

## COLLABORATIVE DESTINATION MARKETING

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### ABSTRACT

Collaborative destination marketing has been a major topic in tourism research. Several studies have been conducted on the subject, and researchers developed various models that try to understand and explain this issue. In this article, we make a literature review with the purpose of systematizing the several contributions to the topic, presenting different approaches to it, critically analyze various models proposed, and discuss the main issues regarding the subject. The paper also illustrates the intimate relationship between destination marketing and networking, in developing collaborative destination marketing strategies. At the end of the article, a synthesis of the elements involved in collaborative destination marketing is presented within a theoretical framework. Collaborative destination marketing must be seen as a dynamic process happening in a certain context, it is initiated with a specific purpose, involving diversified actors performing integrated activities, and leading to different types of outputs with added value to its stakeholders.

### KEYWORDS

Destination Marketing, Collaboration, Networks, Tourism Alliances, Destination Development.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism destination marketing encompasses the activities involved in sustainably developing a region with tourism appeal and in its promotion through a marketing strategy. Destination marketing is an activity that involves a large number and diversity of stakeholders, who together provide the overall destination product (Heath and Wall, 1992; Kastenholz, 2006), however working within dissimilar business contexts, with distinct specific objectives and strategies. As a consequence, contribution of individual stakeholders is critical for the success of destination marketing efforts, but managing this process becomes quite complex (Palmer and Bejou 1995; Buhalis 2000; Wang 2008). This is an important stream of research, and the application of network theories to the subject – in particular studying collaboration relationships, constitutes a field of high interest for researchers.

This paper begins by explaining the concepts subjacent to both destination marketing and networking, with an emphasis on the most relevant issues involved, and then illustrates the intimate relationship between both aspects in collaborative destination marketing strategies' development and implementation.

The main contribution of this paper will be to discuss collaborative destination marketing from the network view of the firm developed by the IMP (Industrial Marketing and Purchase) Group. This approach shall contribute to a better understanding of this field of study and practice bringing new insights to the topic and may help identify and fundamental relevant avenues of future research.

Diverse studies have been developed about collaborative destination marketing, confirming its current relevance. Although the aim of the studies varies, there are some common themes: collaborative strategies, the actors and their roles, the process of collaboration, its determinants and consequences, and the main advantages and difficulties associated to network collaboration (e.g., Palmer and Bejou 1995; Jamal and Getz 1995; Jansen-Verbeke, 1996; Gibson et al., 2005; Wang and Fesenmaier 2007; Naipaul et al. 2009).

Additionally, studies on destination marketing focus on the inter-organizational relationships among individual providers in creating an integrated tourism offering and on how this integrated supply affects tourist behaviour (Buhalis 2000; Gnoth 2003; Novelli et al, 2006; March and Wilkinson 2009). Thus, the relevance of the theme, and the need for understanding why networks, alliances, partnerships or other forms of relationship between organizations exist, how they are built and developed, who participates and at what level. And finally, what is their role in destination marketing.

## 2. DESTINATION MARKETING

In the literature, several concepts are employed to define a destination. The traditional view of a destination is based on a geographical concept; so, a destination is seen as a limited geographical area - a town, region or country - attracting tourists (Buhalis, 2000). However, other factors can be associated to the destination concept: history, culture, religion, traditions, and leisure services provided, for example. Also, the geographical concept of a destination can be distinct for different tourists; “London can be a destination for a German business traveller, whilst Europe may be the destination for a leisure Japanese tourist who packs six European countries in a two week tour” (Buhalis, 2000: 97). Lundberg (1990) stresses the relevance of the tourists’ perspective suggesting that a destination is perceived as disposing of a common image, which may naturally depend on the type of tourist and his/ her travelling context. Buhalis (2000: 98, citing Leiper), explains that destinations are places towards which people travel and where they choose to stay for a while in order to experiment certain features – a perceived attraction of some sort. Most destinations share some common characteristics, which Buhalis (2000) presented as the *six As framework*: Attractions, accessibility, amenities, available packages, activities and ancillary services.

Destinations can be viewed as a set of products and services that are offered to tourists as a single entity, many times under a brand name and “ultimately [as] experiences provided locally.” (Buhalis, 2000: 98) Tourists develop correspondingly destination brand images, associated to a set of suppliers and services (Buhalis, 2000), whose value is enhanced through cooperative destination branding (Cai, 2002).

One of the activities developed at a destination, with the objective of enhancing its overall market success, is destination marketing. Lundberg (1990: 141) defines *integrated destination marketing* as: “the overall effort to identify what it is a destination has to offer (the product), what groups of people would have the time, money and desire both to travel to and to enjoy the destination (the target markets), and how best to reach and convince those people to come to the destination (marketing)”. Wang (2008: 151) stresses the relevance of collaborative action, suggesting that “destination marketing is a collective effort that requires

various organizations and businesses in a geographically limited area to harmoniously work together to achieve a common goal.” This idea of collaboration between several organizations had already been presented by Gunn as crucial for the development of a destination: “the ‘go-it-alone’ policies of many tourism sectors of the past are giving way to stronger cooperation and collaboration... No one business or government establishment can operate in isolation” (Gunn, 1988 cited by Jamal and Getz, 1995: 186). Similarly, Jansen-Verbeke (1996) identifies the need of *networks* contributing to the best possible exploitation of “*place advantages*” and leading to *synergies* in an inherently complex tourism offering.

Destination marketing involves differentiated functions, both at the demand and the supply side. In many practical situations, destination marketing is associated mainly with promotional activities (Cai, 2000), but – however important- that is only one side of the equation. Developing the destination product must also be considered and, in many cases, it should be the starting point and a most central one in strategic destination marketing. This strategic product/ destination development further requires, due to the nature of the product and the impact caused by tourism development, a concern about sustainability, in an attempt to satisfy all stakeholders involved in a long-term perspective (Middleton & Hawkins, 1998; Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Kastenholz, 2004; Kastenholz & Paul, 2004).

### 3. COLLABORATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF NETWORK THEORY

No firm lives in isolation. All organizations establish some type of relationship with external entities, like customers, suppliers, financial institutions, or government agencies. However, the nature and intensity of these relationships vary, which may lead to the establishment of more or less formal ways of working together. Knoke and Kuklinski (1983) describe networks as “a specific type of relation linking a set of persons, objects or events” (as cited in Tinsley and Lynch, 2001: 368); and Porter (1998), referring to an industrial context enhancing competitiveness, defines clusters as “geographic concentrations of interconnected companies and institutions in a particular field, linked by commonalities and complementarities” (as cited in Novelli et al., 2006: 1142).

Regarding strategic alliances, Palmer and Bejou (1995: 618) conclude that “a strategic alliance is a joining together (by means of dependency and collaboration) of two or more organizations over a given time period in order to gain a competitive advantage”, with collaboration requiring shared decision making among key stakeholders of a specific field about the future of that field (Wang 2008).

From these conceptualizations of networks, clusters and strategic alliances, a few points can be identified as common and recurrent: the existence of interactions between some entities, joint working approaches (collaboration), interdependence, common goals, benefits/ advantages seeking.

The study of networks started with a focus on the industrial context, with the development of network theory of the firm mainly conducted within business-to-business relations in the industrial sector (Axelsson 1992; Hakansson and Snehota 2006). The concept of “network” as a new organizational structure has received increasing attention in the context of globalization, deregulation and radical technological changes, being viewed as an opportunity of enhancing, in a cooperative way, the value creation process and thereby the networks’ competitiveness (Achrol, 1997; Gummesson, 1997).

According to Hakansson and Ford (2002: 133), “in its most abstract form a network is a structure where a number of nodes are related to each other by specific threads”. In a business network, the nodes represent

the firms, and the threads the relations between firms where interaction occurs. Both nodes and threads have their own content, which is the result of interactions, investments made and adaptation between the companies over time.

In the network view of the firm, there is a fuzzy distinction between firms and environment. Firms are no longer viewed as a single unit, with perfectly defined boundaries; on the contrary, firms are boundless, and their boundaries are not defined by the control of resources, but by the access to resources and capabilities which may change over time. Firms interact to have access to the resources they need, and relationships are considered to be themselves an asset of the firm. Actors in the network are defined as those who perform activities and/or control resources (Hakansson and Snehota 2006).

#### **4. COLLABORATIVE DESTINATION MARKETING**

The overall tourist experience at a certain destination is usually the result of multiple and differentiated interactions with the local stakeholders, in which we include private organizations, public actors, and also the general public. Due to the large number of actors involved, some way of organizing and controlling the process of tourism experience provision is developed within the destination (Palmer and Bejou 1995; Jamal and Getz 1995; Selin and Chavez 1995; Buhalis 2000; Gnoth 2003; Wang and Fesenmaier 2007).

The advantage of developing a structured and coordinated approach to the organization and promotion of a tourist destination, involving the main stakeholders is generally recognized. However, the complexity involved in creating and maintaining this network organization is also well-known. This subject has been of high interest for researchers, and several studies have been developed with a specific approach to destination management (Palmer and Bejou 1995; Jamal and Getz 1995; Selin and Chavez 1995; Gnoth 2003; Gibson and Lynch 2007; Wang and Fesenmaier 2007).

##### **4.1. MAIN ISSUES IN COLLABORATION**

Several issues arise related to collaborative destination marketing: short-term benefits versus long-term vision; collaboration and competition among rival actors; stakeholders' roles and involvement through the destination or project life cycle; conflict management.

The involvement of the most relevant stakeholders in one region is critical for the success of destination marketing efforts. These can be opinion leaders within the community, their involvement revealing the importance of the project bringing in important resources (knowledge, human, financial), as well as other stakeholders. Simultaneously, each of these also has expectations about the project, namely regarding potential benefits for their own organizations (Selin and Chavez 1995; Jamal and Getz 1995; Gibson and Lynch 2007; Wang and Fesenmaier 2007).

Bearing this in mind, we can find in the literature several issues regarding the complexity of building collaborative destination marketing strategies, such as the need to conciliate short term with long term benefits and the need to balance individual and common benefits (Selin and Chavez 1995; Wang 2008). Another issue, associated with the latter, is the relation between cooperation and competition; in fact, usually firms that are competing in the marketplace must cooperate with each other within destination

marketing strategies. The concept of cooptation, developed in game theory, sustains that firms engage in simultaneously competitive and cooperative relationships, being an important reference in the context of business networks (Bengtsson and Kock 2000).

A different issue is the assignment of roles to the partners, where three main perspectives may be distinguished: first, at the moment of participant selection, role attribution must be undertaken considering the balance between different interests involved and resources available; second, roles of partners must be analyzed in terms of their continuous involvement throughout the collaboration process. Usually, their involvement will vary along time, but their continuous compromise must be assured, so that resources will be present whenever needed. And, as a third aspect, proportional involvement among all partners must be reinforced. An unbalanced effort among partners is one of the reasons for partnership failures (Jamal and Getz 1995; Selin and Chavez 1995).

All these can be sources for conflicts and, therefore, a conflict management approach must be developed. Wang (2008: 159) specifically refers to a “cooperation-conflict-compromise trajectory (...) as the conflict management strategy. (...) Conflict management usually requires open and honest conversation, constant communication, patience, and sometimes compromise”.

Despite all difficulties exposed, “the interdependency of organizations involved in producing and promoting the tourism destination product provides a basis for the development of a co-marketing alliance” (Palmer and Bejou 1995: 618). In fact, when two or more organizations take some form of joint action, they expect to achieve a result they believe not achievable alone. Regarding the tourism industry, this can be promotional cost reduction, extending markets (Cai 2002), improving the articulation between service providers to guarantee a more interesting and satisfactory overall tourist experience (Gnoth 2003) or simply increasing the number of visitors. Apart from this, partnerships induce the exchange of knowledge and technology, thus improving the skills of partners and their capabilities (Wang and Fesenmaier 2007). Gibson and Lynch (2007) distinguish three benefit categories of networks in tourism destinations: learning and exchange (e.g. knowledge transfer, communication); business activity (e.g. co-operative activities, inter-trading within network, enhanced product quality and visitor experience); and, community benefits (e.g. increase or reinvent sense of community, more income staying locally).

Buhalis (2000:100) presents four generic strategic objectives for destinations: enhance the long-term prosperity of local people; delight visitors by maximizing their satisfaction; maximize profitability of local enterprises and maximize multiplier effects; optimize tourism impacts by ensuring a sustainable balance between economic benefits and socio-cultural and environmental costs. This is in line with Crouch and Ritchie (1999) when they link tourism destination management – with an emphasis on *total management* rather than simply *marketing*, to the competitiveness of a destination and its societal prosperity.

Reaching these objectives depends on both individual stakeholders and the dynamic interactions among them. This interactive behaviour has been modelled by Buhalis and Fletcher (1995, cited by Buhalis 2000) in the *dynamic wheel of tourism stakeholders*. Besides a representation of the stakeholders and their interactions, this concept also highlights the “two sides of the coin” in collaboration efforts: interests and benefits, but also responsibilities.

4.2. STAKEHOLDERS AND INTER-ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The destination product is a combination of many different products and services, provided by a network of service providers within one delimited region. These actors vary in terms of dimension, interests, services provided, capabilities and resources, organizational form. Table 1 provides a description of the major actors of a tourism destination.

Table 1: Main actors in tourism destinations

<b>Economic tourism agents:</b> sometimes referred to as the tourism industry, producing the services offered directly to tourists, like accommodation, transportation, attractions, food
<b>Economic agents from other sectors:</b> indirectly affected by tourism activities, like retailers or generic service provider
<b>Non-profit organizations:</b> providing tourism related or non-related services, like health, cultural or recreational activities
<b>Public entities:</b> providing infrastructures and facilities, heritage and nature preservation, information and education, and some activities coordination within a more or less formal structure
<b>Local population:</b> who condition the tourist experience directly, can benefit from touristic development, but also can suffer some social impacts from it
<b>Tourists:</b> to whom the offer is directed and that ultimately seek unique experiences and activate the destination network

The tourist is at the centre of this network, and he/ she may activate his/ her “own network” - the services that he/ she consumes at the destination. This idea is presented in Gnoth (2003: 1) when he states that “a tourist-activated network is formed by heterogeneous suppliers of services that have been chosen or activated by the consumer to optimally respond to his/her needs”. Gnoth (2003) further suggests the formation of “voluntary networks” at the destination, when single companies recognize the existence of “inadvertent tourist-activated networks” and decide to exploit the inherent opportunity. Similarly Jaeger and Bieger (2003) suggest the term “virtual organization” (introduced by Byrne *et al.*, 1993) to be applied to this destination network, designing it a “virtual service firm”, which “*the customer activates... from an existing network of firms*”. For each single service firm this means a highly complex business environment, which is difficult to control, unless all firms articulate their offerings within a network, guiding tourists through the destination, developing synergies, investing in coordination and maximizing the overall outcome for all involved, tourists and companies likewise.

The development of strategic partnerships between small and medium sized tourism enterprises, as Williams (1999) analyzed for the case of Canada, should be particularly important for less developed, small scale tourist destinations. Williams’ study identified *member commitment*, *flexibility* and *trust* as key factors for successful partnerships.

Trust is a key issue in networks, since relations between organizations may be based on non-formal agreements, being trust between the actors the basis for their interaction. Building trust is a gradual process, and is highly influenced by the individuals who are interacting. One of the risks present in a relation is opportunism. That is, one part may take advantage of the relation for its own and single profit. In a certain way, we can say that opportunism is exactly the opposite of trust. As opportunism aims to reap an advantage in the short term, trust is fundamental for long term advantage. Opportunism may yield a

temporary stronger positioning in a network, but in the long term it will reduce the quality of the company's relations. Within this complex and sensitive network of stakeholders, usually there is a destination management organization that emerges as a leading and coordinating entity (Jamal and Getz, 1995). Typically, it is a public entity, since many of the touristic primary resources are under public jurisdiction, like transport infrastructures or natural attractions, and the maintenance of these resources on a long term basis needs to be guaranteed through preservation.

This need for a coordinating entity is somehow contradictory with the network concept. Traditionally, two extreme organizational forms are considered: the hierarchy of a firm, in which authority centrally sets the rules, and the market, in which no coordination exists and the rules are agreed upon by actors that interact. Between these extremes, alliances, partnerships and networks are suggested as alternative forms of organization (Wit and Meyer 2010). Nevertheless, a central issue in network theory is power and the organization's position in the network.

Network position depends on the specific bargaining power between two actors – the microposition, and it is also dependent on the specific role of the organization in the network – the macroposition. Companies may have different roles in the network, “some firms occupy a leadership role in shaping network development, others have more specialized roles as sources of new ideas, or as providers of particular inputs – but all firms occupy some kind of position” (Wilkinson and Young 2002: 125). Therefore, some organization will assume a coordinating role, and the main issue that remains is legitimacy; that is how the other members view this leading organization position in the network. Resources and capabilities access, not possession, are the determinants and should be the key factors for the emergence of the leading organization within the destination network.

This need for coordination, that will lead to a certain level of control over the network, is related to one of the paradoxes that was presented by Hakansson and Ford (2002), when discussing firms interactions in networks, namely: the more a company achieves control over the network the less effective and innovative the network will be. Networks are self-governing entities with diverse interests. One of the ambitions of organizations is to control the network of actors that enclose it, and to manage as much as possible the relationships in accordance to their own interests. But, the more successful an organization is in doing this control – whether institutionalized by the others or not, the more likely it is for the network to lose its basic characteristics and become closer to a hierarchical form of organization. This will impact on the evolution of the network, since the independency of each organization in finding its own way and in developing relationships will be reduced over time (Hakansson and Ford 2002; Gadde et al. 2003).

In developing collaborative efforts at a certain destination, organizations should keep attentive to this issue over time, since an excessive focus on coordinating activities between members of the tourism network may lead to stagnancy in their own evolution and in the long run to decreasing results from collaboration.

### **4.3. COLLABORATION PROCESS**

Several authors proposed frameworks to understand this process. These models have two common characteristics: first, they adopt a sequential stage approach to the process; second, different activities are identified at each stage. Besides these two explicit characteristics, there is a third that is implicit: at a destination there is only one collaborative process, or network. But, that is not necessarily true, since each

organization may be part of more than one network. In fact, that is the rule for organizations, even in tourism. A hotel may be part of a destination network and of an accommodation network that crosses the geographical limits of the touristic region.

In strategic terms, this is related to the issue of dependency; that is, at what level is the performance of one organization dependent on the others; and how many “others” in the network is it dependent upon. In building relationships, organization managers must take in consideration the dispersion of the company’s dependencies in different networks, with diverse features like product, technology or geography based networks. Besides this different networks inclusion, building a company’s relationship portfolio should also strive to reach a balance between strong and weak ties in the network (Wilkinson and Young 2002). Looking at the problem from another perspective, the tourist, may perceive different networks at the destination and not a single one (Gnoth 2003). Whatever the approach we take, this aspect has not been considered in models for collaborative destination marketing, which have a focus on the creation of a single regional network.

However, very relevant aspects of collaborative process have been identified. In 1995, Jamal and Getz (based on Gray’s work, 1985, 1989) suggest a three stages model: In stage one, problem definition and stakeholders’ involvement are the key issues; the second stage focuses on building identification with the network through sharing of values and on balancing the roles and power structure among partners in order to achieve a common sense of collaboration; finally, stage three corresponds to the implementation phase of collaboration. For each stage, several actions were identified as well as the facilitating conditions to perform it. Among them, this model includes important issues, like problem definition and collaboration scope, key stakeholders’ involvement, legitimacy, power balance and emphasizes interdependency as a main reason for collaboration

Selin and Chavez (1995) add several reasons leading to collaboration, like crisis, common vision or a mandate; they also typify the outcomes of the collaboration. Wang and Fesenmaier (2007) present a conceptual framework for destination marketing alliance formation. Within this framework, a five stages model for managing this process was proposed in detail, as shown in figure 1.

Stage one is concerned with issue identification and partner selection; in the second step, the objective is to reach a shared vision about the partnership goals and to plan the actions to put in practice; the third stage refers to implementation of the ideas and programs developed previously; the fourth stage is evaluation - checking results against expectations; and a final step is related to the future development of the partnership. Also this proposal reinforces the relevance of stakeholders’ motivation for collaboration. The inclusion of a transformation stage is an interesting contribution of the model, with different possibilities for the evolution of the collaborative process. The outcomes are categorized, and have a direct linkage to the motivations, which seems most appropriate.

Figure 1: Framework for destination marketing alliance formation

Precondition	Motivation	Stages					Outcomes
Crisis Competition Economic condition Organization support Technology	Strategy oriented Transaction cost oriented Learning oriented Cluster competitiveness Community responsibility	Assembling  Issue identification Partner selection	Ordering  Establish goals Develop programs	Implementation  Assign roles Execute programs	Evaluation  Asses predefined goals Check against expectations	Transformation  Evolve stronger Other projects Continue the same Continue dif. form Finish	Strategy oriented Organization learning oriented Social capital oriented

Source: Adapted from Wang and Fesenmaier (2007)

Among the outcomes, social capital oriented outcomes are explicit, which reveal the impact that this type of projects may have on community development. The same idea was already present in the benefits presented by Selin and Chavez (1995). The importance of community related benefits resulting from destination networks is stressed by Gibson and Lynch (2007: 110) when they state that “*successful* tourism community networks are conceived to be those groups that have fulfilled the role of producing the (...) benefits described (...); thus, making a *vital contribution* to the development of tourism in their particular community.”

This evolutionary view of the collaboration process may be associated to the commitment that the different members of the tourism network make to its development. Recalling networks as composed of nodes and threads, the content of each one of the threads in the network is the result of the investment that is made on it by the nodes it connects. The higher the investment of firms in the relation, the richer the relation and the more opportunities will arise from that relation for both firms (Hakansson and Ford 2002). If we apply this idea to destinations, increased commitment will lead to an increased effectiveness of the collaboration in the touristic region over time.

This progressive commitment leads to another paradox: a network represents at the same time new opportunities for a firm, but also several limitations for pursuing its goals (Hakansson and Ford 2002). This paradox is related to the resources dimension in industrial networks. There are three main ways in which relationships represent strategic resources: first, relationships are important resources themselves; second, they connect the focal company to the rest of the network; third, they permit the combination of physical and organizational resources of both parts. This is a continuous process, since firms involved in relationships try to combine the resources in a systematic way, thus inducing the constant creation of new resources, and therefore new opportunities (Gadde et al. 2003).

Through the combination of resources, relations and capabilities of organizations, opportunities may arise in the form of innovation, synergies exploitation, market expansion, cost reduction, or activities integration, for example. But as the relation gets closer, inter-dependencies tend to increase, which leads to some restrictions on the individual actions of each of the organizations (Hakansson and Ford 2002). In a destination network, a high commitment of its members will create more opportunities, better results, but also a higher level of dependency, making it more difficult for an organization to act independently. This last aspect is not considered in any of the models that we found concerning collaborative destination marketing, and it seems relevant to us to understand the evolutionary process of tourism destination networks.

#### 4.4. DISCUSSION AND SYNTHESIS

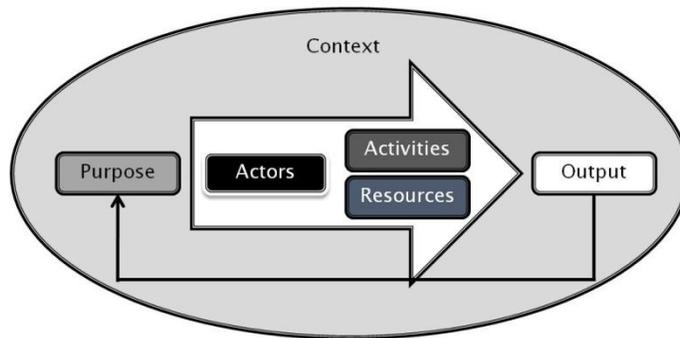
In the traditional view of the firm, organizational boundaries are defined by the hierarchical resources control, whether those are property of the firm or are contractually bounded to it. Thus, firms have clear boundaries, which are easily recognizable for everyone; it is easy to know where the line that separates the firm from its environment is. If we approach the same issue from the network perspective, completely different boundaries would be defined; relations of a firm are themselves considered assets of a firm, since through these relations the firm has access to resources and activities from other parties.

Therefore, boundaries of the firm are no longer defined by the hierarchical control of resources, but by the capacity to access and mobilize resources. This leads to a more diffused definition of boundaries, since not all the relationships of a firm may be known for everyone. Plus, relationships change over time due to continuous interactions, and do not need any formal agreement, leading to a more “virtual” than “physical” concept of organizational boundaries. Within this view, “the organization exists and performs in a context rather than in an environment, in as much as it has a meaning and a role only in relation to a number of interrelated actors” (Hakansson and Snehota 2006: 263).

This view of a *network context* rather than a *general environment* affecting a firm’s performance is not seen in the studies of tourism networks. And, being a destination offer the result of a collective effort of differentiated actors in a region, we can say that it is this network context which determines the evolution and success of a collaborative approach to destination marketing. In fact, one may question why under similar general environmental conditions, touristic regions have such different performances.

From the literature review, a synthesis including the most significant features of tourism destination networks, their constitution, dynamics and outcomes is presented. That synthesis is schematically presented in figure 2.

Collaboration at a destination is a dynamic process that occurs within a certain framework, considering that collaborative initiatives must have a purpose for their development, which can be seen as the input for the execution of activities by the actors of the network and common exploitation of resources (including relationships), finally leading to different types of outputs. The activities performed are dependent on the evolutionary stage of the collaboration, which will be the result of the commitment of the various actors and of the investment they make in the relationships with other members. The outputs may lead to a changing purpose for collaboration – its evolution, thus continuously influencing the process and its outputs. This emphasizes the dynamic nature of collaborative destination marketing. All this happens within a network context directly related to the destination, that is influenced by its members, and that can create favourable or unfavourable conditions for the evolution of the collaboration.

**Figure 2: Collaborative destination marketing as a dynamic process**

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

From the presented review and analysis, one may conclude that tourism is a natural ground for the establishment of collaborative approaches. A number of reasons contribute to this fact. First, a tourism destination offer is composed of many individual offerings, provided by numerous entities. Second, the nature of the organizations that provide the products, services or experiences is quite diversified, whether regarding dimension, purpose, shareholders' nature or organizational development. Third, the nature of the tourist experience itself is highly complex and may be based on the activation of the destination network.

Collaboration at a destination is clearly identified as a dynamic process that occurs within a certain framework, with diverse models suggesting similar but also distinct features of this process, a synthesis of which was proposed as based on the most consensual propositions. Some key issues identified along this process are: stakeholders' involvement, legitimacy and power; recognition of common benefits and balancing them with individual ones; the understanding of tourists as part, or even at the centre, of the process; the need for a coordinating and managing structure. The way these aspects are dealt with is critical for the success of the collaborative initiatives.

In the article we have also looked at this problem from an industrial network perspective, identifying converging issues, but raising some questions about collaborative destination models. The issue of power and network position of an organization as a key for coordinating efforts; trust as a basis for the evolution of the collaboration; coordination potentially affecting destination innovation; the relevance of a direct relational context in detriment of a general environment for the performance of a touristic destination; organizations' involvement in more than one single network as a means to reduce dependency. All these aspects have not been sufficiently researched in the context of collaborative destination initiatives, and may be seen as opportunities for research.

Some other issues seem to be relevant and not sufficiently dealt with yet by studies on the subject. Although the role of stakeholders was highlighted, their internal organization and resources allocation towards this collaboration project should be better understood. Another issue that should be recognized as most relevant is measuring collaborative processes' impact on destination branding, requiring longitudinal

studies and clear assessment of network dynamics, branding strategies and outcomes regarding destination image and market success. An interesting research topic would be to analyse the importance of the network context of different regions on the results achieved by collaboration initiatives.

Another possibility for future research is the local population's involvement: what is their knowledge about the initiatives going on, how they participate in the process, what are their contributions and benefits within a global market-oriented destination network. Some more areas can be added like results achievement in existing processes and identification of critical constructs determining the outcomes of the process, the importance of trust in the particular case of tourism collaboration or, in a wider sense, collaboration among destinations, although in this last case a few studies have already been conducted (e.g., Naipaul et al, 2009).

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