

## **Destination Management Organisation (DMO): a Business Model to Achieve Sustainable Mobility**

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*Purpose. This extended abstract intends to explain our work-in-progress research about the identification of a suitable business model for network governance in the tourism industry. In particular, the aim of our study will be suggesting a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) business model for Province of Brescia around the topic of sustainable mobility.*

*Methodology. Based on the literature review analysis, a business model concept for DMO aimed at sustainable mobility management of the Province of Brescia will be proposed using a qualitative research approach.*

*Impact. The research will be able to contribute to the literature on the sustainable management of the tourist destination and will be able to have a practical impact by proposing a theoretical reference for the actors involved in DMO*

Sustainable tourism, according to the definition of sustainability by Brundtland Report (1987), can be defined as the ability to meet the needs of both present tourists and the host community while protecting the cultural integrity and the biological and ecological processes, in order to enhance opportunities for the future (WTO, 2005). In this context, the aspects of environment, economics and socio-culture emerge as the conditions on which the tourism development is based and to balance for guaranteeing the value creation in the long-term (Ritchie and Crouch, 2003; WTO, 2004; Mihalic, 2016). Therefore, thanks to a managerial approach for tourist destinations, the tourism sector can assume a pivotal role for spreading the culture of sustainability within the challenge of climate change.

During the last decades many studies about sustainable tourism emerged, also in relation to the increase of climate change (and related social impacts) concerns (De Lange and Dodds, 2017; Shu-Yuan et al., 2018; Hall, 2019; Kim et al., 2019; Gössling et al., 2021).

Previous literature suggests the importance of networks between community-level and political actors to achieve strategic sustainable tourism (Albrecht, 2013; Lamont et al., 2023). In fact, a tourist destination attracts a system of various interests by different categories of stakeholders (as tourists, accommodation facilities, host communities, local governors and central rulers) operating in a network of common benefits. Coordinating and managing this network is essential to assure the co-creation of sustainable value of the whole system, satisfying the different actors' expectations taking into account the current and future impacts. For this reason, it is important to balance the stakeholders' participation in the network (Selin, 2017; Pechlaner et al., 2020) in order to maintain the destinations attractive and competitive (Costa et al., 2023).

The research on networks within the tourist industry started in the beginning of the 21st century with the sociology and management approach (Selin and Beason, 1991; Costa et al., 2023; Gajdošík, 2023). In this context, as an example, the, which brings together several stakeholders to develop consensus-driven decision-making, domains (Ansell & Gash, 2008). According to Ansell (2008), collaborative governance is a formal collaboration where public and private stakeholders meet together in a deliberative and multilateral process. Recent tourism governance research also has explored the role of multiple actors in governing destinations (Bichler and Lösch, 2019) emphasising the role of both networks as contributors to tourism governance and collaboration as an essential aspect of tourism destinations (Keym, 2017).

Cooperation between the main players in the tourism sector (consumers on the demand side; tourist enterprises, hoteliers and restaurateurs on the supply side), is very important for good governance of the destination because tourism represents a fragmented industry (Garrod et al., 2012). Nevertheless, while network-building leads to benefits thanks to tourism development, relatively few tourism actors consciously engage in the day-to-day work of network-building (Stoddard et al., 2020). The offer of a range of products and services consumed by tourists is the base for the sustainable economic opportunities that tourism provides, and depends on the degree of collaboration and engagement between stakeholders to create a product which is well designed and attractive (Jamal and Stronza, 2009, Selin and Chavez, 1995).

Interesting projects that seek to exceed the limitations found and that are aimed at creating shared networks for the development of sustainable tourism have been activated. Nevertheless, we believe that there is still little spread of integrated governance processes that can actively involve the tourist/consumer during his experience, raising awareness of the concept of sustainable tourism.

In this regard, CETS (European Charter for Sustainable Tourism) is a method of participatory governance to promote sustainable tourism, to structure the activities of protected areas, and to encourage the development of a tourism offer compatible with the needs of biodiversity protection in protected areas by means of greater integration and collaboration with all stakeholders, including local tourism operators. CETS is awarded by the Europarc Federation, the network for Europe's natural and cultural heritage, and in Italy, CETS methodology is promoted by Federparchi as an effective tool of public engagement.

In particular, Europarc Federation verifies and certifies that the protected areas under this recognition have effectively implemented inclusive and transparent participatory processes and that have shared a sustainable tourism action plan with the various actors (local institutions, practitioners, trade associations).

Another significant example is the Intense Project. It involves 5 regions (Tuscany, Liguria and Sardinia in Italy and Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur - PACA and Corsica in France) and it is about the identification and cross-border management of a system of tourist itineraries. The project, which has long-standing origins and links to the first global event to raise awareness about sustainable tourism (that is the Charter for Sustainable Tourism, Lanzarote 1995), as the following goals: socio-economic growth thanks to a sustainable tourism, in particular cycling and hiking tourism, integrated with gentle mobility and intermodality; enhancement of protected natural areas, cultural and archaeological heritage in the participating territories; integrated management of a seamless system of sustainable cross-border tourist itineraries by promoting cycling and hiking tourism; increasing of the number of tourists and their presence throughout the year in the cross-border area thanks to a joint management plan for the creation of a sustainable tourism route; identification of standards and integrated plans for the development of joint promotion actions and of tools for a unitary management. Therefore, the Intense Project can be representative of the concept of participatory governance as a model of articulated and multidimensional management of a homogenous cross-border tourism product: the management model aims to make operational an action plan that identifies objectives, actions and roles in each of the three fundamental areas in which the governance of the itinerary is articulated.

Tourism is one of the most important economic activities in Italy, in terms of GDP and jobs created, but also and above all a concrete opportunity for cooperation and exchange between public and private institutions, in Europe and with the countries of the southern Mediterranean area. As evidence of this, the international governmental organisations have included in their agendas and investment plans numerous projects, financed under cooperation programs, through which, directly or transversally, various initiatives are developed to strengthen the tourism sector as a whole. In this regard, the most promoted activities concern the quality and innovation of services and the qualification of operators' skills, to adapt them to new needs and new ways of using territories and cultural and environmental heritage. Similarly, the pandemic had a considerable impact on the

management of the whole sector and, after an initial phase characterised by emergency, a deep thought on the effects of the pandemic crisis has begun emphasising the need to pay attention to make the sector economically, ecologically and socially sustainable, at international level, also in emergency situations.

Hence, the identification of cross borders strategies can drive towards a joint effort enabling tourism to exploit its full potential, pressing national governments to make such strategies feasible and the goals concretely achievable. A virtuous example of an internationally engaged planning and collaborative tool for a green and digital transformation of tourism is the Transition Pathways for Tourism (2022): this is a new strategy, based on the concept of co-creation, defined thanks to the collaboration between the European Commission and stakeholders of the tourism ecosystem. EC underlines the importance of enhancing the relations between tourism sector and other industrial ecosystems in order to contribute to the transition and the resilience of the tourism ecosystem.

The competitiveness of the tourism industry will largely depend on its capacity to meet the need and customer demand to become more sustainable, also with reference to mobility. Sustainable multimodal and active transportation modes in cities and regions can significantly contribute to green transition in tourism. Every tourist is first of all a traveler. The demand for mobility towards art cities and tourist places is undoubtedly the crucial point on which to place the attention in order to work efficiently on the construction of a governance system that is oriented to sustainability. The physical movements of tourists are the most critical aspect to manage, also considering its impact on the production of pollution and unsustainable consumption of our planet's natural resources.

To this end, according to a collaborative and participatory perspective aimed at building effective governance networks, the role of the public sector as a promoter of this system becomes fundamental. In this sense, an important initiative developed in Italy by the Department for Regional Affairs and Invitalia has signed a collaboration protocol with the Ministry of Infrastructure and Transport, Directorate-General for Stationary Transport Systems and Local Public Transport (TPL), aiming at the harmonisation of research, analysis and data processing activities in the field of regional and local public transport (Strategic plan for tourism mobility, 2017-2022, MIT). The National Observatory on Local Public Transport Policies has some tasks as: collection and standardization of data making them available to Regions and Local Authorities, support the alignment of the efforts by the main players in the sector, and monitoring of the effects of the implemented policies at local level, highlighting their weaknesses and dysfunctions. The agreement aims at activating synergies between the activities of collection and systematization carried out by the Observatory on TPL Policies and the activities of analysis and elaboration lead in the national plan.

The importance of network has therefore emerged for tourist mobility (Shih, 2006; Asero et al., 2016) considering that the collaboration between public and private sector organisations brings more benefits when compared to in-house processes (Palmer, 1996).

Effective transport systems are fundamental to destination development and sustainable visitor markets (Page and Connell, 2009, Prideaux, 2000). Mobility infrastructure is referred to as the most important component of tourism facilitating the movement of people to, from and inside the destination. The relation between transport systems and the tourism market is reciprocal because they reinforce and influence each other (Currie and Falconer, 2014). It is also difficult to imagine that the aging of the population will not play a role in terms of personalization of the tourist offer, consumption of services and products, also in term of mobility: new experiences dedicated to seniors (the so-called "silver-haired tourists" to quote the UNWTO) should consider their moving needs.

The discussion about the possible strategies and policies to reach sustainable transport systems has attracted the attention of both scholars and policy makers. In destinations where tourism is part of the local economy, it is also important to take into account the transport behaviour and choices of tourists, which may differ from those of residents (Zamparini and Vergori, 2021). Previous literature analyses the choices of tourists to reach their destinations (Khadaroo and Seetana, 2008; Prillwitz and Barr,

2011) considering the availability of mobility alternatives given by the existing infrastructure (Hunecke et al. (2007). In these studies the key role of policy makers and local administrations emerges and the decision to make use of environmentally friendly transport modes depends on both the availability of these modes (Malhado and Rothfuss, 2013) and the personal socio-economic attitudes of tourists (Lew and McKercher, 2006; Becken, 2007). The search for other tourism models - which convey a different relationship with the environment and local communities - will acquire growing importance.

However, the concept of participant-governed networks to achieve strategic sustainable mobility (Prideaux, 2000), for our knowledge, is an understudied topic. Gallo and Marinelli (2020) investigate many topics to provide a broad analysis of the main studies and research that from different points of view have focused on sustainable mobility, emphasising the interdisciplinary nature of the issue. In their research the aspect of network and collaborative governance is not addressed.

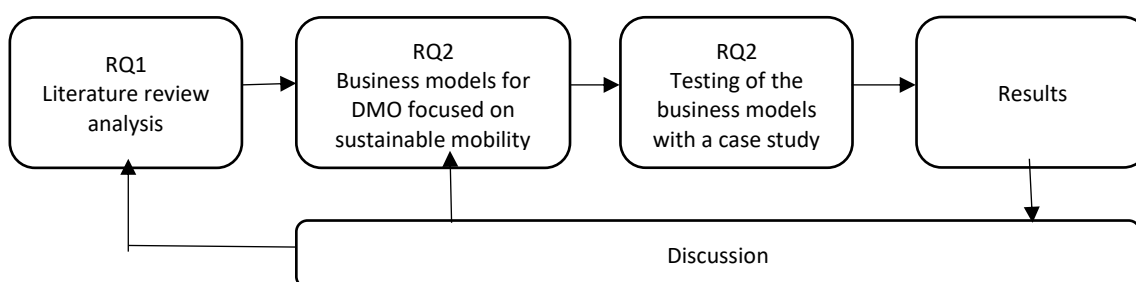
Starting from this gap in the literature, *the aim of this research is focusing on the governance aspect of networks among the actors committed in the destination management suggesting a Destination Management Organisation (DMO) business model around the topic of mobility.* According to the definition of World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2019) 'destination management consists of the coordinated management of all the elements that make up a tourism destination'. Destination management is based on the coordinated management of different elements of the destination embracing a strategic approach that helps to avoid duplications of functions and efforts and to identify potential gaps yet not filled. Organisations involved in this coalition are committed to maximise the competitiveness of the destination by defining a DMO that coordinates the different activities of the actors under a shared strategy and integrated goals. Traditionally, destination management is used for marketing, promotion, location brand and visitor services (Pike, 2006; García et al., 2012), but DMO for mobility is a field yet to be studied.

Considering the aim of our research, the questions leading our study are the following:

RQ1) What is the current scientific literature about network and DMO, with particular regard to mobility issue?

RQ2) What are the business models for DMO focused on sustainable mobility?

Our research develops in these parts.



The literature review aims at answering the RQ1) focusing on the advancement of the research activity in the fields of sustainable mobility in the tourism sector, network governance and DMO to identify the gap we aim to fill. For the literature review analysis, we will be supported by VOSviewer software.

The second step aims at answering the RQ2) starting from the typologies of Destination Management Organisations business models by Reinhold et al. (2019) to be adapted with both the results of literature review and the results of an empirical analysis. In particular, Reinhold's et al. (2019) research identifies four types of business models suitable for DMO, considering both the complexity of business model configuration and the control the DMO has in order to manage the destination as a production system: the first type (destination factory) describes a business model configuration of

low complexity that assumes a DMO of high perceived control over the destination; the second type (destination service center) refers to a business model configuration of low complexity and DMO's little control over the destination; the third type (value orchestrator) stands for a business model configuration of high complexity that assumes a DMO of high perceived control over the destination; the fourth type (value enabler) characterizes a business model configuration of high complexity enabling value creation by destination actors.

Using these types of business models as a base concept, we will proceed with an exploratory study based on qualitative methodology on a case study (Province of Brescia): external and internal context analysis, carried on with secondary sources analysis and interviews, will depict the status quo of tourism in Province of Brescia. Hence, we will propose a DMO business model suitable for the case study and potentially suitable for other tourist destinations.

The impact of our research is twofold: first, filling the identified gap, we aim at giving a contribution to the existent literature in the field of sustainable tourism management destination; second, our suggested model can be proposed to a target of actors potentially involved in the creation of a DMO to manage the mobility related to tourist flows in Province of Brescia, having a practical implications and representing a starting point of future research in the field. The main limitation of our study refers to data collection (e.g. archival records, interviews) that provides past static data and potentially misleading information (e.g. high non response rate). A further limitation is the definition of a DMO business model specific for the destination object of the case study. However, given the presence of different territorial variables in the Province examined, we believe that the same may represent an emblematic case and reference for other provinces.

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