: Ajzen, 2019

The Theory of Planned Behavior shares some limitations with the Theory of Reasoned Action. Most cited is the fact that it relies on rational reasoning, i.e., does not account for emotions influencing whether an intention translates into behavior (Sniehotta et al., 2014). While it is often used to study health behavior, its focus on beliefs and their influence on norms is less useful when dealing with an intersection of organizations and their representatives.

3.2.3 Diffusion of Innovation Theory

Other than the two previously mentioned theories, Rogers' Theory of Innovation (2003) centers the terminology of innovation and its acceptance rather than the relationship of intention and behavior. Innovation is defined as "an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption" (cf. Rogers, 2003, p. 31). This is fitting for this scope of work as tourism networks are perceived as a new concept in the Pacific Northwest and regarded as a novel practice.

Rogers (2003) refers to acceptance as one of the stages of Diffusion of Innovation. The diffusion process refers to the communication of an innovation "through certain channels over time among members of a social system" (cf. Rogers, 2003, p. 25). As acceptance is seen as one of the steps, the components referring to circumstances and elements of diffusion are still applicable to acceptance research.

The model of Diffusion of Innovation also incorporates the elements of social system, communication channels and time. A common subject of diffusion scholars are the traits of earlier adopters versus those of later adopters, centering the element of time in their research (Rogers, 2003). To answer the research question, those elements are of lesser importance. While research into those elements of tourism networks are of interest, they exceed the scope of research for this paper.

Instead, the focus lies on the traits of tourism networks as they are perceived by the network members. Special attention is paid to the relative advantage the network poses compared to previous structures, the complexity of the concept and the role observability plays in making the network an effective tool in advancing sustainable tourism. Trialability is disregarded as members of the public are invited to meetings and the innovation therefore shows a high degree of trialability. Compatibility was already proven to be a significant component according to Halme and Fadeeva (2000).

Table 3. Characteristics of Innovation after Rogers

Characteristic	Influence on Diffusion
Relative Advantage	The innovation is perceived to be superior to previous concepts. The greater the advantage, the more likely a

	fast diffusion is.
Compatibility	The innovation aligns with an individuals' existing values, past experiences and needs. The higher the degree of alignment, the quicker the diffusion process is going to happen.
Complexity	This refers to how hard it is to understand and apply the innovation. The simpler the concept and use, the quicker the diffusion process is going to be.
Trialability	This trait describes whether it is possible to use the innovation on a limited basis. Trial processes ease the way of diffusion.
Observability	The innovation and the results of its use are visible to others. Visibility makes it more likely for people to adopt the innovation.

Source: Cf. Rogers, 2003

4 Methodology

4.1. Participant Selection

The research involves eight qualitative, semi-structured interviews with four public and four private participating members. As discussed in 2.2 Structure of the CGTA, members are defined as active participants. Based on this definition, it was estimated that the CGTA has about 40 active members. The selection process took duration of participation and board member status into account with the goal to have varying levels of involvement and experience. The interviewees also reflect a mixture of private and public entities to portray different motivations behind the involvement. The outreach was conducted via email with a release form (see Appendix A) and a participant information form covering expected questions (see Appendix B).

Further demographic questions reveal that interviewees working directly in the tourism industry had a range of experience from three to 45 years and of the eight interviewees, two (or 25%) have received formal college education in tourism. All but one (or 87.5%) work for a small or medium-sized business or public entities which is representative of the majority of the CGTA members, and the majority (62.5% or five participants) were the only members of their organization involved in the network.

4.2 Structure of Interviews

Before the interview process, a first draft of the questionnaire was tested with two participants. The goal was to refine wording, determine further demographic data points of relevance to the research and the length of the interview. The questionnaire was expanded to include questions regarding their tourism education and the number of years the interviewee has worked in tourism. All interviews were conducted in July 2023.

The questionnaire is divided into a demographic section to collect general information relating to the participant's and the body of the interview with twelve in-depth questions. The ten demographic questions help to further interpret statements that are made during the interview. The body of the interview involves twelve questions that are divided into three sections (cf. Appendix C):

- Relative advantage of the CGTA for advancing sustainable tourism,
- Complexity of the network concept, and
- Observability of the impact

These sections correlate to the characteristics of an innovation as described by Rogers (2003). As previously mentioned, trialability and complexity were neglected as areas of studies for the sake of this research.

The method of qualitative exploration was chosen to enhance the insights on the members' motivation to better reflect a complex decision and rationalization process. Each interview is fifteen to twenty minutes in length and conducted through the online video call platform Zoom.

The audio was recorded with "Voice Memos" and later transcribed in Microsoft Word. Filler words such as "uhm," "ah," or "mmh" were skipped unless they represented a pause in the flow of the conversation. Grammatical mistakes such as, "There is a number of" were left as well as contractions and slang words such as, "I'm gonna." The transcripts can be found in Appendix D.

4.3 Evaluation of Interviews

A qualitative content analysis based on Mayring's encoding principles (2010) interprets the results of the interviews. The process uses a combination of deductive and inductive applications of categories to distill the results of the

interviews. The only deviation is the omittance of an intercoder check due to the limitations of this work being subject to grading. Figure 6 outlines the steps to evaluating the interviews.

Figure 6. Mayring's Steps of Qualitative Content Analysis
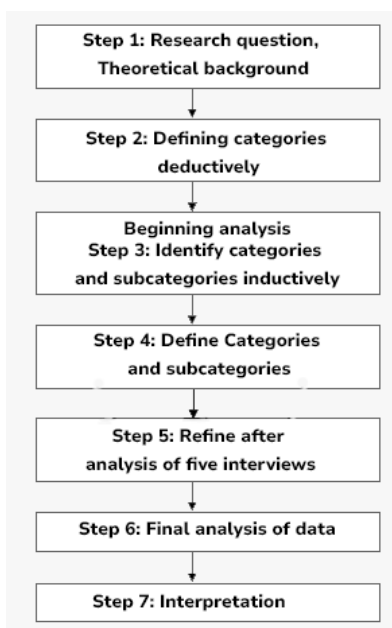
Source: Own depiction, based on Mayring, 2010, p. 605

Firstly, deductive categories based on Rogers' characteristics of innovation (2003) and the benefits as outlined in the partnership form (CGTA, 2020) built the foundation of the analysis as shown in step 2 of Figure 6. 'Collaboration' and 'Relationship Building' are broken into two categories to better evaluate the impact of each component (cf. Tab. 4).

Those are later joined by other categories or subcategories that emerge through the analysis process in an inductive manner as shown in step 3. Categories are subject to change throughout the analysis process until Step 4 (cf. Fig. 6). The definition of each category along with the rules of its encoding is discussed in Chapter 5.

Table 4. Deductive Categories at Beginning of Analysis

Category	Subcategory
Relative Advantage	- Bi-state network - Collaboration - Relationship building - Raise destination profile nationally and internationally - Government advocacy - Support fundraising for their projects - Education of the public around natural and cultural resources - Conversion to sustainable tourism Further subcategories are added inductively.
Complexity of the Network Concept	Subcategories added inductively.
Observability of the Network Impacts	Subcategories added inductively.

Source: Own Depiction based on Rogers, 2003

5 Results and their Implications

5.1 Results

It should be stated first that all participants agreed that the tourism network is focused on advancing sustainable tourism development. They were all able to name multiple sustainable tourism projects that the CGTA has worked on, even though one participant limited their statement to exclude certain projects, saying that they are sustainable but not centered on tourism development. Namely, they expressed doubts about the sustainable tourism value regarding public transit advocacy and inclusion of local food businesses on the food trails regardless of their visitor dispersal factor (ID-7).

5.1.1 Relative Advantage of the CGTA

To assess the success of the tourism network at developing sustainable tourism in the region, the participants were given a Likert scale. The average rating was a 3.69 with a median rating of 4 and a mode of 4. The general impression of the tourism network as a tool to advance sustainable tourism is therefore positive with room for improvement. This supports the assumption made in conducting this research that active members have found the tourism network to be an effective tool. These results support the membership benefit: Conversing to Sustainable Tourism (cf. Ch. 2.3, p. 15).

One of the most common relative advantage or benefit of the CGTA is relationship building. The benefit was brought up a total of eighteen times across six out of eight interviews (or 75%). The rules used to encode relationship building were statements involving relationships (or 'know people'), community, connection, communication, networking, contacts, interaction and unity. The encoding process lemmatized those words meaning that different forms of the words were allowed. For example, a section was

encoded as 'relationship building' when featuring variations of connection such as connected or connecting.

> I think it's created a greater sense of **unity** in the industry, and I think particularly people who really see themselves in the industry, like small business owners and you know, people working at the museum, they probably felt more **disconnected** before and I think I think there's a greater sense of **unity**. (ID-6)

> I feel like I **know many people** across various different industries and different elements of tourism across the Columbia River Gorge. I feel like I **know different stakeholders and network partners** (...). (ID-5)

Four people highlighted the fact that the CGTA brings together traditional tourism businesses and DMOs and connects them with public agencies such as the US Forest Service or the Oregon Department of Transportation (ID-4, ID-5, ID-7, ID-8). On one hand, it connects the agencies to current issues in the tourism realm to create awareness (ID-4, ID-7), but it also helps the public servants understand how they could help in ways they were not aware of before (ID-4).

> And then realizing that me personally or **my agency could help** in a number of areas and that people were coming from like the hospitality and the culture section and (...) providing input on transportation. (ID-4)

Another participant pointed out that the tourism network is the one meeting space in which said government agencies and private actors meet at eye-level and each voice is heard equally (ID-1). This indicates that the CGTA has successfully incorporated the network mindset. This makes it one of few cases, according to Van Der Zee & Vanneste (2015) who found evidence across several studies that small and medium-sized enterprises are often less likely to participate in tourism network due to "[a] lack of social capital and network skills, time and budget constraints or a dominant position of larger tourism

businesses" (p. 62). This can further be supported by the fact that all but one participant was part of a small or medium-sized organization with 50 or less staff members.

> Whether they are actively involved or not is fine but having them in the room to listen and be a part of it, that's I think important, and we don't see that in a lot of the other meetings where **everyone has an equal voice** at the table. It's usually one sway heavily towards one side or the other. (ID-1)

These valuable relationships span across the state border. In line with the value proposition of the network (cf. Ch. 2.3, pp. 14 - 15), 25% of participants (two members) mentioned the benefits of having a network that connects the Washington and Oregon side of the Columbia River (ID-3, ID-8). The network connects "cross-sector, cross-jurisdiction, cross-region actors and players (...) in the tourism industry and (...) related fields with (...) particular attention to the cross-state issues of the Columbia River Gorge" (ID-8).

The CGTA fills this role as a convener across two states and six counties because of its unique geographical location. Aside from assuring the relationships span across the river, the tourism network has assured that the work of both sides connect appropriately as state funding cannot support efforts in the other state. This is despite tourists perceiving the Columbia River Gorge as one destination (ID-8).

Table 5. Encoding Rules and Examples for Bi-State Network

Coding Rule	Examples
Statements involving: - "across the river"	"Ideally particular attention to the **cross-state** issues of the Columbia River Gorge because **state funding** lip stops at the boundaries, and so it

- "state funding" - "boundaries" (Lemmatization was used.)	really doesn't have a cohesive connection between the two sides and that's really- I think the kind of- the need that they're trying to fill kind of get everybody on." (ID-8) "Tourism in the gorge- Just needs- to have a- You know, a[n] organization that reaches **across the river** that represents everybody in the Gorge. And so there was nothing like it. And so, it's great." (ID-3)

Source: Own Illustration

It is this realization that tourists understand the destination as one entity that leads to the importance of aligned visions across all tourism stakeholders. One goal of the CGTA is the perpetuation of its 15-year vision for the Columbia River Gorge. According to two participants, it builds part of the relative advantage the tourism network has in comparison to other organizations (ID-4, ID-5).

It should be noted that participants were not asked directly about the importance of aligned visions, but the open-ended questions allowed them to choose which aspects of the networks were the most relevant to them. It is possible that other participants also regard the 15-year vision as a relative advantage but chose to focus on other aspects.

This leads to bi-state collaboration based on those established relationships and aligned visions. Through conversations, stakeholders identify shared issues that they can solve by connecting their resources. Collaboration culminates in projects that create tangible results. The CGTA is an action-

based network which supports but also leads some of these projects in the sustainable tourism development realm. Collaboration was emphasized by all eight participants (100%) a total of twenty times.

Table 6. Encoding Rules for Collaboration

Coding Rule	Examples
Statements involving: - "collaborate" - "come together" - "get involved/"actively involved" - "work together" - "working group" - "plan"/"holistic plan" - "holistic solution"/"holistic approach" - "help [sb.]"/"support [sb.]" - "combine forces" - "project" - "coordination" (Lemmatization was used.)	"I know the different operators and managers (...) throughout the Gorge, and we've communicated about our events and ways that we'd like to **collaborate** and communicate better in the future. So, I feel like that's also been nice to have because I don't know that there would be a- a way to do that if the network didn't exist." (ID-5) "the regional transportation agencies and CGTA was able to bring together groups that wouldn't normally talk to one another and get them to work- **work together** to advance regional tourism, you know, regional transportation in a way that I cannot imagine happening without CGTA." (ID-3)

Source: Own Illustration

It was emphasized by two participants that these collaborations would not have happened without the CGTA convening the relevant actors in one space (ID-3, ID-5) and allowing participants to contribute small pieces to have a unified

great impact (ID-1, ID-4). Projects have "supported multiple partners for multiple areas" (ID-7) and have had quick impact because of a lack of formal requirements and its grassroots structure (ID-1, ID-5) making it more effective than other action-based networks in the Columbia River Gorge (ID-1).

> The big project has been this ADA one we're working on. That's been a good turning point to show that we can affect outside of our own sphere of influence by working with others. It's kind of grown beyond. It's benefited us, but it's also-become bigger. (ID-1)

While connections and their resulting collaboration have a positive impact on private tourism firms through sharing of information (Van Der Zee & Vanneste, 2015), the experience of members shows that they perceive a considerable benefit to leveraging shared resources for sustainable tourism development. Three participants (37.5%) pointed out that part of the capability for development projects stems from the fact that through the tourism network, there is a continued source of leadership in the Gorge (ID-1, ID-6, ID-7). The perpetual existence of the network as a convening point is an essential difference to ad-hoc project teams to maximize impacts (ID-6).

The education of the public to favor sustainable initiatives was brought up three times (ID-3, ID-4, ID-6). The project "Ready, Set, Gorge" served as an example of these efforts in two of the three cases. The subcategory was encoded when phrases like "elevate awareness of visitors" or "provide information to visitors" were used.

The following benefits are listed in the partnership form (CGTA, 2020) but did not appear in the conducted interviews: raising the destination profile and supporting personal fundraising. These benefits did either not hold up or were less relevant for the tourism network to support sustainable tourism development.

Lastly, government advocacy was mentioned once across all interviews but only to point out areas in which the CGTA could grow its capacity (ID-4). Other aspects that were mentioned to improve the effectiveness of the CGTA as a tool to develop sustainable tourism are: increase fundraising (ID-1, ID-4), increase membership numbers (ID-1, ID-3, ID-7, ID-8) and adding new action areas (ID-6).

Table 7. Ranking of Relative Advantages of the CGTA

Relative Advantage	No. of Participants	No. of Encoded Segments	% of Total Encoded Rel. Adv. Seg.
Collab.	8	20	38.46%
Rel. Build.	6	18	34.62%
Perpetuation	3	4	7.69%
Ed. of Visitor	3	3	5.77%
Sole Sus. Focus	2	3	5.77%
Bi-State Network	2	2	3.85%
Alignment	2	2	3.85%

Source: Own Illustration Based on Member Interviews

These seven relative advantages can be ranked by the number of participants that brought up said advantage as well as the number of encoded segments for each advantage. The more often an advantage was brought up, the higher its importance is to network members. Collaboration and relationship building are the two leading benefits with collaboration taking the lead. This implies that

projects and tangible results are fundamental for the perceived usefulness of a sustainable tourism network.

Figure 7. Importance of Each Relative Advantage to Network Members
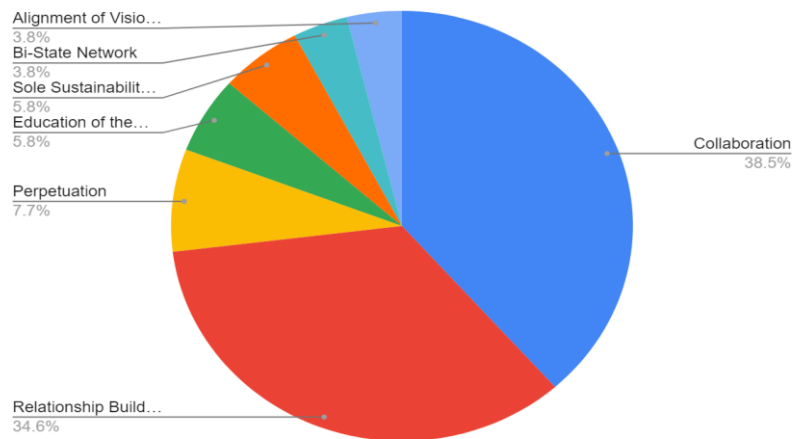
Source: Own Illustration Based on Interview Data

Especially when looking at the data in a pie chart, it becomes apparent how significant relationship building and collaboration are for sustainable tourism development. The other advantages each show little variation in their importance. However, this should not indicate that tourism networks can neglect these benefits as they were still relevant enough to be mentioned in the interviews.

5.1.2 Complexity of Tourism Network Concept

Another characteristic of acceptance is the complexity of the tourism network concept. The goal was to evaluate whether the network concept was difficult to grasp for network members and the factors that contributed to the perceived complexity. According to Rogers (2003), the more complex an innovation, the slower the adoption process.

The first step was to evaluate how active participants explain the CGTA to others. The goal was to evaluate if they used the term 'network' or had already found another term to explain the type of organization. When asked to describe the CGTA to someone that is unfamiliar with it, four out of eight participants (50%) described it as a "network" while the other 50% used a variation thereof ("conglomeration of folks" (ID-5), "regional tourism association" (ID-3), "partner-facing organization" (ID-2) or "industry leaders getting together" (ID-1)).

In the next step, participants were asked whether they find the tourism network concept easy to understand. 62.5% (five out of eight) of participants admitted that the tourism concept is not easy to understand or requires further explanation. This allows for an evaluation of the relationship between the use of the word 'network' in the description and the perceived ease of understanding.

The results are linked in a matrix to calculate statistical significance through a Fisher's Exact Test (cf. Tab. 4). The test is used to generate more accurate results than the Chi-Square Test due to the small sample size. The returned p-value is 1, therefore suggesting that there is no significant relationship between the use of the network and the perceived complexity of the tourism network concept. This suggests that the more meaningful result is the majority of participants evaluating the concept as hard to understand.

Table 8. Relationship Matrix for Perceived Complexity of Networks

	Easy to Understand	**Hard to Understand**
'Network'	2	2
Not Using 'Network'	1	3

Source: Own Illustration

When asked to disclose a specific moment or project that made them understand the network principles, three out of eight (37.5%) mentioned an ADA project from Summer 2022, two (25%) remarked they were founding members and their perception of the network evolved with its development process and another two (25%) mentioned that participating in meetings was most effective at making them understand the purpose and functionality of the network. The ADA project can therefore be seen as an exemplary project that can be used as an example to demonstrate the functionality of a tourism network.

> That waterfall corridor project was a great example. A problem was identified from a tourism partner and a handful of people were able to come together quickly and pull multiple resources from different agencies and create a solution that- that supported multiple partners for multiple areas, and it was based in tourism. I think that was a very cool small example of what- What I really and the network can do. They don't always have to be so like quick or anything but the- Multiple people getting involved with different aspects. They're being a critical part of what a network could and should be. (ID-7)

In the following, the factors that influence complexity shall be evaluated. Five out of the eight participants (or 62.5%) indicated that their tourism education played a role in the perceived complexity of the tourism network concept (ID-1, ID-2, ID-5, ID-6, ID-7). Two participants stated that their unfamiliarity with tourism contributed to their difficulty in understanding the network concept (ID-1, ID-5). An area of future research regarding complexity may therefore be the understanding of tourism and sustainable tourism in relation to the understanding of the sustainable tourism network concept. If members are unfamiliar with the underlying concepts, the complexity might not stem from the network mindset.

> You know, tourism wasn't something that I had a background in and so I was getting- my role was created to really work on downtown development, in community development, within primarily our downtown area, which is directly related and nearly identical to tourism and destination development I just didn't know that at the time because I didn't know really anything about tourism. (ID-5)

Another factor that adds to the complexity in understanding the CGTA as an innovation for sustainable tourism development is the overlap of functionality with the local RDMO, called Mount Hood and Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance. Not only are the organizations similar in name but the RDMO also supports sustainable tourism projects like the Trail Ambassadors program (ID-7). The RDMO overlap was brought up by 25% of participants. One participant entered the region when both organizations were established and pointed out that the increased focus of the RDMO on management rather than marketing further blurs the distinction between the two (ID-5) while another described the relationship as a "veil of competition" (ID-5).

It should be remarked that the RDMO does not convene tourism stakeholders in the way the CGTA does. Another distinction between the two organizations is that the RDMO is strictly tied to the Oregon side of the state border while the CGTA is not. The RDMO therefore needs the CGTA to support efforts for the Washington side of the Gorge that lacks an RDMO representative if the goal is to portray an evenly developed destination. Other tourism networks should therefore be aware of other organizations working on similar issues that can add to the complexity.

Since 2019, the CGTA has functioned not only as a convener but also a project lead on various initiatives like outdoor safety education with Ready, Set, GOrge or a coordinated public transit pass with GOrge Pass. This work involves leading meetings but also producing and implementation of marketing

assets, social media management, development of content assets such as website content and brochures as well as organizing goods needed to support the provision of services.

> So, a network, I think, it's supposed to be more about functioning as (...) bringing partners together to work together- to [find, from author] solutions together, but [then] they are leading that work and CGTA [is the one that, from author] leads a lot of work (ID-7).

One participant indicated this further complicates people's understanding of the network since those are not grassroots projects but are clearly led by the tourism network (ID-7). Networks are, as another participant said, often understood simply as a networking opportunity (ID-6). This wrong assumption about networks and its capabilities further complicates the process. In fact, it might indicate that the use of the word network is limiting when conveying the concept to others. Rather, the CGTA can therefore be seen to fulfill three separate functions: gathering, coordination and sustainable tourism project execution around the action areas as illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Functions of the CGTA and their Relationships
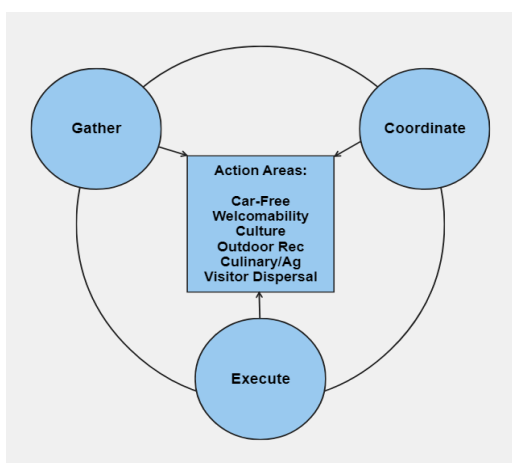
Source: Own Illustration

Another factor seems to be that the personal benefit can get lost for sustainable tourism networks. Unlike traditional business networks in tourism that are focused on aligning marketing messages, sustainability does not necessarily have direct, short-term benefits to the bottom line of a business. 50% of participants stated that the personal benefits of networks are more complex to grasp. While "in theory (...) it'd be easy to understand for most people, (...) if explained to them, (...) it might become murkier if an individual is trying to think of (...) what benefit they would have directly (...), like what the value would be for them" (ID-8). The personal benefits should therefore be closely monitored and centered in direct messaging to the tourism stakeholders of the region.

> [about first joining the network, of author] What benefit am I getting back? What (...) am I expected to put into it? (...) Is it a paid membership? Is it a voluntary membership? (ID-1)

Not only that, but the active participation in the network also seems to require an understanding and valuation of long-term benefits for the whole region (ID-3). This reflects Rogers (2003) dimension of compatibility with an innovation as well as Halme and Fadeeva's findings (2000). Despite disregarding the area of study for this research, three participants mentioned that they are active in the network because it aligns with their values (ID-2, ID-3, ID-5). This suggests the significant importance of the business owner's personal values regarding sustainable tourism development.

> [A] lot of the properties in the gorge are just busy keeping up with the traffic that's coming in and they're not really focused on the long-term effects of tourism. (ID-3)

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5.1.3 Observability of the Network Impacts

Going into the interviews, an assumption was made about the observability of the CGTA. Firstly, the tourism network has executed or majorly supported several projects that have had tangible results such as increased information availability for visitors (CGTA, n.d.-a). Secondly, while listed on the website of the CGTA, the projects themselves do not link back to the CGTA website, decreasing the observability of the impacts as ones caused by the tourism network. The observability of tangible results coming out of the network in a public landscape is therefore low.

Within the tourism industry, the network can mostly be observed as the convener of the Annual Gorge Tourism Summit. This industry-facing event as well as the website are clearly branded as projects of the CGTA. The most recent summit had about 50 attendees showing a rather low observability in the tourism industry of the Columbia River Gorge.

50% of all participants felt that involvement in the network is critical to observe the results of the network (ID-3, ID-4, ID-5, ID-7), supporting the impression of low observability. Involved partner would include other destination development entities such as the DMOs/Chambers, the RDMO and Travel Oregon as organizations aware of the network's impacts. Since those organizations also operate in a business-facing manner, they could potentially enhance the network's visibility.

> You kind of have to be close to it or (...) benefit [from, of author] one of the projects to really kind of know and understand what CGTA is in the Gorge. (ID-4).

Branding or 'tag marketing' is unlikely to affect the public perception or increase the success of the implemented projects (ID-2). It stands to argue that public-facing branding therefore would be pointless in attracting new

members. However, most businesses - and therefore potential network partners - interact with public-facing materials, not realizing that those are connected to the network.

To make a distinction between a "tourist" and a "resident" is a false dichotomy. Residents are visitors to their own region, they use mobility options, dine at restaurants and peruse attractions on weekends and own small and medium businesses in the region. As one of the participants pointed out, "as a as a resident now I actually get to benefit from that transportation, you know, and as a resident, I get to, like, know where to go [when, of author] I'm going over to The Dalles and know like, what cool places to go and eat local food at" (ID-6). Public-facing branding would therefore also have the potential to reach future network members.

The question is then what benefits increased observability would have for sustainable tourism development. Rogers (2003) stated that increased visibility of impacts would lead to faster adoption of an innovation. In this case, 50% (four out of eight) of the participants brought up an increase in membership as a potential benefit to the network (ID-1, ID-3, ID-7, ID-8). The network shows a higher population of transportation stakeholders (private shuttle providers, public transit providers and bike/pedestrian activists) rather than traditional tourism stakeholders from the hospitality industry (ID-1, ID-3, ID-7). A strategic increase in membership numbers could create a greater momentum (ID-8).

> [If, of author] people don't see the things that they are kind of successfully doing and championing and creating that it might make them less likely to seek out and even know about them as an option- see them as a viable or valuable option, and I think that that would kind of end up reducing the like the scope of impact particularly. (ID-8)

As one member points out, the network with its seven years of existence is well enough established at this point that the people that are plugged in, continue to be plugged in: "[It's] (...) just sort of an inertia that keeps going with some of the same players" (ID-8). Since networks largely depend on the grassroots structure, a wider range of members can help find better, more holistic solutions on one hand and increases the chances of external leadership that the network staff does not have to take on.

50% of all participants brought up that the decrease in observability also detracts from funding opportunities for the tourism network (ID-1, ID-2, ID-5, ID-6). Association of the network with their successful projects can help generate more funding (ID-5). Especially with sustainable tourism programs in rural areas, funding helps small and medium-sized enterprises when implementing the programs. The idea is here that if tourism businesses in the Gorge observe the impacts of the tourism network, they are more likely to donate.

Despite those arguments, not everyone is in favor of increasing observability. 25% of participants stated that they are in favor of staying behind the scenes (ID-6, ID-7). In one case, the participants even stated that they perceive the network has already taken credit for a project that it was not involved in (ID-7). While this instance of wrongfully implying CGTA involvement with the Oregon Trailkeepers lies years in the past, the impression clearly lingers, leading to hesitation about public communication. This disagreement about the right way to present the tourism network to the outside reflects discussions held at the Strategic Planning Meeting in January 2023.

One participant (12.5%) has stated that the current level of observability has caused problems for their organization which points to the limits of the

capabilities for a network approach. As soon as increased observability turns network partners into competitors, the network mindset of a flat hierarchy that promotes trust becomes unobtainable. Observability can therefore not be a factor that sustainable tourism networks rely on if they are aware of an overlap of function in their region. Other solutions have to be sought out.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

The research supports some of the benefits listed by Halme and Fadeeva (2000) as relative advantages of tourism networks to advance sustainable tourism. The results similarly align with the general benefits laid out by Van Der Zee and Vanneste (2015). Lastly, they also support Halme's Framework for Learning in Sustainable Tourism Networks (2001) that suggests that networks need reinforcing positive experiences or, in other words, tangible results.

As a next step, research should focus on measuring the outcomes of sustainable tourism networks (Van Der Zee & Vanneste, 2015). This echoes a current development in the tourism industry. The UNWTO (n.d.) is currently working on developing an international framework for measuring sustainable tourism. This international standard could then be used as a starting point to measure the impact of sustainable tourism networks.

When evaluating the complexity of sustainable tourism networks, the research revealed a general agreement that the phenomenon is complex. The author suggests additional research whether this complexity stems from a lack of understanding of sustainable tourism or the network mindset itself.

Additionally, researchers should consider an inquiry into the value perception of the network approach in different cultures within the tourism industry. The

individualistic culture could have played a role in the delayed development of tourism networks in the United States.

The measuring of tangible outcomes would also be beneficial for further inquiry into the observability of sustainable tourism networks. Results suggest that the lack of observability on one hand limits the ability of the CGTA to grow further while simultaneously presenting a conflict of interests. Research in this area should compare these findings to other tourism networks, specifically within the United States. While the network mindset should allow for all participating members to take credit, the reality within the capitalistic system, in which the network operates, requires it to show results for continued funding opportunities. Attention should be paid to competitive organizations operating within a network's space.

5.3 Practical Implications

The CGTA now has robust findings in its benefits and relative advantage. Aside from implications about which aspects to advertise to future members, it can also derive recommendations about its activities. While the CGTA's involvement in the project work and its resulting visibility in the space splits the opinions of members, it is the most-cited benefit of the network (cf. Ch. 5.1.1 pp. 33 - 34).

A reporting of impacts of the collaboration is recommended to show the difference the network has made in improving the local tourism industry. As of this writing, CGTA does not have annual measurements for all its initiatives in place. Some indicators include public transit ridership and social media engagement (on monthly basis). Future indicators could include congestion, local food usage or queer visitor's safety perception. It should be in the interest of tourism agencies to support these efforts financially.

While Emily Reed and Kristin Dahl were mentioned as having successfully conveyed the idea of the network concept (ID-2, ID-4), further exploration into network explanations could be made. When sharing the CGTA's principles with potential members or other interested parties, it should not be assumed that they understand the full capabilities or functionality of the organization.

One recommendation would be to emphasize the community spirit that networks create. The CGTA could focus on conveying that the network gives tourism business the power to fix the issues that have arisen with overtourism. This could be particularly successful in the rural areas that already show a tendency towards limited government ideology.

In order to maintain or grow the network, the CGTA has to continuously look for potential members that share its vision and values. Not only has past research shown this (Halme & Fadeeva, 2000), but also the fact that it was brought up within the conducted interviews. People with aligned values are the community leaders that can make a difference, create momentum and lead to lasting change. One goal should be to evaluate how to best attract people in the tourism sphere that already show inclinations towards sustainable action.

As already mentioned, the observability cannot be increased without defying the network mindset. Instead, the CGTA can add value to their already existing visibility by measuring its results. When (potential) members can see tangible impacts in the form of data sets, they might be more likely to want to join the efforts or support them financially.

6 Conclusion

To support sustainable tourism networks and show their benefits, this work evaluated why members accept the CGTA as a tool to advance sustainable tourism in the Columbia River Gorge. The research used Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory (2003). The aspect of innovation was specifically evaluated for its characteristics: relative advantage, complexity, and observability for network members.

The results indicate that members accept the CGTA because of its relative advantage compared to other organizations or efforts in advancing sustainable tourism themselves. The research shows that collaboration with tangible results and relationship building are the most significant benefits for members.

Members also were able to understand the network concept either through participation (trialability) or explanation. The majority felt that it is a more complex innovation to understand the full scope and capabilities of. Especially since the observability of the impact is limited and most visible to members already actively engaged in the network.

The findings support further theoretical exploration of sustainable tourism networks, specifically within the United States. Areas of interest include the measurement of tangible outcomes, the acceptance of the network mindset within tourism in the US and the limitations of observability on other tourism networks.

Lastly, it should be acknowledged that the research does not guarantee applicability to all other sustainable tourism networks. The results should be compared to a larger sample size. For an increased accuracy of the results, Mayring also plans for an independent check of categories to see whether both

researchers arrive at the same rules of categorization. This was not possible within this work.

Additionally, while the complexity of the network concept was discussed with participants, a common agreement on what the network mindset includes was not established. Participants therefore might have stated that they find the network concept easy to understand without having an accurate understanding of it themselves.

The sphere of sustainable tourism networks remains a fruitful area of research as the need for sustainable tourism development becomes more urgent. This work has shown several ways in which tourism networks are helpful tools in advancing this development. Future research can support its effectiveness as well as exploring solutions for its limitations.

Appendix

Appendix A: Release Form

Nicole Wähner
International and Sustainable Tourism
Bachelor's Thesis

▲ Hochschule Harz
Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften

Release Form
Participating in Interview for "Tourism Networks and Sustainable Networks"

Researcher: Nicole Wähner, Hochschule Harz and Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance

- I have received the information regarding the research project and understood them.
- I had the possibility to ask questions that were answered to my satisfaction.
- I am okay with the interview audio being recorded and that the content will be transcribed.
- I was informed that the participation in the study is voluntary. I am aware that I can revoke my participation in the study at any point without negative consequences.
- If I revoke my participation, I have the choice whether I want my data to be deleted or I am okay with the data being used for research purposes. If the results of the study are already processed it is possible that it will not be possible to delete my data.
- I agree to participate in the study.
    Yes ◯   No ◯

Name of the Participant: _____

Signature: _____

Date: ___/___/2023

Appendix B: Participant Information

▲ Hochschule Harz
Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften

Nicole Wähner
International and Sustainable Tourism
Bachelor's Thesis

Tourism Networks and Sustainable Development
A Case Study of Network Member Perception For Advancing Sustainable Tourism

Background of the Research
Tourism networks are emerging new organizations that add to traditional regional destination management organizations (RDMOs) to support complex destination development. These impact networks seek to reflect the holistic structure of tourism because they can unite a wide variety of stakeholders and align their visions in working towards a successful and for all participants sustainable destination.

A network is only as good as its members. Impact networks are built on involving actors with different ideas on how to solve one or multiple issues while being able to agree on the desired outcome. The network needs to be able to continuously engage the members based on the common vision and push towards the adoption of this vision across the whole community. In the case of CGTA, it is the implementation of sustainable tourism.

This research therefore seeks to evaluate the acceptance of participating members of the tourism network as an effective tool to advance sustainable tourism.

Why were you invited?
You are an active participant in the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance by participating in meetings, working on the board or actively participating in project teams. I reached out to a number of different members that have participated in the network for varying amounts of time and for a variety of organizations, both private and public. The gathered information is not going to be shared with third parties.

How can you participate?
You were invited by an informal email inviting you to this interview. When signing the release form, you agree to participate in this study. The participation in this interview is voluntary. The interview audio will be recorded solely for research purposes.

What happens during the interview?

This study includes an interview with 8 network members that last about 10 to 15 minutes. The first 8 questions concern some demographic data about your participation in the network. The following questions concern your experience with the network.

Are there any risks for you?

No, the interviews will happen in a one-on-one conversation with me personally in the familiar setting of a Zoom meeting.

How do I ensure your privacy?

The gathered data is treated confidentially and cannot be connected to your name. Your participation in the study remains anonymous. Results will be presented and processed in a manner that cannot be traced back to your name.

Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?

No, participation in this study is totally free.

Who can I contact if I have concerns?

If you have concerns relating to this study, feel free to contact me, Nicole Wahner at
- nicole.waeh@gmail.com or
- 541-625-3570

How can I receive the results of the study?

This paper will be completed by mid-August 2023. You can reach out if you are interested in receiving a copy. You will receive a reminder that the results are available in the CGTA newsletter.

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Note: The sections in-between were read aloud while the headings printed in bold were not disclosed to the participant.

Demographic Information
1. What is your name?
2. What organization do you work for?
3. Is this a public or a private organization?
4. What is your position within that organization?
5. How many members are within your organization?
6. If applicable, how long have you been working in the tourism industry?
7. Do you have any form of formal education in tourism?
8. Are you the only person within your organization that is involved in CGTA?
9. When did you personally first join CGTA that means started to attend meetings?
    1. Are you the first person from your organization to be involved with CGTA?
10. What, if any, action teams are you active in?

The following questions concern your personal experience with the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance which will be referred to as "the network" or "CGTA." Please answer the questions as honestly as possible to produce the most accurate research results. The answers will be anonymized and treated confidentially.

Relative Advantage of CGTA for Advancing Sustainable Tourism
1. Why did you start attending meetings?
2. What is the value that you get out of the network for your job specifically?
3. If you know, can you speak on why your organization originally decided to join the network?

The next couple of questions concern CGTA's work in advancing sustainable tourism development. When we speak of advancing sustainable tourism here, we mean aiming to minimize negative impacts of the tourism industry on the people, the place and the local economy while maximizing the positive ones. This definition is based on the definition by the Global Sustainable Tourism Council.

4. Would you agree that the network is focused on advancing sustainable tourism?
5. On a scale of 1 through 5 with 1 being the least and 5 being the most, how effective is CGTA in advancing sustainable tourism?
6. Can you explain your rating?

Complexity of the Network Concept
7. How would you explain CGTA to someone that has never heard of it?

8.   Since tourism networks are a fairly new and unique concept, would you say it is easy to understand its functionality and purpose? Why or why not?
9.   Was there a specific moment or project that made you understand the purpose of the network?

Observability of the Impact
10.   How has the network changed tourism in the Gorge?
11.   The network generally keeps a low profile with the projects it works on - for example the Gorge Pass website has no mention of CGTA. Do you think this influences how successful the network is in advancing sustainable tourism?
12.   Does the network get recognized by the tourism industry in the region for its work? Why or why not?

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Declaration Under Oath

With this, I assure that the work at hand was written independently by me, no other sources or aids were used than the ones that have been disclosed here, and any quotes were clearly marked, and the work has not been submitted to any other examining authority.

(German Version)
Hiermit versichere ich, dass ich die vorliegende Arbeit bisher bei keiner anderen Prüfungsbehörde eingereicht, sie selbstständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel benutzt sowie Zitate kenntlich gemacht habe.

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