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## MAKING CULTURAL TOURISM NETWORKS WORK – THE ROLE OF COLLECTIVE ACTORS

Anna Moretti\*, Michele Tamma\*\*

### Abstract

Culture and tourism have a complementary and mutually beneficial relationship: value offerings are co-created by integrated value chains and networks of interdependent actors. However, building and maintaining cultural tourism networks is far from straightforward: both the tourism industry and the cultural sector are fragmented and heterogeneous, and often seem to be speaking different languages. We investigate how collective actors can contribute to fostering collaborative strategies, focusing on a specific inter-organizational network located in the city of Venice. Our main findings have implications both for managerial and public policies: the identification of actors, positioned at intermediate network levels, who can influence a network's functioning allows for interventions not generally addressed to the destination as a whole but aimed at solving specific network's weaknesses.

**Keywords:** network, complementarity, culture, tourism, trust, collective actors, governance.

### Riassunto

*Far funzionare le reti turistico-culturali: il ruolo degli attori collettivi*

Le produzioni turistiche e culturali sono caratterizzate da una relazione di complementarità: i processi di creazione del valore si sostanziano in catene del valore integrate e reti di attori interdipendenti. Nonostante ciò, la costruzione e il mantenimento delle reti turistico-culturali è tutt'altro che scontata: le produzioni turistiche e culturali sono frammentate ed eterogenee, e spesso sembrano parlare lingue diverse. Il presente

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lavoro di ricerca analizza come gli attori collettivi possano contribuire allo sviluppo di strategie collaborative, e in particolare si focalizza su un caso di rete inter-organizzativa sviluppata nella città di Venezia. I principali risultati di questo lavoro hanno implicazioni sia manageriali che di politiche pubbliche: l'identificazione degli attori, posizionati a livelli intermedi della rete, in grado di influenzarne il funzionamento permette di individuare interventi non diretti alla destinazione nel suo insieme, ma volti a risolvere le specifiche debolezze della rete.

*Parole chiave:* rete, complementarietà, cultura, turismo, fiducia, attori collettivi, governance.

## Introduction

Culture and tourism have a mutually beneficial relationship that can strengthen the attractiveness and competitiveness of destinations. Culture is an increasingly important element of the tourism product, which enriches customers' experience and adds important distinctive traits. At the same time, tourism provides not only an important means for creating income that can support cultural heritage, cultural production and creativity; it also creates a broader audience/market for local cultural products. Moreover, tourism structures, businesses and organizations offer those services needed to deliver and improve the cultural experience of non-local visitors (such as accessibility, hospitality, communication and information).

Thus, cultural and tourism value chains can be opportunely integrated, since "the quality of the experience offered by a tourist destination is more than the sum of its parts; it depends in important ways on how the organizational parts are interconnected, the way they act and interact and the relations between the actors involved" (March and Wilkinson, 2009). Value offerings are co-created and co-delivered to customers by integrated value chains and networks of interdependent actors.

However, building and maintaining cultural tourism networks is far from straightforward (Della Corte and Aria, 2014). Creating effective collaborations is a real challenge, because both the tourism industry and the cultural sector are fragmented and heterogeneous (Pavlovich, 2003). Heterogeneity can be defined in terms of different value systems (Ritchie and Crouch, 1993), missions, resources and competencies that each player brings to the collaboration process. Within a collaboration context, heterogeneity can be viewed, on the one hand, as a strength: through the mix of different capabilities and resources, a superior capacity to meet varying customer needs can be achieved (actors, activities and resources form a system where heterogeneous demands are satisfied by heterogeneous resources [Håkansson and Johanson, 1992]). On the other hand, it

can make inter-organizational relationships more subject to coordination problems and conflict issues. These problems can be highly relevant for cultural/tourism partnerships, since these sectors often seem to speak different languages because of their different approaches: profit vs. non-profit motives, market vs. public, etc. (OECD, 2009; De Carlo and Dubini 2010).

The tourism literature has increasingly acknowledged the importance of a network approach that integrates tourism with other value chains, with the aim of achieving sustainable value-creation processes (Arnaboldi and Spiller, 2011). The presence of complementarities and resource dependencies has also been widely acknowledged by scholars, who linked interdependencies to the relevance of networks for achieving strategic leverage (Pavlovich, 2003).

Approaching tourism organizational fields through network theory provides a useful analytical approach for the analysis of multi-level interactions that characterize destinations: it allows us to recognize the presence of multiple networks operating at different scales and over time (Dredge, 2006; Haugland, Ness, Grønseth and Aarstad, 2011). A plurality of actors suggests that the composition of interests needed to sustain network coordination arrangements is not a trivial issue, and that organizational studies cannot ignore the twofold – both cooperative and conflictual – nature of interactions.

Network functionalities and dysfunctions, studied by sociologists and organizational scholars, have been investigated in the tourism field for a number of years (Selin and Beason, 1991; Novelli, 2006; Saxena, 2005; Tinsley, 2001), however still little is known about *how different actors can contribute to fostering collaborative strategies*. The present paper seeks to contribute to this literature with a case study of a specific instance of network in a world-famous cultural tourism destination: the city of Venice. We take as an exploratory field of research the network of relationships between the local hospitality system and a cultural event of international resonance, the Venice Film Festival. With our analysis we want to assess how *collective actors* can contribute to fostering collaborative relationships that are of strategic relevance both for the Festival and the destination's competitiveness.

This paper is organized as follows: section 1 presents the theoretical framework from which we develop our analysis; our network conceptualization and hypotheses are introduced in section 2, followed by the presentation of methods, analysis and results in section 3; the interpretation of our main results is provided in section 4, while the last section offers a general discussion, presenting the implications of our findings and potential future developments of this research.

## 1. Background theory

Debates in organizational studies have developed significantly around networks, following two main approaches: i) networks as a perspective, adopted by social network analysts (within which very famous concepts such as the strength of weak ties and structural holes have been developed [Granovetter, 1983]), and ii) networks as a form of governance, characterized by a vivid debate between Williamson's TCE (1985) and Powell's sociological approach. This debate has been fundamentally shaped by Walter Powell's (1990) seminal call for a "new conceptual toolkit" to describe "networks that are neither markets nor hierarchies," but which are somehow more social – that is, more dependent on relationships, mutual interests, and reputation – and less guided by a formal structure of authority (Powell, 1990) than either markets or hierarchies. The study of networks as a form of governance is strongly linked to the study of destination management, and thus we position this work within that stream of research. In defining what a network form of governance is, we follow Podolny and Page (1998) who define it as "any collection of actors ( $N > 2$ ) that pursue repeated, enduring exchange relations with one another and, at the same time, lack a legitimate organizational authority to arbitrate and resolve disputes that may arise during the exchange". This definition, while excluding market pure relations as well as employment relations, includes a wide variety of inter-organizational relationships, such as alliances, consortia, business groups, relational contracts, outsourcing relations, co-marketing agreements.

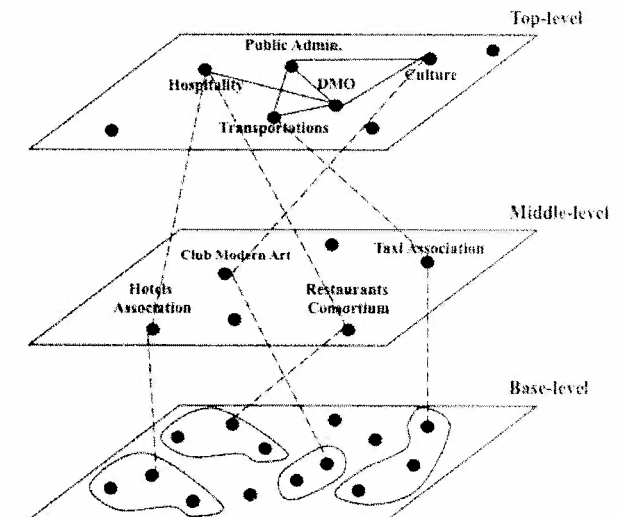
In the cultural tourism field, networks can be the basis for the value-creation processes of destinations, since they are strongly tied to the interconnection of organizational parts and depend in important ways on the relations between the actors involved. Given the particular production structure of the tourism field, the social approach to the coordination mechanisms of networks has been the most widely used (Wong, 2011; Lemmetyinen and Go, 2009; Sundbo, 2007; Pavlovich, 2003). Trust and personal ties have been recognized as key assets for tourism destination development (Beritelli and Bieger, 2014) through network organizations (Saxena, 2005; Tinsley, 2001). Since firms, belonging both to the same or different business areas, can regard one another as competitors as well as cooperators, issues such as "trust", "relations", and "social capital" become fundamental in tourism networks (Novelli, 2006).

Destinations involve several kinds of interdependent but autonomous businesses, organizations, and institutions that, together, create different tourism experiences that are more than the mere sum of their parts. Hence, inter-organizational relationships can be considered as structural preconditions to improving value-creation processes both on the demand and sup-

ply sides (Rispoli e Tamma, 1995). But it also must be noted that within a destination, alongside single players, a range of *collective actors* very often operate, i.e. actors that result from collaborative behaviors and alliances adopted by single players themselves. Groups of single firms and organizations, in fact, cluster together to create consortia, associations, online booking centers and information points, product clubs, and convention bureaux. Public agencies and institutions are frequently among the partners. Through these collective actors, single players are able to pool resources and realize activities to cope with specific issues or projects that are beyond their individual capacities. But collective actors can also be seen as a means to institutionalizing and managing the convergence of their members' interests toward better-defined and better-represented common strategies. Hence, collective actors can function as a point of reference for numerous other businesses, institutions and stakeholders, internal or external to the destination, that must relate and negotiate in the most rapid, effective, and efficient way.

The variety of actors potentially involved in such relationships raises the issue of which kind of players populate the interaction field and how they position themselves to influence the evolution and development of collaborative networks (Jamal, 1995). Making cultural tourism networks function therefore requires the identification of single and collective actors who can actually influence the collaborative strategies between players within the network.

Fig. 1 – Levels of analysis of cultural tourism networks



Note: a) Solid lines represent network ties and oblongs are formal organizations (associations); b) People in multiple roles are dashed lines connecting corresponding dots in different domains.

Hence, in order to study the development of collaborative strategies in a destination, it is necessary to identify at least three levels of analysis and the interplay between them: i) a base-level (the lower level), which considers single actors (businesses, organizations, institutions) who control specific resources and activities; ii) a middle-level, which takes into account the various types of possible collective actors, formed by groups of single actors with the aim of pooling resources for joint projects and activities, or increasing their own bargaining power and fostering relationships with other actors; iii) a top-level, which provides the synthetic view of the overall system of relationships among the main destination's stakeholders.

In a way, a similar approach is also present in the literature on destination governance. As presented in the work of Beritelli (2011), the development of stakeholder networks is a key issue for policies related to the strategic development of destinations (Getz, 1994; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003) as well as destination marketing (Heath, 1992). Collective actors are identified as relevant actors since they can intervene in managing and coordinating relationships both between firms themselves and between firms and the public government (Tamma, 2012).

Notwithstanding the acknowledgment of the presence of different levels of interaction, the literature somehow under-investigates the actual role of *collective actors* in fostering collaborative strategies within cultural tourism networks: our analysis aims at contributing to answer to this question.

## 2. Network conceptualization and hypotheses formulation

The empirical setting of this work is the network between the Venice Film Festival (VFF) and the local hospitality system (HS). In particular, we developed our observation during the 68th Festival, when a formal attempt of coordination between the VFF and the HS was made.

The VFF is the cinema division of one of the most important cultural institutions in Venice, the Biennale. Each year, it organizes a cultural event of international fame, the "Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica", the first competitive film festival of the world, born in 1932. The Lido, the biggest island of the city of Venice, is the historical location of the Festival: first hosted by the Hotel Excelsior in 1937, the VFF was moved to a brand-new theater with multiple screens, the Palazzo del Cinema, located on the same square as the hotel.

The hospitality system in Venice counts more than four hundred hotels, grouped into three different associations: Association 1 gathers almost all of the big and higher-category hotels; Association 2 is the oldest association and groups the larger part of Venetian hotels; and Association 3 is a smaller group of hotels mainly located on the Lido.

The VFF is tied to the hospitality system in a tight complementary relationship (Milgrom and Roberts, 1995; Siggelkow, 2001): the festival experience is complemented by the hospitality system, as well as by all of the complementary services its visitors require (transportation, restaurants, etc.), hence its value depends on their overall quality. Vice-versa, the realization of a cultural event of international appeal in the city of Venice creates high tourist demand and high value (Getz, 2008).

Despite the existence of these important complementarities, cooperation between the VFF and the hospitality system has never been developed effectively, with detrimental effects on tourist experience and on value-creation for the whole destination. An emblematic article from one of the most important specialist journals, *Variety* (2002), points to the core of the problem: "Shouldn't the oldest and arguably most prestigious film festival in the world be running like a well-oiled machine at this point – even though it's in Italy? To be blunt, it's not. From an organizational point of view, it's a creaky mass of disconnected parts".

Determined to tackle these weaknesses, the VFF realized that the only way to become "a well-oiled machine" was to have a dialogue with the whole hospitality system in order to reach a systemic coordination<sup>1</sup>. On the occasion of the 68th annual Festival, the VFF organized two formal meetings (hosted by the local administration as a neutral ground), with the directors of the three hotel associations, considered as possible effective points of reference. During the meetings the content of possible collaborative agreements was discussed. The focus was limited to those actions that could enhance the overall perceived value of the event with a negligible required investment by single firms: commercial aspects were ruled out as a topic of discussion. So, the hypothesized content of collaborative actions encompassed, among others, actions such as extending the service time of meals to conform to the Festival's screening times, offering a coordinated service of private transports to the Festival's location, arranging an information area within the common areas of hotels with informative material provided by the VFF, etc. When the agreement was finalized the three associations presented the proposal to their associates, asking them to cooperate with the VFF on the collectively designated lines.

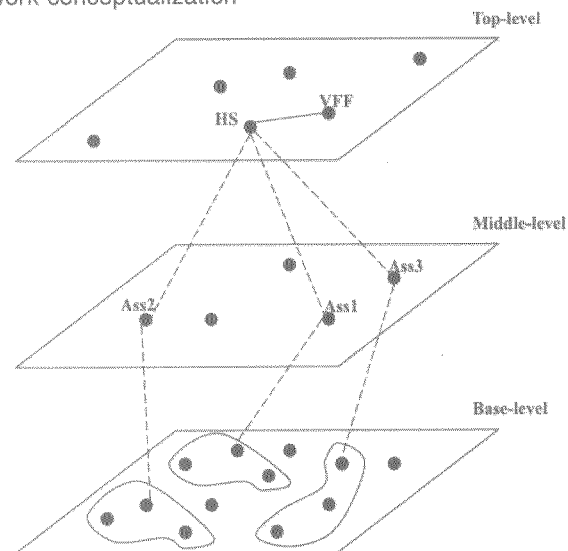
The network has been conceptualized as depicted in Figure 2.

At the base level lie all of the single hotels constituting the hospitality system, which are represented in the middle level by the three associations. The VFF, at the top level, negotiates with the HS as a "unique subject": a unique collaborative agreement was developed between the cultural event organization (VFF) on the one hand, and the hospitality system (HS) on the other.

1. Evidence coming from authors' qualitative analysis (in-depth interviews, press and archives data) presented in the Appendix.



Fig. 2 – Network conceptualization



Note: a) Solid lines represent network ties and oblongs are formal organizations (associations); b) People in multiple roles are dashed lines connecting corresponding dots in different domains.

The investigation presented in this paper refers to what happened next and to the role played by collective actors: in fact, “gathering stakeholders at a round table is no guarantee for initiating collective action, launching joint projects or sealing alliances” (Beritelli 2011, p. 610).

This empirical case presented an ideal research setting within which to explore our research question for two main reasons:

- the actual presence of actors at the middle level mediating collaborative relationships between network members (associations);
- the underperforming network, which allows for the investigation of the actual role collective actors have in fostering collaborative strategies without resorting to other possible explanations (for example, embedded relationships, inertia, learning from past experience, etc.).

Our units of analysis are *collaborative strategies adopted by the hotels* (base level) toward the VFF. In order to investigate the role of collective actors in fostering the adoption of collaborative strategies at the lower network level, we hypothesize that the higher the trust in the association, the higher the level of collaborative strategy adopted by the hotel.

*H1: Hotels’ trust in the association positively influences the likelihood of developing a collaborative strategy with the VFF.*

In agreement with Zaheer *et al.* (1998), who highlight how the combination of trust and conflict can differently (in their interdependence) im-

pact inter-organizational performances, we hypothesize that the higher the conflict with the association, the lower the level of collaborative strategy adopted by the hotel.

*H2: Hotel’s conflict with the association negatively influences the likelihood of having a collaborative strategy with the VFF.*

We tested our hypotheses on survey data collected immediately after the 68th annual VFF. The interpretation of the results of our hypotheses testing is supported by data from semi-structured interviews with network members, direct observation of participants’ interactions, documents and archival data of the VFF (Yin, 2009). A more detailed account of the qualitative data collected is provided in the Appendix.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Data

*Sample.* Our reference population is represented by all the hotels belonging to an association located in the area of influence of the VFF. From the total number, a sample of 198 hotels (representing 75% of the population) was selected, following the criterion of the representativeness of the hotels’ category, association and location (in terms of distance from the Festival).

*Questionnaire.* A web-based questionnaire was prepared and pre-tested with association directors. Hotel managers were invited to respond to our questionnaire by e-mail. Following Dillman’s techniques (Dillman, 1978; Dillman, 1991), we followed-up with correspondence in order to maximize the response rate. We received a total of 69 valid questionnaires, for a final response rate of 35% of individuals eligible and willing to participate (69/198).

*Testing for Nonresponse Bias.* In order to assess possible threats to the internal validity of our work, we carried out t-tests to detect differences in means between respondents and nonparticipating hotels. No significant differences ( $p$ -value  $< 0.01$ ) were found for the hotels’ category ( $t = 1.46$ ,  $df = 196$ ,  $p = 0.15$ ), location ( $t = 2.10$ ,  $df = 196$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ), or association ( $t = -0.29$ ,  $df = 196$ ,  $p = 0.78$ ).

#### 3.2. Variables

In order to test our hypotheses we used a set of eight variables: the dependent variable (collaborative strategy), the two explanatory variables

Tab. 1 – Instruments

Measures and Items	Loadings	Cronbach's $\alpha$
<i>Trust VFF*</i>		.815
Actions undertaken by VFF are coherent; I know what to expect (P)	.887	
VFF is reliable for what concerns collaborations (R)	.646	
Facing eventual problems, VFF would be willing to help us (R)	.603	
VFF is trustworthy (R)	.719	
(1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 7 = strongly agree)		
<i>Trust association*</i>		.939
Actions undertaken by my association are coherent; I know what to expect (P)	.997	
My association has always been evenhanded in collective actions (F)	.869	
My association looks out for members' interests with equal concern (F)	.842	
I am sure my association would not act against my interests, even if the opportunity presented itself (R)	.641	
I would feel a sense of betrayal if my association's behavior was below my expectations (R)	.969	
My association is trustworthy; it represents my interests (R)	.905	
(1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 7 = strongly agree)		
<i>General Collaborative Attitude</i>		.894
Effort put into collaborations is repaid in terms of income	.582	
Effort put into collaborations is repaid in terms of image	.882	
Effort put into collaborations is repaid in terms of customer satisfaction	.866	
Effort put into collaborations is repaid in terms of customer fidelization	.820	
Effort put into collaborations is repaid in terms of differentiation	.821	
(1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 7 = strongly agree)		
<i>Collaborative Attitude VFF</i>		.895
Collaboration with the VFF is important for customers' fidelization	.842	
Collaboration with the VFF is important for differentiation	.753	
Collaboration with the VFF is important for increasing our occupancy rate	.699	
Collaboration with the VFF is important for tying our image to a cultural event	.801	
Collaboration with the VFF is important for reducing marketing costs	.726	
Collaboration with the VFF is important for acquiring visibility on the cultural tourism market	.803	
(1 = strongly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 7 = strongly agree)		
<i>Collaborative Strategy</i>		.865
<i>In the occasion of the last VFF, your hotel has:</i>		
Offered tourism packages explicitly dedicated to event visitors	.614	
Offered an information service about the event	.159	
Reserved some rooms for event visitors	.546	
Proposed special services for event visitors	.804	
Ran a marketing campaign tied to the event's brand	.302	
Had personnel explicitly dedicated to event visitors	.832	
Hired temporary workers for the event's duration	.902	
Had collaboration agreements with the VFF	.964	
Had personnel explicitly dedicated to manage relationships with the VFF	.849	
(1 = No, 4 = Yes, it is a consolidated practice)		

\* P = Predictability, F = Fairness, R = Reliability

(trust of and conflict with the association), and five control variables (trust of the VFF, general collaborative attitude, collaborative attitude with the VFF, importance of collaboration, and star rating). Two variables (conflict with the association and the importance of collaboration) were measured through a single item, while five variables were built through the Principal Components Analysis developed from a set of items in our questionnaire. Table 1 reports all items used to operationalize these five variables. In order to measure the constructs of interest, we used instruments derived from the literature where available. We used Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient to estimate the reliability of scales in which all items are weighted in the same way. All the  $\alpha$  coefficients are well above the recommended value of 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Details about the construction of the instruments follow.

*Trust.* In order to measure the two constructs related to trust we started building our instrument from that created and validated by Rempel *et al.* (1985) and later adapted by Zaheer *et al.* (1998). In the two instruments we adapted the referent of trust to our context, as either the VFF or the association. Initial sets of items measuring the two constructs of interest were the same. However, factor analysis of the two trust measures (assessing the constructs for unidimensionality) showed a higher measurement power of reduced subsets of items. The final set of questions contained four items for "trust in the VFF" and six for "trust in the association", all coming from previous literature (Rempel *et al.*, 1985; Zaheer *et al.*, 1998).

*Collaborative Attitude.* Beginning with the assumption of utility-maximizing individuals, we focused our attention on the effects of collaborative relationship performance: the higher the acknowledgment of opportunities coming from collaboration, the higher the attitude in favor of collaboration. We decided to weight the knowledge of possible profit with the knowledge of efforts or investment required for building and maintaining collaborative relationships, thus our items acquired the "effort is repaid in terms of..." form. We also developed a factor analysis to assess the construct unidimensionality, leading to a final scale constituted by five items. In order to measure agents' "collaborative attitude towards VFF", we adapted the "general collaborative attitude" scale to the specific context. This construct expresses the willingness of hotel managers to cooperate with the VFF, due to their acknowledgment of its relevance in terms of potential revenue (material and immaterial). After testing the construct for unidimensionality, the final scale is composed of a group of five items.

*Collaborative Strategy.* Following Evans (2001), the implementation of collaborative strategies in the tourism field can be conceptualized in terms of five different strategic areas: marketing, product, information systems, equipment and human resources, and logistics. We developed our scale proposing items for each of these strategic areas, asking hotel managers if



their firm adopted such organizational practices and if they were consolidated ones or not. From the initial group of items, factor analysis led to the identification of a subset of 9 items with higher measurement properties.

*Conflict.* One item measured the degree of conflict between hotels and their association. This item was adapted from Zaheer *et al.* (1998) and Van De Ven and Delbecq (1976).

*Importance of Collaboration.* One item was dedicated to agents' self-assessment and their perception of the importance of being involved in cooperative relationships.

### 3.3. Analysis

From the scales developed, we built our variables. The dependent variable, "collaborative strategy", is built as follows: we attributed a "0", to all respondents who declared not to have adopted any collaborative activity or, at most, providing only information service; otherwise, we attributed a "1".

All other variables were built on an additive base, as the assessment of their validity through Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient requires. Since other elements of the transaction can play a role in the adoption of collaborative strategies, we controlled for the hotels' star rating, a good reference for qualitative levels and specific structural assets of hotel firms.

Table 2 includes some descriptive statistics of our data. A first consideration can be made by observing that only 22% of respondents adopted a collaborative strategy during the 68th annual Festival. This result in some way mirrors the general scenario of the destination depicted through the analysis of archival data and interviews.

The trust variables are both close to the "neutral score", but respondents show higher trust levels for their association in comparison to the VFF. This difference can be explained by the low level of interaction that respondents had with the VFF, given that trust is known to be strongly linked to experience and repeated interactions (Zaheer *et al.*, 1998).

Higher results are registered for the perception of the importance of collaboration and of a collaborative attitude. The importance of collaboration is on average evaluated 5.75 points out of 7. Interestingly, on the other hand, the collaborative attitude toward the VFF is assessed significantly lower than the general collaborative attitude respondents declare to have toward generic cultural institutions: 4.17 against the general 5.25. Again, it is possible to trace this result back to the low level of collaborative attitude ever adopted by respondents, but it also suggests that the effort to build collaborative strategies with the VFF is not perceived as being worthwhile.

Tab. 2 – Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Coll. Strategy	0.22	0.42	1.00							
Trust VFF	4.14	1.10	0.62	1.00						
Trust Association	4.38	1.48	0.31	0.42	1.00					
Importance Coll.	5.75	1.42	0.27	0.21	0.13	1.00				
Coll. Attitude Gen.	5.25	1.33	0.13	0.23	0.07	0.71	1.00			
Coll. Attitude VFF	4.17	1.58	0.42	0.45	0.30	0.60	0.61	1.00		
Conflict Assn.	4.06	1.77	-0.04	0.03	0.39	-0.03	-0.18	-0.06	1.00	
Star Ranking	3.12	0.95	0.20	-0.03	-0.11	0.08	0.10	-0.03	0.04	1.00

In order to test our hypotheses (H1 and H2) we developed a logit analysis. Our model is in the form of:

$$p(x) \equiv P(y = 1|x) = G(x\beta)$$

where  $x\beta = \beta_1, \beta_2, \chi_2, \dots, \beta_k, \chi_k$  and  $G(\cdot)$  is the cumulative distribution function which maps  $x\beta$  into the response probability (Wooldridge, 2001). In the logit model, where  $G(z)$  is the logistic function, the sign of the effect of  $x_j$  on the probability of adopting a collaborative strategy is given by the sign of  $\beta_j$ . It is important to know that the magnitude of our parameters is not tied to a defined scale, and thus only relative comparisons for interpretation are possible.

### 3.4. Results

Table 3 summarizes the regression results for our models. Model 2 is shown to better fit our data by dropping the collaborative attitude toward the VFF, but both models are shown to fit well with our data

$$\begin{aligned} \chi^{2,1} &= 45.801 \text{ (7df), } p < 0.001 \text{ and} \\ \chi^{2,2} &= 45.275 \text{ (6df), } p < 0.001. \end{aligned}$$

Hypothesis 1, predicting a positive impact of *trust toward the association* on collaborative strategies is not supported by our data, namely, we get a positive coefficient but not a statistically significant one.

Hypothesis 2, predicting a negative relation between *conflict with the association* and our dependent variable, is supported by our data at a 90% confidence interval ( $\beta = -1.06, p < 0.10$ ).

For what concerns other control variables, our results show that *trust toward the VFF* has a positive impact on the adoption of collaborative

strategies. The coefficient is positive and significant at a 99% confidence level ( $\beta = 0.75, p < 0.01$ ).

A positive relation between the perception of the *importance of collaboration* and the adoption of a collaborative strategy is shown by our data, with a 90% confidence interval ( $\beta = 1.59, p < 0.10$ ). An interesting result is the negative and significant coefficient of the *collaborative attitude* variable ( $\beta = -0.267, p < 0.05$ ), indicating that the higher the general collaborative attitude, the lower the probability of adopting a collaborative strategy with the VFF.

Discussion of these results is provided in the next section.

Tab. 3 – Determinants of Collaborative Strategy, Results of Logit Regression

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	-20.16 *** (7.157)	-21.82 *** (7.279)
Trust VFF	0.69 *** (0.245)	0.75 *** (0.245)
Trust Assn.	0.13 (0.123)	0.153 (0.123)
Importance Coll.	1.30 (0.915)	1.59* (0.867)
Conflict Assn.	-1.01 * (0.613)	-1.06* (0.628)
Coll. Att. Gen.	-0.28 ** (0.120)	-0.267** (0.118)
Coll. Att. VFF	0.06 (0.088)	-
Stars	1.51 ** (0.769)	1.46** (0.727)
Null deviance	72.25(68df)	72.25(68df)
Residual deviance	26.45(61df)	26.98(62df)
$\chi^2$	45.801(7df)	45.275(6df)
AIC	42.454	40.98
Observations	69	69

\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

Data inside parenthesis are the corresponding standard errors.

#### 4. The role of single and collective actors: discussing results

In order to give a more comprehensive understanding and more robustness to our results, in this discussion session we triangulate them with additional qualitative evidence (a more detailed description of the qualitative analysis is provided in the Appendix).

Our findings are in line with the literature saying that *trusting the potential partner* is an important precondition to collaborative strategies. In our empirical case, we found quite a low level of average trust toward the VFF (4.14 on a 7-points scale), especially considering the long history and embeddedness of their interactions. This result may be traced back to the difficult past relationship between the VFF and the hospitality system. The analysis of our interviews suggests that their common history has been anything but smooth. The VFF's director describes it as follows:

*"We could talk of relationships micro-breaks. A global break never happened. We had always had a dialogue, a dialogue that still lasts. Some firms some years worked more with us, some other years less. Someone was satisfied, someone else was not. The same can be said for us"*.

Regarding the perception of hotels about the importance of collaboration, our analysis shows its positive impact on the adoption of collaborative strategies, revealing even a double magnitude with respect to trust towards the VFF. Average assessments for this variable are around 5.75, suggesting that some fertile ground remains available to build collaborative relationships between the hospitality system and the VFF. In our interviews, the importance of collaboration is acknowledged also by association directors, as well as by the VFF: they define network governance as something *advisable, desirable* and in some cases *necessary*. The awareness of the relevance of cooperation probably comes from the negative publicity in the national and international press about the lack of coordination among the actors of the destination.

A surprising and interesting result comes from the control variable measuring hotels' attitude toward collaboration: the estimated coefficient predicted a negative relationship, namely as the general attitude increases, the probability of adopting a collaborative strategy decreases. This result suggests how in our context there seems to be an unexplained *gap between theory and practice*, as respondents who have a higher awareness of the potential benefit of collaboration do not adopt collaborative strategies with the VFF. Supporting this consideration are data from the qualitative analysis reported above: despite the awareness of the potential value that could be added through network governance, still other factors seem to inhibit the creation of inter-organizational relationships.

Within this general framework, we contextualize our hypotheses testing in terms of the following. *Hypothesis 1* predicted a positive relationship between trust toward the association and the likelihood of adopting a collaborative strategy, and *Hypothesis 2* predicted a negative relation for the conflict dimension. The model estimation returns a positive but not statistically significant coefficient for the trust variable (H1 is not supported), while we get a negative and significant coefficient for the conflict one (H2 is sup-

ported). The negative effect of past conflicts with the association on the willingness to adopt collaborative strategies is even stronger than the effect of trusting the VFF.

Associations, then, are certainly playing a role in the intermediation between associates and the VFF, since in the presence of conflicts they are able to negatively influence their members' willingness to collaborate with the Festival. Our results say that the two dimensions of the Associations' role in fostering collaborative strategies are not symmetrical: conflict looms larger than trust.

The role of collective actors in mediating cooperative relationships has some critical traits in our case study. As the VFF's director points out:

*"There are many different hotel associations, not all representative of the reality of the hotels. This is a first element of important difficulty".*

*Representativeness* seems to arise as a context-specific issue, characterized also by a paucity of trust toward the association (with an average score of 4.38 out of 7) that itself can affect the success of intermediation processes and consequently the adoption of collaborative strategies. This intuition is also supported by the narration of Association 3's director:

*"It often happens that the director comes to the meetings – roundtables for specific initiatives – and then the communication [within the association] isn't... isn't really positive. So someone, maybe the "dead wood", doesn't agree with the conclusions or the choices made by the association, and doesn't follow the guidelines, damaging the whole group".*

Evidence points in the direction of an important role of associations in fostering collaborative strategies, and they seem to suggest that Venice's difficulties may lie in this domain.

## Conclusions

In this paper we contributed to answer the question of whether collective actors located in the middle level of a cultural tourism network help in fostering collaborative strategies between organizations at the top and lower levels of the network. The case study of the Venice Film Festival and the local hospitality system was selected as our research setting, given the actual presence of a middle level and its difficulties in building inter-organizational relationships.

Tourist destination management research widely acknowledges the relevance of a network form of governance and inter-organizational relationships. Yet the investigation of how this process can be sustained by the role played by collective actors has somehow been neglected by the literature.

We developed our hypotheses in order to investigate if trust and conflict with the association (our case study's collective actors of the middle level) had a positive and negative impact, respectively, on hotels' collaborative strategies with the VFF. Our results confirm that collective actors operating at the middle level actually affect the likelihood of adopting a collaborative strategy by actors at the base level of the cultural tourism network. In particular, in our case, this was an "inhibiting role" due to problems of representativeness.

## Managerial implications

In the analysis of the tourism destination of Venice, focused on the interaction between the local hospitality system and the Venice Film Festival, it emerged how the relationships between hotels and both the VFF and their associations are characterized by a paucity of trust. Hence, a potential path to exiting the failing dynamics of collaboration would be, on the one hand, to begin some trust-building actions within each association, and between hotels and the VFF; on the other hand, to develop processes of sharing goals and mutual interest communications (Provan and Kenis, 2007). Associations should promote trust-building processes among their associates. As the literature highlights (Zaheer *et al.*, 1998), trust within collective actors could be enhanced through more transparent communication and decision-making processes. In addition, associations should be able to enhance trust towards the VFF, for example through a more extensive communication on the potential benefits of a systemic cooperation.

Moreover, Zaheer *et al.* (1998) found that interpersonal and inter-organizational trust are two different concepts, although highly correlated: thus developing individual-level trust through team building processes (for instance, the creation of small project-oriented commissions) would have a positive impact also on inter-organizational trust (Das and Teng, 2001). Likewise, building routines or specific policies and procedures for interactions would create some reciprocal control mechanisms between organizations (Littler and Leverick, 1995).

Finally, the present study highlighted the importance for cultural tourism destinations to have reliable collective actors: these subjects, in fact, could be able to manage the convergence of their members' interests, often numerous and fragmented, toward shared and collective strategies (Della Corte and Aria, 2014). Thus the local administrator could foster the emergence of such collective actors and promote their legitimacy, in order to find the best interlocutors for public policies and project development.

## Future research directions

Our work contributes to developing a general framework for the analysis of cultural tourism destinations that are amenable for network gover-

nance. This study could be replicated in other research settings in order to assess its external validity, and namely to investigate the role of collective actors in different contexts. Moreover, an interesting extension of the present work would be a further investigation of the role of collective actors, assessing the magnitude of their influence on collaborations' successes or failures. In our context, the scarcity of actual collaborative strategies adopted did not allow for the development of a deeper analysis of the weight collective actors have in the collaboration-building process. Nevertheless, our preliminary findings sustained by the qualitative analysis suggest that mobilizing practices within associations (our reference for the middle level) can significantly affect the possibility of developing network forms of governance. Hence, an intriguing possibility for future research in this field could consider the extension of the analysis of collective actors' role to theories of political coalitions (March, 1962) and social movements (Kaplan, 2008).

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## Appendix

Tab. 1 – List of sources and brief description

Sources	Description
<b>Internal</b>	
<i>Interviews</i>	
18, 18h10min	Interviews were developed from February to May 2011. All key-stakeholders of the macro-system were interviewed at least once. The majority of interviewees occupied their position at least for 10 years, thus being able to provide an historical perspective of the situation.
<i>Ethnography</i>	
2, 3h15min	The two meetings to which the authors were invited to participate as external observers were held in March and April 2011. The meetings were hosted by the Lido Municipality.
<b>External</b>	
<i>National Press</i>	
2001-2011	All articles of the VFF national press review were analyzed. Articles about the relationships between the VFF and the HS have been selected (11 years of press review, 600 articles from more than 5000 available)
Observers	Articles containing opinions of third parties, external to the macro-systems.
Macro-system	Articles reporting interviews or official declarations of the macro-system's members.
<i>International Press</i>	
2001-2011	All articles of the VFF international press review were analyzed. Articles about the VFF performance, the HS performance, and their links, have been selected (11 years of press review, 50 articles selected).
<i>VFF Archival Data</i>	
1967-1983	Data accessible from the VFF archives regard all official documents collected for each festival's organization. Documents after 1983 are still secured. Data regarding official correspondence between the VFF and HS were analyzed, aiming at reconstructing the past history of their interrelationships.

Tab. 2 – Interviewees

Interviewee (# of interviews)
<i>Venice Film Festival:</i>
Managerial Director (1), Marketing Director (3), Press Manager (1)
<i>Local Government</i>
Tourism and Culture Counselor - City of Venice (1), Vice-president - Lido Municipality (3), Tourism and Culture Counselor - Lido Municipality (3)
<i>Hospitality System</i>
AV Director – Venice (1), AV Director – Lido (1), AT Director (1), AC Director (1), Hotel Manager 1 (1), Hotel Manager 2 (1)