

The coordinating DMO or coordinators in the DMO? – An alternative perspective with the help of network analysis

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Abstract

Purpose

Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) are known to have a coordinating role within a destination. Many qualitative case studies discuss this role in the institutional context, assuming that the DMO is supposed to coordinate the network of the organizations and stakeholder groups in the destination. By contrast, this paper analyzes the coordinator role of DMOs by focusing primarily on the prominent individuals (directors and board members) affiliated with it. In so doing, it proposes an alternative perspective on these organizations. Looking at the influential individuals in the destination, in particular those affiliated with the DMO, reveals new insights into what the DMO alternatively could be from an individual's perspective.

Design/ methodology/ approach

Using social network analysis, we measure the coordinator role of the actors affiliated with the DMO for six destination cases in Switzerland, Italy, and Austria. First, we identify the network of the most salient individuals in the destination. Second, we measure the coordinator score with the help of the Gould & Fernandez measure. Third, we compare coordinator scores of individuals affiliated with the DMO against those of the other actors in the network. Fourth, we compare the scores of actors affiliated with the DMO and other actors to the coordinator role attributed to the whole organization by those individuals (i.e. how they see the DMO as coordinator). Fifth, we complete the analysis of the results with case-specific information.

Findings

In each of the six destinations, there are actors affiliated with the DMO as top scorers; these are usually the president of the board and other board members as well as the director. Additionally, the analysis identifies further board members of the DMO among the tourist elite in the destination. The DMO as an organization is generally seen as an important coordinating institution. In particular, the actors affiliated with the DMO attribute a higher coordinating role to the organization than do the other respondents.

Practical implications

In their board constellation, DMOs support the formation of interlocking directorships through the representation of various stakeholder groups. They increase the concentration of power in favor of a small group (elite) but they can also increase the effectiveness of decisional processes. In so doing, a DMO serves as a valuable platform for leaders in its destination.

Social implications

This study affords a surprising insight into the difference between the overall image actors have of DMOs and the organizations' self-images, expressed by the actors affiliated to the organizations - the former is always lower than the latter. The study also clearly demonstrates that the role of an institution largely depends on the actors affiliated to it and hence points to the constantly adapting coordinating role of DMOs within destinations.

Originality/ value

A DMO can be seen as an organization constituted by individuals who join and leave its board or its management. This paper proposes an actor-based analysis of these often small, but controversially discussed organizations. We do it with a combination of quantitative measures from network analysis and qualitative information. The alternative perspective (actors of the DMOs inside the elite) and the application of social

network analysis for this purpose have not been used in studies before. Further research points to two new research streams, namely to understanding (1) the role attributed to the DMO by different actors in the destination and the reasons for joining/ leaving the organization, and (2) the shift of the self-concept of the DMO.

Keywords

Network analysis, coordination, coordinator role, DMO, destination management

Paper type

Research paper

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1. Introduction

Destination Management Organizations (DMO) are believed to play an important coordinating role in both destination planning and development and destination marketing (Bieger, 2008; Heath & Wall, 1992; Inskip, 1991; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). While the role of the DMO has been examined in previous research, with particular emphasis being given to its coordinating function (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2009; Bieger, 1998; Getz, Anderson, & Sheehan, 1998; Presenza, Sheehan, & Ritchie, 2005; Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014), there is no conclusive empirical evidence of DMOs' effective coordinating role within a destination's network.

In the case of DMOs (i.e. local, regional, national tourist offices), we argue that the analysis of their coordinating role among the various organizations and institutions in the tourist destination involves a series of peculiarities that require a specific research approach. First, DMOs are constant, permanent organizations. While coordinating units are usually temporary, formed to meet specific needs in the course of a project or initiative, the organizational stability of an institution like a DMO implies a constant obligation to function as a connecting element for the whole community. To act as a stable, permanent coordinating institution is a considerable challenge if the other organizations and stakeholder groups involved do not see an urgent need to be coordinated at all. Second, DMOs have limited budgets, limited control over the service chain, and limited human resources (Pike & Page, 2014). This latter factor naturally means that the few people working within a DMO exercise considerable influence over the institution. Consequently, the role attributed to the organization is shaped by the opinions, decisions, and actions of the actors working in or affiliated to it. Or, in other words, few people can affect the actions and ultimately the image and the perception of the institution in the community of the tourist destination. Third, DMOs operate almost exclusively in an inter-organizational context. For example, they provide public services such as information centers, they run promotional initiatives jointly financed by the various tourist enterprises, and they are in charge of planning processes for the whole destination (e.g. Pike, 2004). Consequently, the actors within them are embedded in their destinations' webs of developing relationships and ongoing initiatives.

Our research perspective differs from that of the numerous case studies (Beritelli, et al., 2009; Bornhorst, Ritchie, & Sheehan, 2010; Gartrell, 1996; Getz, et al., 1998; Sheehan, Ritchie, & Hudson, 2007; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007), around the role and coordinating function of DMOs: it focuses, instead, on the individuals working for or affiliated to the DMO. Actually, the coordinating role of such organizations can be explained at the individual level. In line with the idea that organizations are an expression of decisions taken by (networks of) individuals (Luhmann, 2000), the role taken by a DMO in the inter-organizational network and community of a destination can be expected to be linked to, or even actually be, the consequence of the roles of its actors. In order to verify this assumption, it is possible to use a network analysis approach to the actors involved in the destination and the coordinating roles the individuals affiliated to the DMO may play in the network. In fact, “[t]he network structure reflects much about the functioning of organizations and, possibly, their coordination failures or achievements (Salancik, 1995, p. 346)”.

Thus, the aim of this paper is twofold:

1. By analyzing the coordinating role of individuals affiliated to the DMO in a network of prominent actors (the local tourist elite) we can measure and evaluate the overall role of the organization. This approach allows explaining the role attributed to the institution as a result of the relationships between the actors.
2. Seeing a DMO's role in the inter-organizational network or community as shaped by the different roles of the actors affiliated to it, changes the way in which the organization is understood. We therefore discuss and propose an alternative understanding of DMOs, based on the relationships of the individuals who move in and out of the organization.

2. Literature review

Two concepts, and their bodies of relevant literature, have guided us in developing the research design of this study: (1) local actors' networks and the forming of strategic elites in the tourist destination, (2) the coordinator role of the single actors within the networks, highlighting their connecting importance.

2.1. Elite networks in destinations

In tourist destinations, as in any other community, region or country, we must assume that there is a ruling class, i.e. elite, whose power is independent of the democratic election process, and therefore, necessarily, a class that is ruled (Mosca, 1896; Pareto, 1916). The elite is able to organize itself and to run social and political systems through few individuals, even in democratic, pluralistic systems (Michels, 1911). The structural and functional role of elites of individuals is to make complex systems like tourist destination communities work. These 'strategic elites' are able to reach consensus in crucial issues affecting their community (Parsons, 1963). The analysis of elites and their power finds its chief scientific application in the tradition of community power studies (Hunter, 1953). The structural-functional perspective applied in community power studies (Drewe, 1967; Hunter, 1953; Knoke, 1983; Laumann, Marsden, & Galaskiewicz, 1977; Laumann & Pappi, 1976; Mills, 1963) allows an analysis of mechanisms of action based on relationships between influential individuals. This means that if we want to understand the coordinating role of a particular institution in a system of multiple relationships, we need to deconstruct the picture into the relationships between salient individuals and their roles in the elite. The identification of these prominent individuals and the analysis of their role inside the elite are also relevant to the study of relationship dynamics within tourist destination communities, since they must be understood as multi-stakeholder systems, too. Until now, studies on elites in tourism have been limited and focused on the role of policy networks in specific policy issues and/or development projects (Dredge, 2006b; Erkuş-Öztürk & Eraydın, 2010; Liu, Tzeng, & Lee, 2012; Pforr, 2006; Yüksel, Bramwell, & Yüksel, 2005).

In tourist destination communities, individuals and institutions interact in various ways, play different roles and contribute different capabilities and competences to the formation of their opinions, to their decision-making and to their actions. The study of relationship dynamics and of issues related to elite networks and coordination activities is both essential and challenging, due to the implications for appropriate research approaches. In fact, comparable studies in tourism view community destinations as networks and apply models and tools derived from social network analysis. As underlined by Ford, Wang, & Vestal (2012, p. 756), citing Timur & Getz (2008), "in the tourism industry, a network approach is important in studying the diversity and heterogeneity of tourism products, usually provided by a mix of interdependent actors." The dynamics of the relationships

between actors within a destination have been examined from many different perspectives using this methodology. Particular attention is paid to public-private relationships (Dredge, 2006b; Gill & Williams, 1994; Rubies, 2001; Timothy, 1999; Zapata & Hall, 2012), to cooperation and collaboration issues (Baggio, 2011; Beritelli, 2011a; Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Bramwell & Sharman, 1999; Dredge, 2006a; Hall, 1999; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2007; Wang & Xiang, 2012), the role of power in relationships among actors (Ford, et al., 2012; Marzano & Scott, 2009; Reed, 1997), specific focus on power and trust (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011), or power and influence (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011). The problems around these issues are further exacerbated by the fact that a single individual or group cannot control or manage an entire tourism system (Gunn, 1994; Timothy, 1999). Hence, from a managerial point of view, it is necessary to identify individuals capable of turning fragmented tourist community destinations into functioning systems with shared goals despite the multiplicity of interest and stakeholder groups. Coordination within these systems is the result of a complex interplay between various actors and the organizations they represent. The appropriate research perspective must be coordinative, not that of the market, or of hierarchies (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2007; Flagestad & Hope, 2001; Strobl & Peters, 2013).

2.2. Coordination in tourist destinations and the role of DMOs

According to Malone and Crowstone (1994), coordination is the management of dependencies between activities and of the actors involved in these activities. Coordination in tourist destinations is bound by the rules pertaining to industrial organizations and districts. The tourist chain, in fact, develops largely horizontally and includes a variety of independent service providers. Coordination in tourism also occurs vertically between different levels of government (local, regional, provincial, national) (Andergassen, Candela, & Figini, 2013; Hall & Lew, 2009; Sainaghi, 2006). It is thus clear that coordination within tourist destinations is a process involving a multiplicity of individuals with distinct roles and objectives. Given this situation, there are two topics which have been identified as being of particular importance within the field of tourism management. The first is *how* to coordinate the processes and activities and concerns the modalities and mechanisms of coordination. The second pertains to the question of *who* is coordinating within a destination.

On the first question, numerous studies have demonstrated the possibility of coordinating tourist destinations by encouraging participatory governance processes involving both businesses and institutions in public private partnerships and the local community (Beeton, 2006; Dredge, 2006a; Hung, Sirakaya-Turk, & Ingram, 2011; Murphy & Murphy, 2004; Simpson, 2008; Tosun, 1999). This can be achieved by fostering and integrating both top-down and bottom-up relationships (Go & Trunfio, 2011; Hall & Lew, 2009; Sakata & Prideaux, 2013; Vernon, Essex, Pinder, & Curry, 2005) which allow consensus building through shared decision-making processes (Williams, Penrose, & Hawkes, 1998).

The study of ways to coordinate destinations inevitably necessitates the identification of actors and/ or organizations able to undertake this task. Destination management research has often accorded the role of coordination to the destination management organization (DMO). Although initially DMOs were primarily associated with the promotion of destinations, to the extent that they were sometimes called destination *marketing* organization (Gartrell, 1988), today the international literature generally defines a DMO as the organization responsible for not only destination planning and marketing strategies to promote the destination and increase its competitiveness, but also for coordinating actors and activities and guiding them towards a process of shared development (Bornhorst, et al., 2010; Getz, et al., 1998; Heath & Wall, 1992; Presenza, et al.,

2005; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). The DMO is therefore recognized as the appropriate organization to undertake both destination marketing *and* destination management. The more effective the DMO's coordination within the destination, the greater the cohesion between different stakeholders will be (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014), and consequently the greater will be the possibility that the DMO can act as a coordinator and liaison (see also the role of 'liaison' as defined by Gartrell, 1988).

From a theoretical point of view, the coordinating role of the DMO places the organization at the center of a network of actors, from among whom stakeholders may emerge and become key players in the success of the destination (Bornhorst, et al., 2010; D'Angella & Go, 2009; Franch, Martini, & Buffa, 2010; Garnes & Mathisen, 2013; Sheehan, et al., 2007). The coordinating role of DMOs has already been examined in the literature, and is considered to be one of the organizations' key functions (Beritelli, et al., 2009; Bieger, 1998; Getz, et al., 1998; Presenza, et al., 2005). However, we still do not know who the individuals who really play this coordinating role in the destination are. To our knowledge, no empirical evidence has been collected on the coordinating role of actors working for or affiliated to the DMO. In other words, if the DMO is really to coordinate the whole destination, so are the (few) actors being part of the institution supposed to.

2.3. Brokerage and coordinating role in networks

When studying networks and seeking to understand how actors are embedded in their neighborhood, it is useful to determine the extent to which their power and influence is due to their position (Burt, 1995). If the actors belong to different groups, Gould and Fernandez (1989) have proposed different roles: that of 'coordinator', if the broker node and the other two nodes (source and destination) belong to the same group; that of 'gatekeeper' if the source node and the broker and destination belong to different groups; 'representative', if the source node and the broker belong to one group and the destination node to another; 'consultant', if the broker belongs to one group and the other two to a different one, while source and destination nodes belong to the same group; 'liaison', if broker, source and destination node all belong to different groups.

Brokerage roles in networks have been subject to research for some time. Jonsson (1986), for instance, in a qualitative case study, examined the way in which linking-pin organizations and boundary-role personnel could influence political issues in the international aviation sector. More recent research analyses broker activities in various industries, like the financial markets (Abolafia, 1996; Pollock, Porac, & Wade, 2004), employee recruiting (Finlay & Coverdill, 2000; Khurana, 2002), real estate (Halpern, 1996), and leisure travel (Reimer, 1990). However, all these studies use a largely descriptive and industry-specific approach, defining and illustrating different types of roles. A systematic quantitative differentiation of the roles played in inter-organizational networks, like the one proposed by Gould & Fernandez (1989) is still rare. To date, specific empirical research has been carried out on a multi-unit high-tech firm (Aalbers, Dolfmsma, & Koppius, 2004), on the black market in small arms in Africa (Kinsella, 2006), the role of the European Commission in supranational policy issues (Borrás, 2007), and on the communication network between various institutions supporting two communities recovering from Hurricane Katrina (Lind, Tirado, Butts, & Petrescu-Prahova, 2008). The latter study comprehensively adopts the brokerage role approach of Gould and Fernandez (1989) identifying differences between institutions and proposing changes to the future organization of disaster response. All the studies agree that the concept of brokerage roles in inter-organizational networks helps us to understand (1) communication, (2) transaction flows and (3) underlying structures or governance systems. A recurring issue is, therefore, the optimization of a network's effectiveness and efficiency through best use of the positions and

activities of the brokers involved. The analysis of brokerage roles is a particularly useful approach when discussing influence, power, and communication in relation to coordination in inter-organizational networks (Gould, 1989).

2.4. Research questions

The three research questions explored in this paper, based upon the concepts discussed above, are:

1. What is the real importance of the actors affiliated to the DMO (directors and board members) in the elite network of the destination? Specifically, how strong is their coordinator role in the network?
2. Is the coordinator role of the actors working for or affiliated to the DMO stronger than that of other elite members?
3. Does the fact that a DMO has a strong coordinating role correlate with a strong coordinator role for the individuals working within the DMO?

The research questions reflect a purely exploratory approach, using multiple case studies. The research proposes a change in perspective, and thus also in approach, with two novelties that increase the reliability of extant research. First, it measures the real importance of DMOs as coordinators through an analysis of the individuals that represent them rather than the institutions themselves. Second, it quantifies the importance of the actors by looking at their coordinating value in the network, indicating how strong their influence upon the elite network of the destination is.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study cases and data collection

A multiple case research approach was chosen in order to identify differences and commonalities between the cases. We chose seven tourist destinations located in rural mountain areas in the central European Alps: four in Switzerland (Saas-Fee, Lenzerheide, Toggenburg, Appenzell), two in Italy (Valle di Fassa, Valle di Sole), and one in Austria (Montafon).

The data were collected with the help of a snowball sampling technique (Scott, 2000). Snowball techniques "...may also be used [...] in the study of less stigmatised and even elite groups..." (Atkinson & Flint, 2001, p. 6). For each destination we started with a first sample of prominent actors, based on a list of people who had contributed to a former strategy development process. This first step is important for avoiding over-cohesiveness of the identified sample (Van Meter, 1990). In the course of the interview the respondents were asked to name a maximum of five other people, whom they thought were important for the future development of the destination. The limitation of five other actors proved to be useful, since most actors named less than five and by doing so focused really on the most influential individuals. The named people (alters) were then contacted, interviewed, and asked the same question. In this way, it was possible to reconstruct the network of individuals indicating other ones who for their part could name the former ones back and/ or other different individuals. Each prominent actor's network for a particular destination was considered complete when an interviewee named actors who had already been interviewed. Performing this procedure allowed to identify the members and therefore the network boundaries of the tourist elite of the destination. The seven Alpine destinations produced:

- Saas-Fee, with 13 actors interviewed (13 named)
- Toggenburg, with 19 actors interviewed (19 named)

- Lenzerheide, with 21 actors interviewed (22 named, of whom one did not participate)
- Appenzell, with 28 actors interviewed (31 named, of whom three did not participate)
- Valle di Sole, with 26 actors interviewed (41 named, of whom 15 did not participate)
- Valle di Fassa, with 25 actors interviewed (38 named, of whom 13 did not participate)
- Montafon, with 42 actors interviewed (44 named, of whom two did not participate).

Since network boundaries are specified (i.e. the destination elite actors) even a low sampling level of 50% nodes and links missing at random provides stable and representative results (Costenbader & Valente, 2003). Using asymmetric (directed) networks allows for the strict application of Gould and Fernandez’s brokerage roles analysis, because the brokers are not only described by their in-between position, but also by the direction of their influence. In other words, two actors, A and C, calling a third actor, B, influential (two arrows pointing to actor B) and one actor, B, calling two other actors, A and C, influential (two arrows starting from actor B) does not count as brokerage; B is only regarded as a broker if actor A points to B, and B points to C.

 Insert figure 1 about here

3.2. Data treatment and analysis

By performing a Gould & Fernandez brokerage role analysis with the UCINET 6 package (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002) and assigning all the actors to the same group (i.e. there is one single tourist elite), we obtain the sum of all the paths where B coordinates other actors. Figure 2 illustrates the calculation with two examples: in example 1 actor B scores 1. Or in other words, actor B connects two other actors by being named by the first and by naming himself the third one (A points to B, who points to C). In example 2 actor B scores 6. He is named by two actors (A and D) and he names three other actors (C, E, and F). Consequently, we have two times three paths, thus six paths.

 Insert figure 2 about here

The analysis consists of two steps. The first one relates to the identification and characterization of the top coordination scorers. Special attention is paid to the actors working in or affiliated to the DMOs. The second step consists of relating the added scores of all the DMO actors to the total scores of the whole elite network. This step indicates also the relative importance of the DMO individuals to the whole network of elite members, consisting of different organizations and institutions (see also research questions 1 and 2).

4. Results

4.1. Profiling the top scorers

The following tables show the top scorers for the seven cases. An individual threshold was set for each destination, as the scores differ significantly, due to the different sizes of the networks and therefore the different scores of the individuals. The networks visualize the directed connections between the actors. If an actor A has named another actor B as an influential individual, the arrow points from A to B. The top scorers are highlighted with greater nodes in grey.

Insert tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 about here

This first qualitative analysis shows that in every destination the directors of the DMOs and the presidents of the boards are among the top scorers, often one or both actors rank first or second. Valle di Sole is an exception: the director and the president of the DMO are not among the top scorers. Possible reasons are connected to the difficulties experienced by the DMO in reaching a consensus with the several actors involved in the destination. This situation reflects, on the one hand, the peculiarities of the community, and on the other, the economic and financial problems faced by the main external investor during the period in which the research was carried out. The strong influence of external businesses has led to a developmental shift: tourist flows are concentrated in some areas of the territory while others have been either partly or entirely ignored. This form of development has not helped to legitimize either the role or the activities of the DMO, which only some actors view as a coordinator of any significance in the valley’s tourist development. The actors’ dissatisfaction with the DMO is intensified by the economic and financial instability of the cableway company. In all the other cases, however, even directors of potentially competing DMOs (in Appenzell) are identified as coordinators. This result highlights the importance within the elite network of the most prominent actors affiliated to the DMO (i.e. directors and presidents but also other members of the board). How about the relative importance of these actors as coordinators in the network? The calculations in the following paragraph show the overall picture.

4.2. Calculating the weighting

Table 8 displays the overall results for all seven cases. In four cases, respondents were asked an additional question: whether or not they thought that the DMO (as an organization) played a coordinating role in the formation of the destination’s strategy, by rating it on a four-point Likert scale between -2 and +2.

Insert table 8 about here

The results point to the organization’s peculiar position as coordinating institution. Just as the actors affiliated to the DMO are among the top coordinators in the network of the tourist elite, so is their organization recognized as the coordinating entity in the destination. Hence, across the different cases there is evidence that the role of the organization and the role of the actors working for or being in its board of directors coincide (see research question 3).

Two destinations present a slightly different picture. First, due to the relatively low coordinator scores of the individuals affiliated to the DMO in Valle di Sole, the scores per actor are lower than the overall value. However, the actors affiliated to the DMO are still positively biased in favor of the organization as a coordinating institution (1.08 mean average for the additional question of whether the DMO plays an important coordinating role). Second, Lenzerheide seems to be the exception because of the relatively low but still positive coordination value for the DMO (0.24 overall). It should be considered that, while the survey was being carried out, the municipality, the ski area company and the DMO were all involved in a dispute, which ended six months later, ironically, with the dismissal of the director of the DMO, the top coordination scorer. In fact, being attributed the coordinator role (as individual or organization) is not coercively a proxy for a powerful role in the network.

5. Discussion

5.1. General perception of DMOs as coordinators

The research questions posed in paragraph 2 can all be answered positively. First, actors affiliated to a DMO do play an important role in the elite network of its destination, particularly as coordinators. Second, looking at the scores per actor in table 8, the coordinator role of the individuals affiliated to the DMO is (with the exception of Valle di Sole) higher than that of the other elite actors. Third, the strong coordinating role of the DMO as an institution is mirrored by the strong coordinator roles of the actors affiliated to the DMO.

This study confirms the DMO as a significant coordinating institution in a destination, differently from other research, by looking not only at the organization but also at the actors affiliated to it. In fact, the respondents generally agree that (1) DMOs are capable of coordinating destinations as complex communities and (2) that the main actors affiliated to it link different actors with each other in a network of influence. These individuals, in fact, by being named by actors and in return naming other, different actors more frequently than do others, reveal the complexity of interdependencies in the elite, and function as coordinators (Malone & Crowston, 1994). This implies that these actors play an important linking-pin function in the destination's system of relationships. However, we believe that it would be presumptuous to attribute this fact only to the importance of the DMO as an organization; this explanation is too simplistic.

5.2. Proposition 1: DMOs as meeting points for multiple identities and arenas for change

This study affords us a surprising insight into the difference between the overall image actors have of DMOs and the organizations' self-images, expressed by the actors affiliated to the organizations - the former is always lower than the latter. A recent study, carried out with DMO managers but not with board members, confirms the self-attributed capability of coordinating and networking (Volgger & Pechlaner, 2014). While it may appear quite natural that a member of an organization has an institutional bias, we must bear in mind the particular role of the DMO, which is at the fringe of being a private enterprise and a public institution. The fact that individuals from the private and public sector who have joined the boards of DMOs are among the top scorers, shows that these institutions present themselves as platforms for both exchange and change. More than in any other case in tourist destinations, we can argue that actors possess multiple identities here, as a direct result of their multiple institutional memberships. Since actors carry their logics as institutional meanings and translate them into action

(Zilber, 2002), professions that operate in multiple institutional spheres have multiple logics (Dunn & Jones, 2010). As a matter of fact, “a network position that bridges fields lessens institutional embeddedness by exposing actors to inter-institutional incompatibilities, increasing their awareness of alternatives” (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006, p. 38). A previous empirical study has shown that in one destination actors who worked for the DMO perceived power more as a process-oriented construct than did other actors, who tended to view power as more closely connected to knowledge, hierarchy or material assets (Beritelli & Laesser, 2011). Hence, someone who joins an organization performing a bridging function can be assumed to have made a deliberate choice to seek exposure and for obvious need to enhance structures and rules since those organizations “... sit upon cultural and societal fault lines...” (Kraatz & Block, 2008, p. 255). It is precisely this feature which destabilizes the coordinating role of the institution itself.

5.3. Proposition 2: DMOs’ transient coordinating role

The cases of Valle di Sole and Lenzerheide show that the coordinating role of the DMO and of the actors affiliated to it are anything but stable. The study also clearly demonstrates that the role of an institution largely depends on the actors affiliated to it and hence points to the transient coordinating role of DMOs within destinations. In other words, the DMO and the actors affiliated to it are not permanently and in the long-term perceived as the coordinators in the destination. Changes in the economic and political systems of a destination, shifts in power and relationship structures within its community, the coming and going of prominent individuals and the temporary influence of external individuals (see also Beritelli, 2011b); - these are some of the major reasons why DMOs experience drift in the organizational networks of destinations, not least because of a drift in the network of the elite actors. So while the literature argues for DMOs as key players and rather stable institutions with clearly defined sets of roles, activities and functions (Bornhorst, et al., 2010; Getz, et al., 1998; Presenza, et al., 2005), we propose that they be understood as organizations capable of bringing together individuals and entities that are willing to tackle issues and initiatives currently affecting the productive systems of destinations that need a coordinating and supporting institution. A DMO is thus constantly exposed to the complexity and the dynamics of its destination and responds to the multiplicity of its tourist forms (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2013). We therefore have to understand why prominent actors from private enterprises and from the public sector bother to join the boards of directors of DMOs.

Implications 1 and 2 are visualized in the following figure. From an institutional viewpoint the DMO is supposed to coordinate the destination and thus possibly all the organizations and stakeholder groups. We propose an alternative perspective. Particularly, the board members in the DMO but also the directors are a result of individuals joining and leaving the organization, depending on what it means to them. We do not suggest the DMO may be instrumentalized by individual with personal interests, through this may be sometimes the case. Yet, the study at hand shows that among the local tourist elite the individuals who are affiliated to the DMO have a strong coordinator role that puts them (additionally) in an influential position. Changes in board composition of the DMO and changes of the directors of the DMO (the latter often being caused by the former) allow a reinterpretation of the DMO as an institution and of its tasks and financing structure (Beritelli & Laesser, 2014). In fact, these organizations, as we have pointed out in the introduction, have small budgets and a limited number of employees. This occurrence is visualized in the right hand side of figure 3: as influential individuals join and leave the DMO the organization shifts its position inside the network of those individuals who represent their organizations and stakeholder groups.

Insert figure 3 about here

5.4. Proposition 3: Drivers for joining a DMO board

Our study has not focused on the reasons why elite actors join the boards of DMOs. However, the results show that in every case there are individuals from the private or public sector who have joined the DMO board, as presidents or other members. The strong occurrence of these interlocking directorships (i.e. people simultaneously sit in many boards and/ or are managers of different organizations) allows two distinct implications. The first refers to corporate-related reasons, the second to social drivers.

With regard to research in the organizational and corporate field, Mizruchi (1996) suggests that interlocks may form (1) because of collusion (Baker & Faulkner, 1993; Pennings, 1980), (2) due to cooptation and monitoring (Ornstein, 1984; Pennings, 1980; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Stearns & Mizruchi, 1986), (3) in order to improve a firm's reputation and hence increase its legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Parsons & Jones, 1960) as functions at the individual level, by advancing careers (Stokman, Van der Knoop, & Wasseur, 1988; Zajac, 1988). A DMO would both assimilate leadership capacities and increase its influence and power as an institution in the destination's network, or the actors would acquire individual power for themselves and their organization by joining a prominent body. We would assume the first case to involve a weak DMO trying to increase its position of relative power. In the second case, we assume a strong DMO and a number of relatively weak actors and organizations trying to gain control over a semi-private, legitimized and reputable institution. Both scenarios imply issues relating to resource-dependence problems and therefore the (re-)distribution of power in an inter-organizational context (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978).

On the other hand, interlocks may also be a result of social ties, where a class or elite joins on the common ground of one or more boards (Mace, 1971; Mills, 1956; Pettigrew, 2007; Scott, 1991; Useem, 1984). Thus, "heavily interlocked directors constitute a vanguard of the corporate elite, integrated into the community and often in the forefront of innovations" (Mizruchi, 1996, p. 288). This applies to tourist destinations, too. The relevance of this claim has been highlighted in various studies. For example, the observation that interlocking directorships increase information flows and the spread of particular practices (Shropshire, 2010) has also been conceptualized for tourist destinations (Shaw & Williams, 2009). In fact, interlocking directorships often occur in small tourist destination communities, where the local community or kinship ties play a central role (Beritelli, Strobl, & Peters, 2013; Tinsley & Lynch, 2001). In addition, DMOs favor through their board constellation the formation of interlocking directorships through the representation of various stakeholder groups (Bregoli, 2013). They obviously increase the concentration of power in favor of a small group (elite) but they can also increase the effectiveness of decisional processes. In so doing, a DMO serves as a valuable platform for leaders in its destination.

6. Conclusion

Limitations: First, the limited numbers of cases and countries included in the study are obvious arguments for a further external validation of the results through additional analyses. Second, the research questions that opened

a completely new perspective of research required a rather descriptive approach. Resultant, more focused questions and hypotheses (see paragraph below) may ask for sophisticated research methods. Third, the cases present a rather limited point in time. While the triangulation of methods in this study (quantitative network analysis, quantitative but descriptive analysis of survey question, and information gathered from the in-depth interviews) provides a very good picture of a certain period of time, approximately some months, a longitudinal study could look at the mid- and long-term development of the elite network and the coordinator role of the DMO actors and the organization itself, disclosing further insights.

Further research: Two directions for further research emerge from our study. First, there is a need to analyze and understand DMOs as drivers for change in their destination. Not, however, as institutions to enforce processes of change, but rather as platforms on which actors from different organizational and institutional settings gather, in order to find new modes of collaborative work and new activities with specific aims. It might be argued that we have, so far, misunderstood the role and function of DMOs. While they are currently understood to be responsible both for fostering change in their destination and also for all the other organizations, while themselves remaining stable and rigid; equally important to all stakeholders - they may actually be bringers of change. In other words, it is less likely that the destination changes because the DMO orders the community to do so, than that the DMO changes, as (elite) actors join and leave it. The DMO may thus be a highly flexible organization, constantly adapting to its community environment. This leads to further research and insights into the theoretical implications confronting methodological individualism with methodological holism/ collectivism (e.g. Hodgson, 2007; Samuels, 1990). Second, there are still many unanswered questions as to what prompts (prominent) individuals to join, and then leave, DMO boards. We think that exploring these issues will shed more light on the problems of managing DMOs, on the extent to which they are accepted by their communities, and on the relationship between DMOs and private and public institutions.

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TABLES

rank	affiliations	score
1	hotel director, DMO president of the board , board member ski area company, municipal counselor Saas-Fee	22
2	DMO director	15
3	hotel director, president local hotel association, DMO board member	6
4	mayor of the municipality of Saas-Fee, board director of the ski area company	5
5 th with a score of 3		

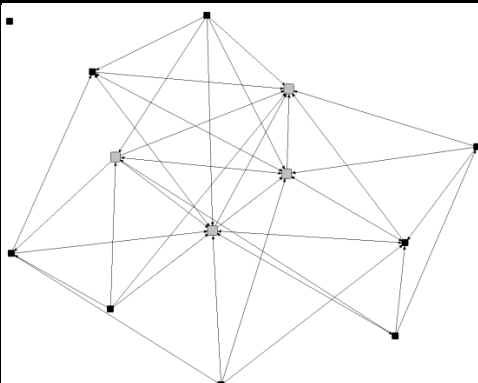


Table 1: Top four scorers in Saas-Fee (Switzerland) (n=13) and network visualization

Note: The destination has one DMO, one major ski area company and four municipalities, of which the most important one is Saas-Fee.

rank	affiliations	score
1	hotel director, DMO board member , board member of the two ski area companies in destination	37
2	DMO director	26
3	mayor of largest municipality in the destination, DMO board member	21
4	CEO of major ski area company	20
5 th with a score of 10		

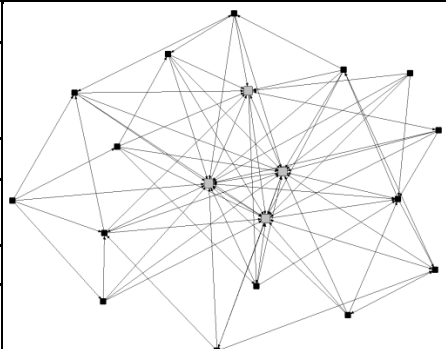


Table 2: Top four scorers in Toggenburg (Switzerland) (n=19) and network visualization

Note: The destination has one DMO, three ski area companies and three municipalities.

rank	affiliations	score
1	DMO director	42
2	hotel director, president cantonal hotel association, board member cantonal industry chamber	31
3	mayor, DMO board member , board member of ski area company	27
4	president of the board of ski area company	20
5	consultant, board member of the ski area company	19
6 th with a score of 15		

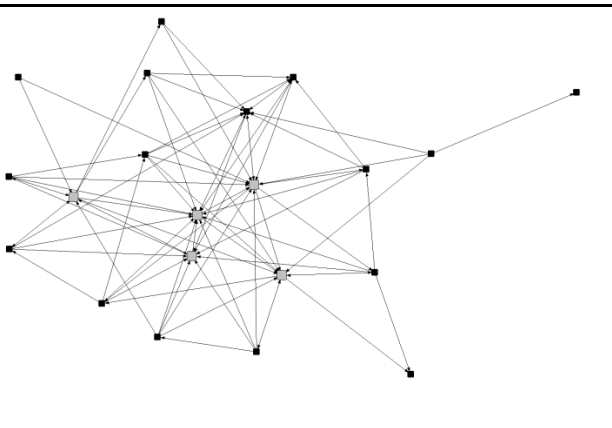


Table 3: Top five scorers in Lenzerheide (Switzerland) (n=21) and network visualization

Note: The destination has one DMO, one ski area company and one municipality.

rank	affiliations	score
1	DMO director (AR)	60
2	DMO director (AI)	52
3	restaurant and hotel owner, DMO president of the board (AI)	46
4	minister of economics (AI), DMO board member (AI)	36
5	hotel director	35
6 th with a score of 24		

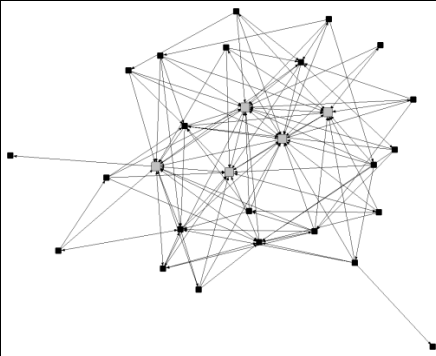


Table 4: Top five scorers in Appenzell (Switzerland) (n=26) and network visualization

Note: The canton consists of two half-cantons, Appenzell Innerrhoden (AI) and Appenzell Ausserrhoden (AR), representing two distinct states. Accordingly, the destination has two DMOs.

rank	affiliations	score
1	DMO director	41
2	DMO president , hotel director, mayor of the largest municipality	35
3	president of the board of largest ski area company, board member of two other ski area companies, hotel owner, board member of provincial hotel association	33
4 th with a score of 8		

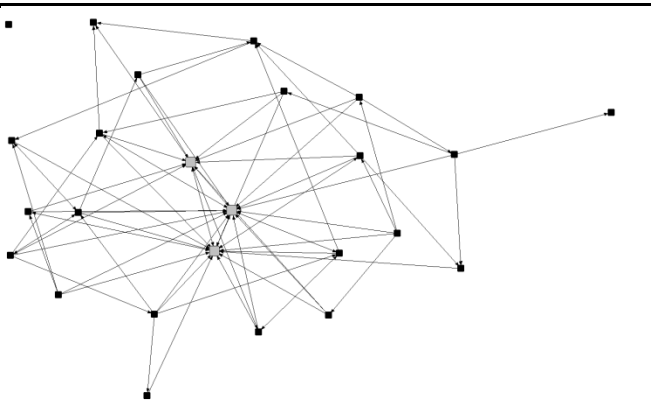


Table 5: Top three scorers in Valle di Fassa (Italy) (n=25) and network visualization

Note: The destination has one DMO, one main cableway associations (involving 9 ski companies) and seven municipalities.

rank	affiliations	score
1	mayor, president of municipal association	39
2	mayor, president of local bank, board member of regional bank federation, president of local school board, vice-president of local family association	22
3	mayor, president of the board of national park, president of regional sports association, board member of society for provincial tax receipts	14
4	mayor, DMO president of the board , president of the Italian snowboard federation, owner of two shops	11
5 th with a score of 9		

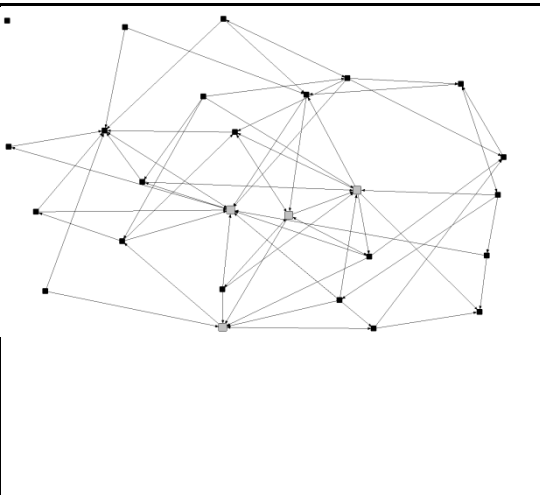


Table 6: Top four scorers in Valle di Sole (Italy) (n=26) and network visualization

Note: The destination has one DMO, one main cableway association and fourteen municipalities.

rank	affiliations	score
1	DMO director (destination)	63
2	CEO of major ski area company	46
3	mayor of major municipality, president of municipal association, DMO board member	44
4	director of major local visitor bureau	32
5	cultural officer at the municipal corporation, president of two local museums and of various cultural associations	31
6	hotel director, DMO board member	30
7 th with a score of 26		

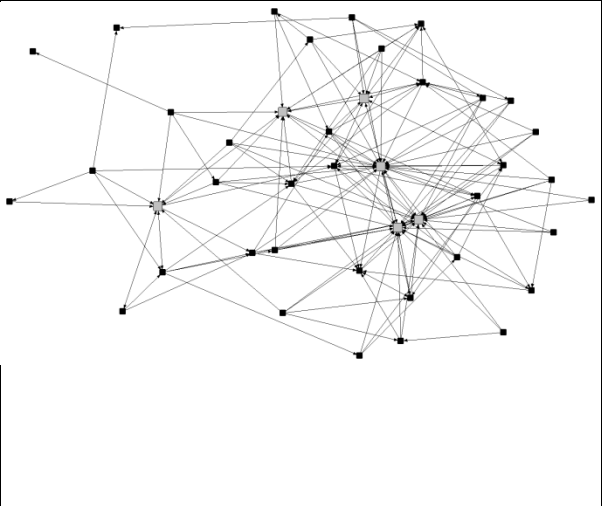


Table 7: Top six scorers in Montafon (Austria) (n=42) and network visualization

Note: The destination has one DMO, two ski area companies structured as holdings, ten municipalities, one municipal association, and four local visitor bureaus.

destination	overall network			DMO-affiliated actors only			coordinating role of the DMO (-2 to +2)	
	actors	scores	scores per actor	actors	scores	scores per actor	mean avg. overall	mean avg. only DMO
Saas-Fee	13	58	4.46	7	49	7.00	1.46	1.86
Toggenburg	19	164	8.63	6	105	17.50	n.a.	n.a.
Lenzerheide	21	202	9.62	7	88	12.57	0.24	0.43
Appenzell	28	371	13.25	15	304	20.27	n.a.	n.a.
Valle di Fassa	25	166	6.64	8	98	12.25	1.24	1.88
Valle di Sole	26	153	5.88	6	33	5.50	1.08	1.33
Montafon	42	409	9.74	14	234	16.71	n.a.	n.a.

Table 8: Comparing the overall network against the DMO-affiliated actors

higher scores per actor and mean value for coordinating role of DMO in bold

FIGURES

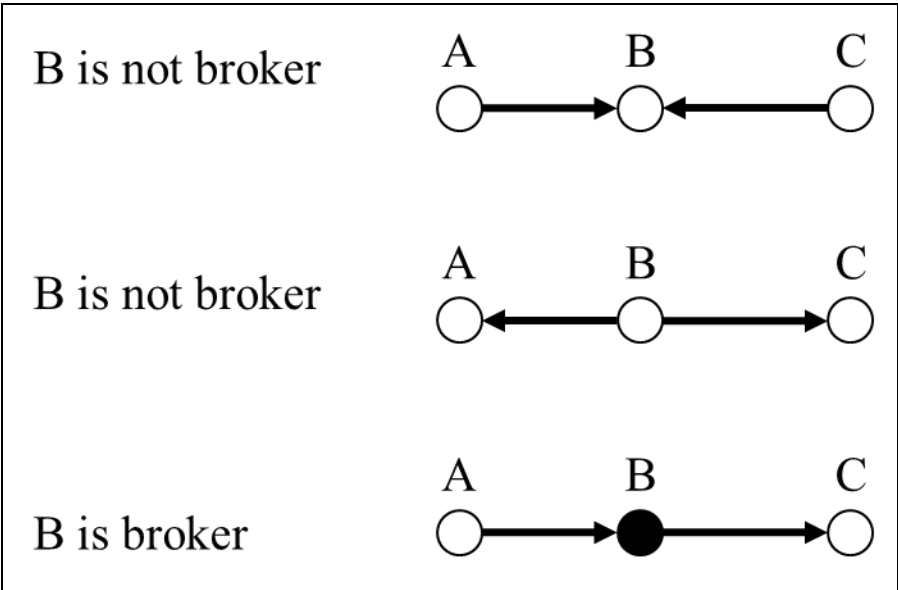


Figure 1: Brokerage vs. non-brokerage, own illustration

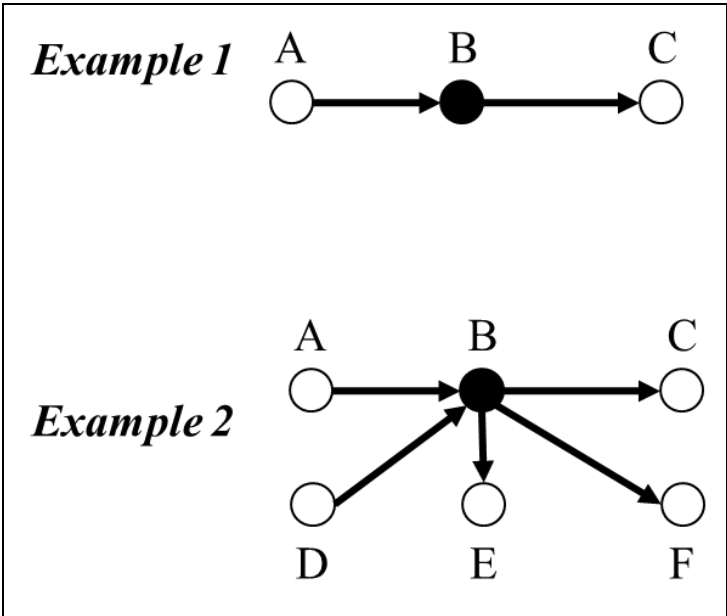


Figure 2: Examples how to count brokerage scores, own illustration

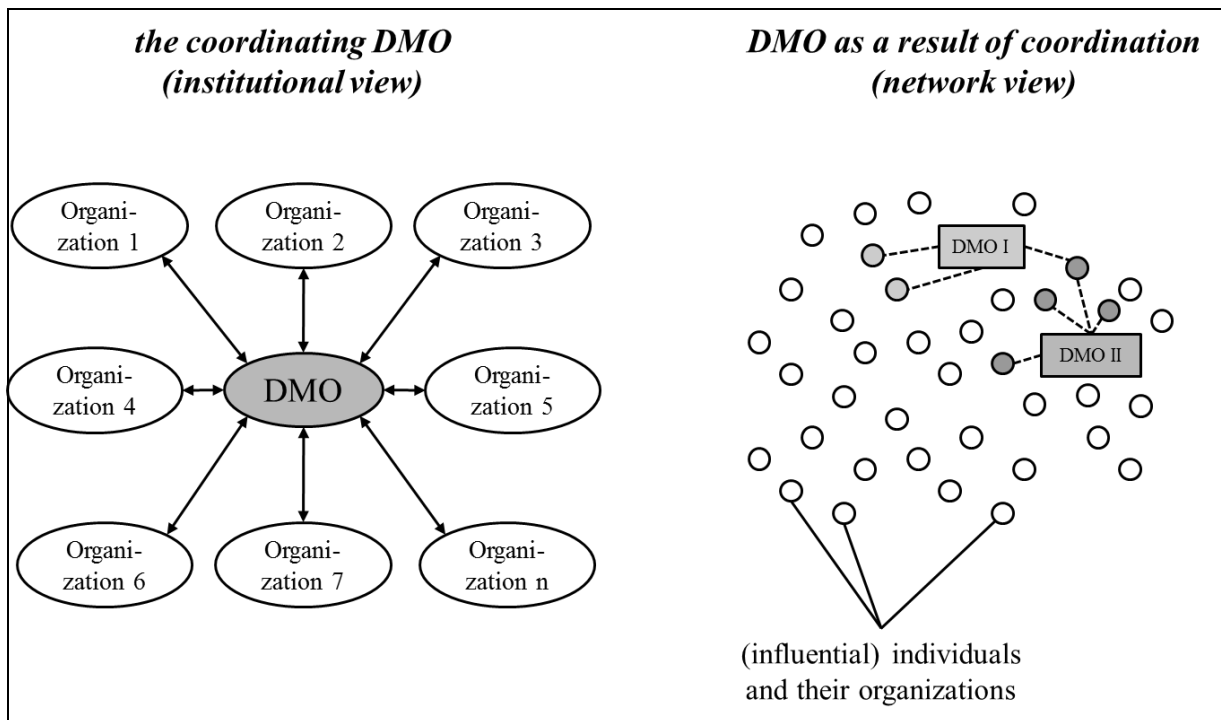


Figure 3: Institutional vs. network view of the DMO in the destination