

2.5. Unboxing event sustainability operations: Habituating commitment, branding governance and planning for legacy

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Abstract

This paper aims to contribute to understanding 'the work behind', and the design of, sustainability operations at events. Our object of study is the ongoing global event, The Ocean Race 2023, and the relation to its local Stopover Events. By analysing empirical data from both own interviews and sustainability related documents from The Ocean Race-organisation, we identify key parts of best practice within the event industry. By drawing on this data and relevant theory, we argue for the urgency of such operations and propose three scalable core disciplines: habituating commitment, branding governance, and planning for legacy.

Keywords: Event design; Sustainable development; Branded governance; Event legacy; Ethics.

Introduction

This paper intends to outline what actual action-oriented sustainability work is in the event industry. How do you move from a strategy that aims to 'do the right thing' to actually 'doing the work'? This translation-work, from strategy to praxis, brings our attention to the sustainability operator, who we see as a key character in doing the work of sustainable development in the event industry. The diversity in work-tasks in implementing a 'green transition' is oftentimes either described holistically and on a strategic level or is mirrored in long lists of very practical tasks. To succeed in governing such a complex project, as executing on sustainability operations in events, demands a skilled operator. Building on findings from the empirical studies we carve out three core disciplines - Habituating Commitment, Branding Governance and Planning for Legacy - that, in our perspective, are essential for getting 'the job done'. Our object of study is the global event The Ocean Race 2023 (TOR), ongoing at paper deadline. An elite sailing competition across the planet by wind power, stopping in seven cities along a six-month route, each stop with its own event celebrations. Data was collected at the Alicante- and the Aarhus Stopovers on this global mega-event.

The assumption is that specialised 'sustainability workers' are becoming more central to event-organisations -work and -Studies (Carey, 2015; Derom, 2015; Jones, 2018; Masterman, 2022). The work is about building sustainability, (grounded on people, planet, profit-based values), into planned events from the beginning. The toolboxes are Circular economy (MacArthur, 2023), Cradle to cradle (McDonough Braungart, 2002), Design for disassembly (Hatcher, 2011), Sustainable Development Goals (un.org) and the Doughnut Economy (Raworth, 2012) etc. They are paradigmatic paths laid out to follow by the event industry. 'Followed' meaning well-planned, communicated iteratively and governed and

maintained during and after the event in conceptual- or community-driven legacies, no matter the size of the event.

Understanding urgency

In a world in urgent need for action-oriented sustainability work, the theory of earth-system science, outlined in the Planetary Boundaries- model (Rockström, 2009) sets the frame for urgent holistic thinking in terms of future production and consumption. The interrelated areas of this model cover nine must-win battles in a planetary system in danger of collapsing. The disastrous consequences of human production- and consumption are clear (e.g., IPPC 2023) and are summed up in new terminology, describing a paradigmatic shift in the way we understand the planetary consequences of human behaviour, such as 'the great acceleration', the 'Anthropocene epoch' (CSIRO, 2012), 'irreversible' dangers when passing interrelated 'tipping points' (Richardson, 2019) causing exponential negative effects. Concepts pinpointing that climate politics are moving too slow. Triple bottom line-based business innovation is an important driver for change to make a realistic green transition possible. The event industry is no exception, it must act. In this paper we study *practice*, by looking into sustainability communication in event documents such as guidelines and action plans and by conducting interviews with event managers, sustainability program managers, -operators and partner-organisations.

Methodologically, we approach this by studying empirical insights – primary and secondary - and deduct potential scalabilities in both practicalities and in the deep design of the event. Which actions does it take to minimise footprints in praxis (waste sorting, power sources, certified food etc.) and how do you plan strategic directions for long term legacies (in actions plans, sustainability guidelines, commitment papers etc.).

Studying the sustainability 'translation work' unfolding in the global-local event TOR2023/Host City, Aarhus, we aim to first, understand potentials and barriers in adapting a global sustainability strategy to local practice and to local strategic public/private level. Second, we aim to outline best practice in assignments of the 'translation work' of local 'sustainability operators'. Sustainability strategy without the 'housekeeping', keeping the basic sustainability of the production in order would turn in to 'greenwashing'. This is a collective effort and will only work through skilled communication, ground-floor-commitment, aligned partnerships, and planning and project skills of the operators as demonstrated in our findings.

We base the study on empirical insight of all public sustainability-related TOR-documents (see TOR 3, Collected public portfolio) and through interviews. Ultimately, we propose a set of necessary focal points for any sustainability operations which comes down to first understanding the urgency of this work and second implementing the core disciplines of, habituating commitment, branding governance and planning for legacy.

Empirical insights

Sustainability is a central issue and tied to 'the right thing to do' (duty) in TOR-web-communication:

"Hosting a sailing race which runs for six months, with nine global stopovers, hundreds of staff, and millions of visitors to our race villages, obviously comes with its own footprint. We have a duty to operate sustainably, and we strive to be a leader in sports, events, and sustainability - testing new ways to produce our Race with the maximum positive impact possible" (TOR1).

Besides the operational impacts by TOR, the Footprint-pillar, the Action Plan-framework (TOR3) describes two other pillars, Impact and Legacy. They contain the engagement of people and the outreach of efforts like these:

“[...] advocating for Ocean's Rights to be recognised through our Summits and Policy work, our One Blue Voice campaign and through Relay4Nature. We're also recruiting a whole new generation of ocean champions through our Learning Programme and adding vital data on ocean health through our Science Programme” (TOR1).

To illustrate both challenges in the translation-work of the local sustainability operator as well as the branding potentials for partners, campaigning on sustainability and its dimension as legacy planning, we turn to our empirical insights. First, the Action Plan lays down, at global event level, the normative performance levels and reporting tasks (Figure1) and second, through our interviews with involved Sustainability Operator at local level and with a Sustainability Program Manager of an (unnamed) Race Partner:

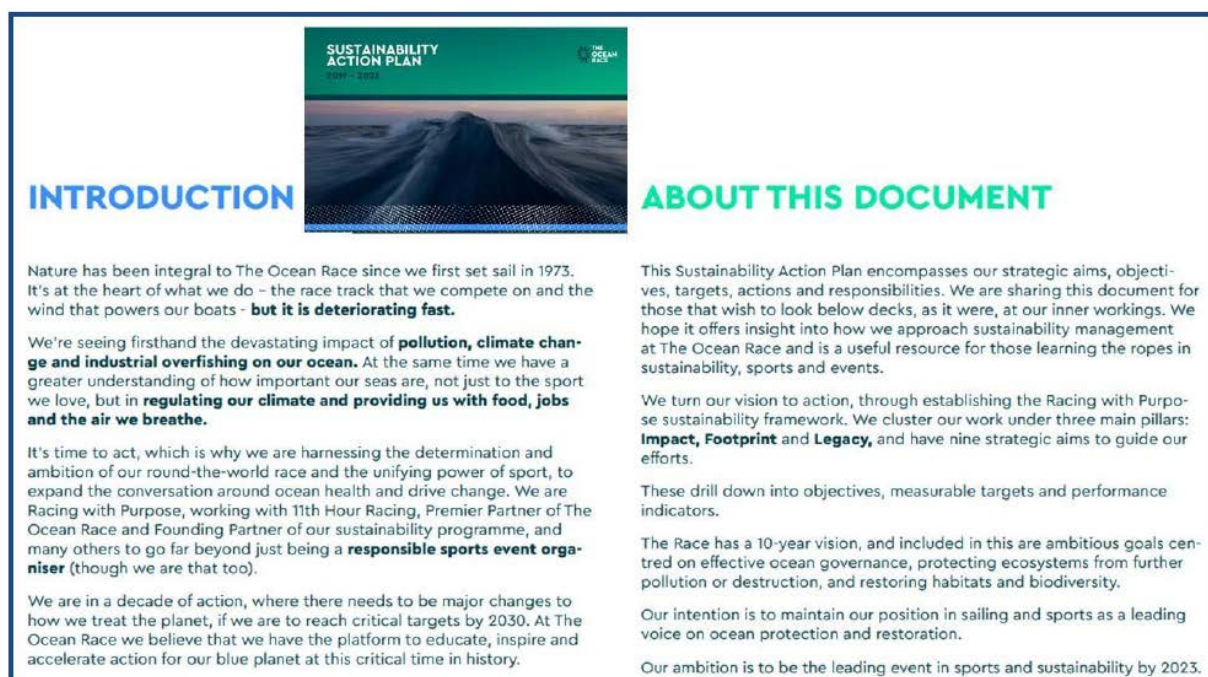


Figure 1. The Ocean Race 2023: Sustainability Action Plan

The study of this document shows that TOR works holistically with sustainability. Four points are to be made from this: First, the event is understood as a defined area for green transition, and they believe in the possibility of a wider impact: “we believe that we have the platform to educate, inspire and accelerate action”. Second, TOR considers transparency a key issue of their sustainability work: “We are sharing this document for those that wish [...] it offers insights into how we approach sustainability management” and, third, they plan for legacy, detailed in this document, but mentioned above as “A 10-year vision...”. Last and fourth, is the normative framework that the Action Plan also is, the framework of the three main pillars Impact, Footprint and Legacy, the nine strategic aims “to guide our efforts.” These drill down into objectives, measurable targets and performance indicators...” These are the rules of the game to which host cities are committed by their ‘agreement papers’, thus this becoming the object of the ‘translation work’ of the sustainability operator.

As an empirical perspective to the effect of the work behind this document several interviews were made, among others with a returning Sustainability Manager at a TOR 2023 Team Partner. He comments on the ongoing changes in the approach to sustainability work:

“...coming back to the event, what’s really cool to see in TOR this time is, that we moved from [...] sort of anecdotal corporate social responsibility with save the albatross or save the turtle, to systemic sustainability taking into account operations and the external opportunities to engage social commitment on the communities, and sustainability is now actually become a very important pillar of the event”. (Interview DF, GreenX)

He then comments on the campaigning advantages of the systemic approach to sustainability, i.e., the sustainable sourcing, the branding of the program Racing with Purpose and the planning for legacy in lobbying for creating juridical Ocean Rights, making sustainability a core mission of the event.

[...] TOR is every 3 or 4 years [...] it is quite hard to bridge from one event to another but now what we are seeing is actually that sustainability has created the bridge from the last TOR to this one four years later (ibid.).

The point here is that the value of sustainability besides reduction in carbon footprint is that it adds value in creating consistency between campaigns. Third, engaging people consistently in reducing their carbon footprint builds the possibility to see one’s own function as part of a larger value chain and consistently aim to improve this year by year.

“The key thing is [...] really through sustainable sourcing. [...] Sustainability requires measurement, requires reductions, The fact that [...] you engage people to ask the question; what are you doing and what help do you need to do better? [...] Through the work we have done [...], whether it is contributing or investing in reductions in our sector, means that the footprint will be smaller in four years’ time [...] and I kind of consider that as in setting, in other words, contributing to reductions within our sector [...]. So, before we go off planting trees in Oregon or blue carbon in Costa Rica, we should be looking at investing in reductions in our own value chain [...] I mean that is really, really important. In setting1, is the last word I would say” (ibid.).

Committed sustainability work then is about changing organisational culture and internalising the work through engagement and branding of the program which adds value and connects engagement to legacy work. But how to translate this from ‘the right thing to do’ to actually ‘doing the work’ at the local level? We interviewed a local sustainability operator at the Aarhus stopover about his work in the Racing with Purpose program:

“We need to master the basic practical sustainability ‘housekeeping’ and the impact- and legacy-parts as well. If the practitioners on the floor do not follow the documents, then you are not going to make what the ambition of the plan is” (Interview RHJ, GreenX). The job of the sustainability operator becomes executing the plan, implementing the values through being hard on knowledge to communicate ‘the why’ to local event crew and to govern structures for plastic, waste, power etc. “My job is governing the platform created by TOR but looking into local context, as in how far you can push local partners and what are local and national aims on sustainability [to understand] in what way we can push legacy-wise” [...]. But you cannot do the job yourself, you cannot cover all ‘housekeeping’. You must get the management processes and governing structures in place. It’s all about people. You use this document [Sustainability Action Plan] and you talk with local crew and define your must-win-battles. [...] The systems need to be there, for people to follow them. (Interview RHJ, TOR Aarhus, GreenX).

This brings us back to the global event-documents. The TOR team of the global Sustainability Program Manager distributed and shared the sustainability program in various documents and public campaigns. They write:

“We are using our global platform to inspire all those that we can reach to take action to help the ocean. This includes the sailing community, wider sports industry, businesses, host cities, governments, children, fans [...]”(TOR 2).

Transparency is connected to the never-ending journey of sustainable development. This gives us access to several key documents, which also indicate the scale of the workload (See Bibliography: TOR3). This means on a local scale, that the local event host will have their hands full with the demands and requirements of these documents which must be managed according to agreements in internal Host City agreements. They must engage local professional sustainability expertise for handling such responsibilities, skilled operators that must be able to turn them into local practices and translate values and excellence boards into internalised virtues and must-win-battles for self-driving staff, hence:

“The guide does not attempt to be a learning device for each of the issues. It is expected the Delivery Partner’s Sustainability Coordinator, and prior to that, the Host City [...] along with TOR, will guide the decision-making and planning, drawing on their sustainability expertise [and...] it is encouraged that the Sustainability Plan also include the approach to advocacy and outreach around sustainability focuses of the Race and the City, and how this would be delivered in terms of programming, content and communications. The Sustainability Plan should be completed no later than six months prior to the Event Period” (TOR3, GreenX).

The global expectations to local planning and governance brings us to what we see as a core discipline, the branded governance.

Commitment and branded governance

True sustainable development requires a long-run effort, while events are temporary. Therefore, we argue, the traditional economic idea of governance in relation to the agency problem (Buchholtz et al., 2009; Thomsen, 2008) is not enough. The sustainability-efforts must be branded to create long-term commitment and “consistency between campaigns”. Therefore, we turn to branded governance as we borrow (and develop) from consumer trend studies. Here the argument is that marketing a company’s brand through its sustainability initiatives shows that the company takes responsibility and therefore, apparently, stays present (is the assumption) in the minds of the consumers (Dauggaard, 2023; dentsu, 2023). This relates to neologisms as ‘a ticket to play’ or ‘keeping a licence to operate’ (e.g., Høgh & Nygaard, 2021), which points to a shift intended to describe that sustainability must have a pivotal role in strategy and business models.

Branded governance in our perspective, is therefore firstly about the actual governing of the sustainability strategy or program and secondly, about communicating internally and externally to build engagement and commitment on all levels. When doing this in both writing, speaking and acting as in TOR, our case in question, then this branded program and all the efforts of the sustainability operators is about “socialising the idea of sustainability to all stakeholders”(interview MJ, GreenX) and the program Racing with Purpose on all levels.

Aristotle can help us illuminate this, since his virtue ethical approach shows us a way to consistently commit to a given role in a given practice which, we argue, is central to the whole idea behind unfolding governance. In brief, Aristotle (2004) says that a good person is one who performs his or her function well. Any practice has a telos or an overall aim which determines the purpose of that practice, and the virtues in turn designate what you

should do to excel in it and be the best person qua practitioner you can be. For Aristotle ethics is a practical discipline and hence the virtues are by definition excellences in a given practice and should be made part and parcel of one's character and thus, through practice become habituated. Hence, to commit is, to fully accept and take upon you the responsibilities and requirements that any role demands of you. Moreover, you must accept that more often than not the responsibilities and requirements will deepen as you actively turn the commitment into practice. Thus, it is an ever-continuing process, so habituating commitment through habituating the pertinent virtues is essential.

From an organisational perspective the same counts. If you want to truly commit to e.g., sustainability you must habituate your commitment. To be truly sustainable is never one-dimensional and therefore commitment to it isn't either. Tightly connected to this then, is the role of the sustainability operator who is responsible for translating global strategy into local practice. This role includes a wide range of tasks that he or she must excel at in order to engage all stakeholders in order to habituate commitment through branded governance and to temporally stretch commitment, plan for legacy.

Planning for legacy

The many tasks of the sustainability operator, our point is, is essentially connected to legacy planning. It is this connection we intend to describe (or 'unbox') here. Long term positive effects of events are a central object of study within Event Studies (Faulkner, Chalip, Ritchie in Getz & Page, 2020). From mega events to neighbourhood festivals, long term effects are discussed and put into discourse as 'events being catalysts', as 'leveraging events' and maybe in particular as 'event legacy'. Dungan pointed to a distinction between direct/indirect legacies in the 1996 Olympic Games, that generated large "construction of sporting facilities and urban parks which led to [...] new education facilities" (Getz & Page 2020). Furthermore, Faulkner explained the concept of 'leveraging events' as the use of events to exploit broader business benefits, the enhancement of tourist spending and building new relationships (ibid.). Chalip pointed to 'social leveraging of events' i.e., when events collaborate in social- and educational causes (ibid.). An important point here is that the legacy of events is also part of the catalyst role, it is planned. This perspective, as the concepts above, help us to understand the planning for legacy.

To illustrate this, we point to the local TOR Stopover event-organisation in Aarhus that choose to integrate sustainability as themed placemaking and as co-created educational programmes, unrolling them with educational institutions, aiming for lasting impact in their programs. Doing so, 'planning for legacy' is aligned with 'branded governance' i.e., the Racing with purpose program of TOR 2023. The deep-design lies in the commitment-work and the branded governance, socialising the sustainability program and in the planned event legacy, all aiming for reducing basic event production footprint, longer outreach in impact, and with longer duration when planning for legacy.

Preliminary conclusions

Actually 'doing the work' of 'the right thing', necessitates a skilled operator to make ends meet between practicalities and the deep design of a sustainability program that aim and plan for legacy. To succeed, in minimising the negative impacts of event production and -consumption, demands commitment and ongoing engagement from a collective crew. Such engagement derives only from understanding urgency, from socialising the decided sustainability program, from the iterative commitment work in branded governance and from the, at best, virtue-based habituated practices, "It's all about people" (op. cit.). Only transparent sustainability journeys, as the one of The Ocean Race 2023 has allowed us to study this.

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2.6. Laying the foundations for the development of a composite indicator of destination interfirm coordination

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Abstract

While coordination has been extensively investigated in the economic literature, it has yet to garner the same level of attention in tourism and hospitality research. Therefore, this study proposes a conceptual framework for investigating destination interfirm coordination in a holistic manner, bridging the existing fragmented knowledge on the subject. Accordingly, this study draws from both tourism management and tourism economics literature to cover all stages of the coordination process and its underlying mechanisms. Its six constituent dimensions relate to proximity, associationism, competitive advantage, comparative advantage, co-production, and contextual factors. This thorough understanding of coordination may serve as a foundation for further research on the topic. From a practical perspective, it may help individual businesses identify their strengths and weaknesses, thus supporting them in increasing their performance and competitiveness. Finally, by operationalizing the concept of coordination, this contribution seeks to support decision-making processes at the business, network, and destination levels.

Keywords: Tourism destination; Coordination; Conceptual Framework

Introduction

Tourism destinations comprise a multitude of independent firms that collectively offer a bundle of complementary and substitute goods and services. From the perspective of tourists, these offerings are perceived as an integrated product (Zach & Hill, 2017). This perception plays a pivotal role in the tourism and hospitality industry, fostering collaborative dynamics and strategies among the interconnected tourism firms involved in the creation of the tourism product. In this context, the concentration of complementary firms within a destination can be likened to a diagonal cluster (Michael, 2003), wherein each firm's activities add value to the products of the others, leading to the achievement of individual and collective goals (Novelli et al., 2006; Stienmetz & Fesenmaier, 2018). Consequently, coordination among these interdependent firms becomes crucial for overcoming the limitations of tourism supply and meeting tourism demand, ultimately increasing the destination's competitiveness. A recent review of Messori and Volo (forthcoming) systematizes the literature on collaborative relational dynamics amongst tourism firms to facilitate an operationalization of the construct that considers both the tourism management and economic perspectives. Indeed, coordination has recently gained research attention in tourism and hospitality research (Zhang et al., 2009), although, to date, studies are still scarce. In particular, a tool to measure the degree of destination interfirm coordination is still lacking.

It is widely acknowledged that certain socio-economic phenomena require the consideration of multiple aspects or dimensions for a comprehensive understanding, as they cannot be adequately measured by a single descriptive indicator alone (Hoskins et al., 2009; Schwab, 2019; UNDP, 2014). Hence, researchers have developed composite

indicators (CIs), to aggregate a set of individual indicators into a cohesive framework, providing a more holistic understanding of these subjects (Mazziotta & Pareto, 2017). However, unlike other fields of social research, tourism and hospitality studies rarely employ CIs to examine socio-economic phenomena (Menodola & Volo, 2017). Given that the use of CIs in tourism studies is still in its early stages of development, this study proposes a conceptual framework that constitutes the starting point of a fifteen-step procedure for the subsequent development of a destination interfirm coordination CI. The conceptual framework's goal is to clearly describe the phenomenon to be measured and its constituent parts, setting the ground for the identification of the individual indicators and relative weights. The CI will be functional for measuring coordination as a multidimensional phenomenon and for practitioners and policymakers' interpretation of the complex information it encompasses. Concurrently, the CI will enable a detailed analysis of each of its constituent dimensions and an assessment of their influence on overall coordination. The research questions guiding this study are "what procedure should be used to measure the multifaced concept of tourism firms' coordination?" and "what are the dimensions constituting the subject that is being measured?" To the best of the authors' knowledge this is the first attempt in the tourism and hospitality literature to first identify the dimensions underlying tourism firms' coordination in order to, second, combine them into a single measure.

The degree of coordination exhibited by tourism firms within a destination could be used as a means of evaluating the coordination levels of the destination as a whole. The latter represents a dimension of destination governance that holds the potential to become relevant in the near future, given the challenges that are increasingly pressuring the tourism industry and the interconnected necessity of the emergence of alternative organizational structures to preserve and increase the destination's competitiveness. Moreover, from a political and ethical perspective, tourism firms' coordination is likely to foster transformative relational encounters – or what Marujo et al. (2020) term "relational goods"- with beneficial outcomes not only for the parties involved in such dynamics but also with positive externalities for many other destination stakeholders excluded from the coordination process -such as residents, wildlife and natural habitats, non-tourism businesses- and a critical engagement crucial to sustainable tourism development (Boluk et al., 2017; Bramwell, 2010; Liburd, 2018).

Literature Review

Coordination in tourism

The theoretical economic underpinning of coordination strategies may be traced back to Williamson (1981), who theorized that any transaction incurs monitoring, controlling, and management costs, which can be reduced by coordination. As a result, firms' interdependencies can be managed through vertical or horizontal coordination mechanisms, depending on whether the interdependencies are across or within supply chain levels respectively (Barratt, 2004). Thus, through joint planning and execution of supply chain operations, individual firms can enjoy higher success than when operating separately (Simatupang & Sridharan, 2002).

This also applies to the tourism industry, which is considered coordination-intensive since its fragmented production system comprising highly heterogeneous firms has to supply tourists with a seamless experience despite the heterogeneity of the tourism product, the predominance of small and medium-sized enterprises, ownership specificity, the local character of tourism, and increasing international competition (Bregoli, 2013; Farsari, 2018; Maggioni et al., 2014). Hence, the competitiveness of a tourism destination relies on the ability of its firms to coordinate their complementary assets and pursue the common goal of successfully offering an integrated product (Ness et al., 2021; Perles-Ribes

et al., 2017; Song, 2012; Zhang et al., 2009; Zhang et al., 2010; Zhao & Hou, 2022). Partnerships are therefore necessary to manage firms' different competencies and meet tourism demand. Multiple forms of partnerships exist within a destination, depending on whether coordination is limited to only some components of the tourism product or extended to all through the creation of an all-inclusive package (Andergassen et al., 2017).

Moreover, the tourism and hospitality literature has been investigating whether a destination's -and consequently its firms'- success depends on the destination's governance form. This debate originated by Flagestad and Hope's (2001, p. 8) distinction between "community model" and "corporate model" of destination organization. In the former "specialized individual independent business units operate in a decentralized way and where no unit has any dominant administrative power or dominant ownership within the destination", whereas in the latter "destination management is often represented or dominated by a business corporation" and is extended to include the recent paradigm of destination tourism organizations (DMO). This dichotomy resulted into a fertile ground for further investigations on the topic aiming not only to perform a categorization but rather to understand whether a successful tourist activity has to be tied to a well-established organizational structure or can emerge from the relationships between stakeholders (Beritelli et al., 2007). Starting from Beritelli's (2011) assertion that most of the existing research on coordination within a tourism destination has investigated the role played by local institutions, the present study focuses on coordination dynamics and strategies originating from tourism firms rather than from a centralized node. As previously mentioned, tourism firms are characterized, among others, by interdependence and resource exchange. Zooming on their formal and informal relationships may be an interesting lens through which study the complementarity of the tourism product and the dynamics originating from it.

To facilitate the reading of this paper, the term "coordination" has been exclusively adopted to encompass the various relational dynamics and strategies employed by tourism firms. It is important to note that within the tourism and hospitality literature, different terms such as cooperation, collaboration, co-opetition, and coordination have been used to describe these dynamics, resulting in a fragmented and inconsistent body of knowledge (Messori and Volo, forthcoming). However, since all these different "convey a sense of cooperation, the involvement of more than one entity, and to some degree common objectives" (Plummer et al., 2008, p. 504), this paper has chosen to utilize the umbrella concept of "coordination", drawing from the economic literature.

Method

Most studies that build a CI follow a structured approach based on the guidelines produced for this purpose by the OECD and the JRC (2008). This study adopts the extension proposed by Mendola and Volo (2017), tailored to the context of tourism research. The steps outlined by Mendola and Volo are as follows:

1. explicit definition of the construct;
2. choice of a theoretical framework;
3. identification of the dimensions;
4. identification of the sub-dimensions;
5. selection of variables;
6. number of the individual indicators;
7. univariate analysis of the individual indicators;
8. multivariate analysis of the individual indicators;
9. imputation of missing data;
10. transformations for normalization;
11. weighting
12. aggregation function;

13. robustness check and sensitivity analysis;
14. validity test;
15. backward decomposition.

As stated in the introduction, this study will proceed through steps 1 to 2, accurately defining the construct to be measured and establishing a theoretical framework to support the subsequent development of the CI. The dimensions of this study are derived from Messori and Volo's (forthcoming) systematic literature review on relational dynamics among tourism firms. In their systematic review of the existing tourism management and tourism economics literature on the topic the authors present several dimensions, some of which are herein used to create a framework and some useful propositions. This allows us to identify the various sub-groups constituting destination interfirm coordination and develop their linkages.

Results

The results of this study can be organized into a theoretical framework of six dimensions and six fundamental propositions, each corresponding to a sub-group of dimensions of the framework offering the basis for a holistic conceptualization of destination interfirm coordination and the subsequent construction of a CI.

Proximity: The spark to coordination is often before one's eyes

Within a tourism destination, the co-location of co-producing firms (Haugland et al., 2011) plays a key role in fostering coordination dynamics and strategies between tourism firms (Czernek, 2013; Czernek-Marszalek, 2021; Yang, 2018). This holds not only for the greatest but also for minor attractions, as attractions close to one another are more likely to meet tourist demand under time constraints (Czernek, 2013; Yang, 2018). Furthermore, firms' geographic proximity enables them to benefit from agglomeration economies and, among others, get access to skilled labor, lower transaction costs, share the costs of specialized labor, infrastructures, and marketing, and foster the exchange of information, knowledge, technology, and learning processes (Camison et al., 2016). However, to coordinate and integrate resources and activities, firms' ease of contact is necessary (Aarstad et al., 2015; Camison et al., 2016). Hence, an active engagement in coordination is also dependent upon the social connection of the parties involved, which is in turn influenced by the frequency of stakeholder participation in events, workshops, and workgroups (Pechlaner & Volgger, 2012; Waligo et al., 2013).

In this context, trust (Beritelli, 2011; Camison et al., 2016; Czernek, 2013; Czernek-Marszalek, 2020; Czernek-Marszalek, 2021; Fyall et al., 2012; Jensen, 2009; Maggioni et al., 2014; van der Zee et al., 2017; Yang, 2018), and cultural and business congruence (Czernek-Marszalek, 2021; Pechlaner & Volgger, 2012) play a key role. In contrast, distrust (Czernek, 2017; Fyall et al., 2012), tensions (van der Zee et al., 2017), or attitudes such as envy, egoism, rivalry, and parochialism can easily inhibit coordination (Pechlaner & Volgger, 2012). Moreover, coordination may be hindered by the costs associated with traveling to a meeting place or negotiating and closing contracts (Czernek, 2013; Czernek, 2017; Czernek-Marszalek, 2021). However, not only spatial distance but also the sociocultural and psychological distance between the individual actors hinders coordination (Pechlaner & Volgger, 2012).

Associationism: The process matters

According to Andergassen et al. (2017), coordination is most profitable when it is driven by the private sector rather than enforced top-down by policymakers. Coordination can take place according to informal interactions (Beritelli, 2011; Maggioni et al., 2014) or formal

agreements (Jensen, 2009), typically consisting of memberships in local, national, and international associations (Webb et al., 2021). According to Della Corte et al. (2021), formal agreements tend to accompany the early phases of the establishment of a partnership between tourism firms since they tend to be more cautious, fearing opportunistic behavior by their counterparts. Later, as the relationship matures, an atmosphere of trust develops, leading firms to opt for informal arrangements to cut administrative costs and accelerate decision-making processes.

Comparative advantage: or the power of attraction of resources

Firm complementarity is another key driver of destination interfirm coordination (Haugland et al., 2011). Because one firm rarely holds all the resources – defined by Crouch and Ritchie (1999) as a destination's comparative advantage- required to successfully supply a tourism product, coordination with a firm offering complementary goods or services enables it to do so (Della Corte et al., 2021; Wilke et al., 2019). However, some resources, such as tacit knowledge, are more difficult to access, especially if one of the involved parties is a family firm (Perles-Ribes et al., 2017).

Competitive advantage: no man is an island

Tourism competitiveness is not exclusively reliant on a destination's resources. All those supporting and qualifying factors, such as infrastructures, accessibility, enterprises, and safety, are necessary to use "a destination's resources efficiently and effectively over the long term" (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999, p. 143). Hence, in the context of coordination, learning, and gaining advice on doing business (Czernek-Marszalek, 2020) is an example of a relevant source of competitive advantage. The same applies to the successful management of the seasonality of tourist demand and employment (Czernek, 2017; Kuokkanen & Bouchon, 2021). If coordination might help firms improve their low-season performance, the large staff turnover deriving from the seasonality of employment implies, on the one hand, greater dissemination of knowledge, but, on the other hand, it also poses a barrier to knowledge diffusion and absorption because coordination agreements might terminate when employees or owners change jobs.

Co-production: evaluating the costs and benefits of coordination

Coordination benefits several parties. First, consumers are presented with a wider variety of goods and services (Andergassen et al., 2013). Then the destination witnesses higher employment rates (Pavlovich, 2014) and a better atmosphere because of improved social relations (Czakoń & Czernek-Marszalek, 2021). Finally, the firms involved in coordination see their profits increase owing to a higher rate of product and process innovation as well as the functional benefits of bundling and network economies (Czakoń & Czernek-Marszalek, 2021; Elvekrok et al., 2022; Maggioni et al., 2014; Zach et al. 2021). However, firms also must bear the additional costs associated with investing in coordination, meeting with partners, and monitoring their reputations (Czernek-Marszalek, 2021; Fyall et al., 2012). Therefore, before engaging in coordination, firms are found to perform a cost-benefit evaluation (Czernek-Marszalek, 2021; Pechlaner & Volgger, 2012).

Contextual factors: context matters

It seems intuitive that coordination depends on the political and economic setup. Hence, local, regional, national, and European policies aiming to allocate funds or other forms of support to coordinating firms provide a strong incentive and support for destination interfirm coordination (Czernek, 2013; Czernek-Marszalek, 2021). Changes in institutional factors, in tourism demand, environmental turbulence, increased competition, globalization, and technological progress (Czernek, 2013; Fong et al., 2018; Waligo et al.,

2013) are also considered relevant coordination antecedents, because firms are more likely to form close ties, and consequently coordinate, when they perceive uncertainty (Aarstad et al., 2015). Firms that actively expanded their networks were found to be more resilient and capable of adapting to changing circumstances, seizing opportunities, and mitigating risks (Pforr et al., 2014; van der Zee et al., 2017).

Conclusions

The recognition of coordination as a crucial factor in economic literature has led to an increasing number of studies exploring this concept in the field of tourism and hospitality research. However, despite this growing interest, to date, an instrument to measure the degree of coordination of tourism firms still needs to be developed. To address this gap, the present study builds upon the systematic assessment of the tourism and hospitality coordination literature conducted by Messori and Volo (forthcoming) and proposes a multidimensional conceptual framework to study coordination and support the construction of a CI. The conceptual framework has been organized into six propositions pertaining to proximity, associationism, competitive advantage, comparative advantage, co-production, and contextual factors. The construction of the composite indicator is the next step. This instrument can bring managers' attention to the importance of coordination with other tourism firms and encourage policymakers to consider implementing policies to promote coordination within tourism destinations. The main limitation in this work stems from data quality and availability, a problem typical of composite indicators due to the difficulty of collecting reliable measurements on many elementary indicators. Hence, data quality and availability will define and refine the next steps in constructing the CI.

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