Collaboration antecedents in tourism: do structures matter the most?

Introduction

Firms operate in various relationships with others and their performance is interdependent with direct partners and third parties. Interfirm collaboration has been recognized as one of the most relevant streams of management literature in an increasingly networked economy (Wang, Xiang, 2008). Collaboration in tourist destinations is especially important because a regional tourist product is created by many different entities. This attracts a growing academic attention to tourism collaboration as a field of scrutiny (Baggio, Scott, Cooper, 2010; Czernek 2013; Mariani, Kylänen, 2014;).

Collaboration with competitors (Gnyawali, Park, 2011), or with other firms in a value network (Brandenburger, Nalebuff, 1996), is seen as a normative strategy allowing firms to achieve goals otherwise unavailable (Czakon, 2009). Firms are aware of collaboration benefits and driven into interdependent relationships, while being at the same time exposed to risk and challenges that may jeopardize the desired outcomes. And yet, collaboration between firms in tourism varies across destinations (Kylänen, Rusko, 2011) indicating that collaboration is an outcome variable dependent on many factors. The varied manifestations of collaboration between firms is explained by not less varied, and even conflicting literature streams on inter-organizational relationships (Bell et al., 2006). The resulting stock of knowledge lacks empirical grounding and rigorous testing both in terms of testing single type explanations, and comparing their relative importance in explaining collaboration formation.

Our study aims at elucidating the antecedents of tourism firms' collaborations. Based on a systematic literature review we have developed and tested a model of collaboration antecedents, regardless of whether the collaborative project is run by two or more partners. We test four hypotheses associating: rational, relational, structural, and cognitive antecedents with the creation of collaborative relationships. We have run our study in a random sample of 368 out of 1.687 firms collaborating in 74 Local Tourism Organizations in Poland. Our data collection process has been realized in the first half of 2016, by administering a survey to relevant respondents. We find varied support for the association of the various types of antecedents with collaboration in our SEM model.

Our results allow us to explore further the interrelationship between antecedents and collaboration. We find that the role of relational antecedents is particularly relevant (Czernek,

Czakon, 2016). Furthermore, cognitive antecedents suggest that the role of rational explanations of collaboration need to be strengthened in the tourism industry.

1. Theoretical background

Interfirm collaboration research is an established and relevant stream of strategic management literature in an increasingly networked economy (Gulati, Nohria, Zaheer, 2000). Indeed, firms operate in various relationships with others, and thus have become interdependent with direct partners and third parties (Hakanson, Snehota, 2006). Key management issues such as: firm survival, performance heterogeneity, or innovativeness have been found to depend on interorganizational relationships. Within an entangled and complex setting, some firms are more successful than others, attracting academic attention to this field of study. Firms are aware of collaboration benefits and driven into interdependent relationships, while being in the same time exposed to risk and challenges that ultimately jeopardize desired outcomes. The successful operation in interdependence with other has been found to be a distinctive organizational capability important for innovation (Capaldo, 2007). More recently, the capability to operate with firms that may display conflicting interests, that is direct rivals included in the value network (Brandenburger, Nalebuff, 1996), has also been identified and labelled coopetition capability (Gnyawali et al. 2016). While our understanding of collaboration success factors increases, notably by focusing on the management of paradoxical relationships (Le Roy, Czakon, 2016), the reasons why firms collaborate are much less clear. Therefore the decision to collaborate is a critical event and we focus on it in our study.

Systematic literature review

Prior literature basically offers four models for scrutinizing collaboration as a process (DeRond, Bouchikhi, 2004). Firstly, the life cycle model offers a linear approach to the dynamics of collaboration, which are supposed to follow a predefined sequence of stages, in the same order, from inception to disappearance. Studies developed from this stance propose different numbers and labels (Das, Teng, 1999) of phases, investigate into the specificity of each one and draw managerial implications. In our study we use the life-cycle approach to focus on the formation phase antecedents.

A second model for exploring the interorganizational dynamics is grounded in the assumption of purposeful action. In this view firms pursue individual objectives, and form relationships whenever necessary (Doz, 1996). Hence, firms are driven by clear-cut strategic objectives in a very rational way. We draw from this model that some antecedents of interorganizational relationships are related to strategies, and to the cognition of the strategist.

A third model swings the pendulum of attention from inside the organization to the outside pressures, stemming primarily from an evolutionary logic. Whether the collaborative relationships are randomly formed or not, it is the best fit to environmental contingencies that survives and spreads across firms. We draw form this model that contingencies may be facilitating or even inducing tourism firms to collaborate (Kylanen, Mariani, 2012).

The last model follows an equilibrium logic, even if it has been labelled as dialectical (DeRond, Bouchikhi, 2004). This stance posits that change occurs whenever an imbalance of opposing forces allows for it. Tensions remain a focal concept, indicating an opposition between two possible options. We draw from this perspective that a tourism firm may be torn between the will to operate individually and the strive to grasp the benefits of collaboration (Wang, 2008).

All in all, prior research offers a wide body of literature on interfirm collaboration developed from various stances. Our study focuses on the pre-formation phase in order to better understand what are the antecedents of tourism collaboration through a systematic review of the literature.

In recent years the traditional "narrative" literature review has been criticized in many ways (Langely 1999; Tranfield, et al, 2003). Among major shortcomings the: researcher bias, lack of thoroughness and rigor, inadequacy and incompleteness of evidence for policy formulation and implementation by practitioners (Langely, 1999; Tranfield et al, 2003; Fink, 1998; Hart, 1998) have been listed. Also, traditional reviews are criticized for the lack of critical

assessment. Traditional reviews start with discussion about other researchers' work before a research question is stated – such an approach is not in line with methodological rigor. In many traditional reviews the literature database selection is not specified, which makes analysis fragmentary.

Contrary to the traditional approach, the systematic literature review follows a replicable, scientific and transparent process, and aims to reduce biases through exhaustive literature searches of published and unpublished studies. It provides an audit trail of the reviewers' decisions, procedures and conclusions (Cook et al., 1997; Tranfield at al., 2003). We follow Tranfield et al. (2003) proposition to follow three main stages of systematic literature review: planning, conducting and reporting (table 1).

Table 1: Systematic literature review – stages characteristics

No. of activity	Characteristics of activities
Stage 1: Planning the review	
1.	Forming a review panel
2.	Defining and clarifying issues being searched and analyzed

3.	Creating review protocol to start scoping studies. The protocol consists of:
	  a) research questions
	  b) general guidelines to the sample of publications planned to be analyzed
	  c) general guidelines to the search strategy for identification of relevant studies
	  d) general criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies in the review

Stage 2: Conducting the review	
4.	Deciding on criteria of searching process e.g. types of sources, chosen keywords, etc.
5.	Searching bases according to accepted criteria and method
6.	Using criteria of excluding double publications
7.	Verifying base by surveying abstracts and quality of methodology
8.	Creating data-extraction forms with: - general information (e.g. title, author, publication details), - specific information (e.g. details and methods) - notes on themes emerging from the review, needed in future synthesis, - study features, (e.g. frequency analysis)
9.	Decide on data needed to perform research synthesis
Stage 3: Reporting and dissemination	

10.	Presenting thorough descriptive analysis of obtained results, explaining for example: how many publications were published in the time researched, who are the authors, what type of publications dominate, etc.
11.	Linking identified themes across the various core contributions
12.	Formulating practical recommendations basing on review
13.	Discussing and disseminating results of systematic review – publications, conferences, etc.

We formed a research panel in order to better understand interorganizational collaboration process in its formation phase in the tourism industry. Our scrutiny is guided by the following research question: why managers in tourist sector decide to start collaboration? We aimed at identifying the various types of antecedents of collaboration in tourism, and in other industries.

After review panel establishing, at this first stage of the project the core issue was to start activities leading to defining types of cooperation antecedents, identifying its types and levels of analysis. The process started with the identification of the search strategy. We decided on strict criteria of the searching process (Table 2).

Table 2: Systematic literature review – criteria of searching process

Category	Adopted criteria
Databases/ Sources	EBSCO, Emerald, ProQuest, ISI Web of Science, Science Direct, Scopus
Type of publication	Articles only (excluding proceedings, books, working papers)
Keywords range	Abstract or title/topic (eventually subject terms / subject area)
Sciences range	Business & Economy, Management, Social Sciences
Publications language	English only, full access papers
Publications access	Free access papers

Some databases, like EBSCO, Scopus or ProQuest generated several papers, ISI Web of Science generated several dozens of them. The review panel decided to search only published articles, treating them as the most useful and relevant source in terms of its merits and quality.

Keywords were searched among abstracts or articles titles. The final results were limited to particular field of science: business & economy, management and social sciences, and only papers in English and with full content were accepted to further analysis.

The review protocol used in this study contained details concerning research questions and general guidelines to the sample of publications and search strategy. Research questions were divided into two groups: general and specific ones. The general question was formulated in this way: "What are the antecedents of cooperation?". Next, specific questions were:

- What are the types of inter-organizational relationships (including cooperation) antecedents?

The keywords sets were as follows: collaboration and antecedents and dynamics; cooperation and antecedents and dynamics; networking and antecedents and dynamics; interorganizational relationships and antecedents and dynamics; inter-organizational relationships and antecedents and dynamics; collaboration and antecedents and evolutionary; cooperation and antecedents and evolutionary; networking and antecedents and evolutionary; "interorganizational relationships" and antecedents and evolutionary; "inter-organizational relationships" and antecedents and evolutionary.

We have run ten searches repeated independently for all of the databases. Each of these searches used three keywords in various configurations. However, in all searches the first keyword was related to cooperative relationships (namely: collaboration, cooperation, networking, "interorganizational relationship", or "inter-organizational relationship"), second was always "antecedent*" while third one referred to application of dynamic approach (namely: dynamics or evolutionary).

At this stage the searching keywords sets did not take into account "tourism" keyword in order to obtain a more comprehensive database for further analysis.

At this stage, we generate the initial literature database (table 3) through a process quantitatively described on figure 1.

Table 3: Initial Literature Database – searching results

	Science direct	Scopus	EBSCO	Emerald	ISI Web of Science	ProQuest
Searching keywords sets	9	78	23	26	357	30
Sciences range	7	51	23	0	148	30
Articles	7	22	22	23	129	22
English	0	21	22	0	123	22
Full text	7	18	18	20	120	9
Free Access	7	18	18	20	107	9
No-duplicate	126					

We used restrictions on the initial database. Searching terms referred to subject area/research field including: social sciences, business, economy, or management; type of publication only articles published in peer-reviewed journals; language of publication in English; and full-text accessibility. Next we aimed at removing duplications within particular databases and in created initial literature base. Before a more detailed investigation we decided to add 4 supplementary papers published in peer-reviewed journals identified by reviewers as seminal studies (additional articles: Grandori and Soda, 1995; Ritter, 1999; Grewal et al., 2001; Thöni et al., 2012).

Figure 2: Database search quantitative results.

In general, the iterative process of imposing additional restrictions allowed us to create the initial literature base consisting of 126 articles which have been read carefully by three individual researchers.

We have identified a visible and significant increase in the number of publications since 2009. What is more, a clearly growing trend characterized papers on the antecedents of inter-organizational relationships over the analyzed time period (1989–2014), which suggests that the interest of the study of collaboration antecedents increases. In terms of the structure of selected publications on the antecedents of inter-organizational relationships, a larger amount of empirical publications (71%) than theoretical (29%) papers can be observed. Furthermore, the antecedents are more often studied through quantitative methods (50%) are more common than through quantitative ones (21% of the sample). From a managerial perspective antecedents have been identified using different concepts and theories related to various management disciplines as: general management (organizational support theory, information management,

social networks), strategic management (Resource-Based View, network theory, strategic alliances, competition theory, diversity theory), logistics (supply chain management), and marketing (relational marketing). Interestingly, in our literature database cooperation antecedents have not been in focus of any replication study. In other words in each relationship investigated a different antecedent.

An examination of industries investigated in our literature database (figure 3), reveals that: (1) while many industries have been studied it is the traditional ones that attract more attention; (2) there is a lack of cooperation antecedents analysis in tourism sector. However it must be stressed, that the term "antecedent" is rarely used in the tourism field. Instead different types of pre-conditions/conditions of cooperation in this sector are researched in the literature. While substantiating the need to develop a model useful for the study of collaboration antecedents in the tourism sector our literature review also unveils various meanings attributed to the broad category of antecedents. This suggests a fragmented understanding and an emerging consensus which has yet to be strengthened by conceptual and empirical studies.

Table 5: Inter-organizational relationships antecedents types

Generic groups	Types of antecedents
Cognitive	knowledge, expertise, experience, information, abilities of a person/organization, leader skills, marketing capabilities, propensity to trust, entrepreneurial abilities, etc.
Relational	trust, former collaboration, conflict, competition, distance, depth of relations, types of networks, etc.
Structural	- embeddedness in directives, standards, in social relations - environmental – turbulence, security, availability of external resources, competitive advantage, market situation, shocks, etc. - institutional: (preconditions connected to relations: social capital, social ties), social resources
Rational	resources, capital, benefits, costs
Other	demographic features, partners diversity

Among the publications on antecedents, some types of antecedents appear as leading. We have aggregated them into six generic groups: cognitive, affective/relational, behavioral,

rational and "other" group. The specific examples of the antecedents types in each group are presented in Table 5.

Hypotheses development

Since the seminal paper on inter organizational relationships formation determinants, where six critical contingencies to collaborate have been outlined, i.e. necessity, asymmetry, reciprocity, efficiency, stability and legitimacy (Olivier, 1990), a wide stream of research has aimed at elucidating the drivers and the process of collaboration formation (Ring, Van de Ven, 1994). A common assumption underlying the bulk of early studies has been that firms pursue clear cut strategic objectives (Doz, 1996) and use collaborative ties as a means to achieve those objectives. Be it access to strategic resources, the strive to increase market power, value creation effort or efficiencies in resources exploitation (Gulati, Nohria, Zaheer, 2000), a number of reasons for firms to enter into collaborative agreements have been identified. For the tourism industry these reasons may be connected with: market expansion, product portfolio development, efficiencies seeking, economy of scale and scope development, learning related (Wang, Xiang, 2007).

However useful in exploring collaboration, these rational factors revealed to provide a fragmented picture of the collaboration phenomenon. Game theoretical modeling suggests that a rational agent should opt for collaboration (Parkhe, 1993), especially in repeated transaction settings. Moreover, the collaboration of many various agents is modeled as value creating (Brandenburger, Nalebuff, 1996), through complementarity and partial convergence of interests. However compelling, the rational choice stance fails to explain the actual behavior of firms in real conditions, as they have been found to be reluctant to collaboration (Okura, 2007). We believe that the rational choice stance has limitations that need to be addressed by examining other factors in order to elucidate why some firms enter collaboration while others do not. Therefore we challenge prior literature's claims that rational calculation is a sufficient condition for collaborative ties formation:

H1: Rational antecedents are a condition for interorganizational collaboration.

The specific setting of the tourism industry permits to deepen our understanding of collaboration antecedents (Fyall et al. 2012) by organizing available explanations into several theoretical frameworks: resource, relationship, politics, process and chaos-based theories. As a result a multidimensional, complex and industry-specific picture of collaboration in destination

marketing emerges. Beyond the strategy-related, or rational antecedents of collaboration, additional antecedents can be identified. Structural antecedents capture the embeddedness of actors in a wider network of business and social relationships (Gulati, Gargiulo, 1999) and in turn reveal to be coupled with relational antecedents, referring to the content of relationships rather than their structural features (Czernek, 2013). Also, the way prospective partners perceive prior experience (Gulati, 1996) and the partner attitudes (Czernek, Czakon, 2016) may have an impact on collaboration entry. We test prior findings in interorganizational relationship formation literature which suggest a path dependency view. As Gulati (1995) points out the likelihood of collaboration formation increases with experience in collaborating with the same partners. Further scrutiny on various types of embeddedness (Hagedoorn, 2006) calls for testing its hypothesized positive association with collaboration formation:

H2: Structural embeddedness fosters collaboration formation.

While structures refer to preexisting sets of ties, they do not address the content of those ties. Therefore we include such concepts as trust, trustworthiness and legitimacy (Kumar, Das, 2007) in our hypothesized variables relationship. While extant empirical evidence leaves a substantial gap in understanding the role of relational antecedents at network level, our prior studies suggest that relational antecedents may be expected to play a positive role in collaboration formation (Czernek, 2013):

H3: Relational antecedents positively impact collaboration formation.

In a similar vein we follow prior literature on tourism collaboration to explore the role of cognitive antecedents in collaboration formation (Kylanen, Rusko, 2011). Firms have been found to display various preferred perceptions of interfirm relationships, ranging from selfinterested competitive to common-good oriented collaborative ones (Wang, Fesenmeier, 2007). Scholars suggest that a specific combination of these conflicting cognitive frames are to be found in a coopetitive mindset (Gnyawali et al. 2016). Therefore most recent advances suggest that cognitive antecedents play a significant role in establishing collaboration:

H4: Cognitive antecedents drive collaboration formation.

All in all current literature on collaboration antecedents acknowledges the complexity of the phenomenon and proposes theoretical frameworks but suffers from very limited empirical test of these propositions. Our study aims at contributing to fill in this gap. We aim at testing the association of four types of antecedents: rational, structural, relational and cognitive with

collaboration formation in the tourism industry. Following prior findings on the differences between dyadic and network's levels of collaboration (Czakon, Czernek, 2016) we test each hypothesis in one model.

2. Empirical research design

We locate our study in the tourism industry, as a number of previous studies have captured the relevance of collaboration in tourism (Czakon and Czernek, 2016; Kylanen and Rusko, 2011). We purposefully choose to focus on firms that are members of Local Tourist Organizations (LTO), which are formal associations with well-developed coordination mechanisms covering the vast majority of industry players. In Poland there are 124 LTOs, but 74 are actively operating. We have identified 1.647 companies associated in these LTOs. The final sample consisted of 368 tourism firms. We run an unlimited simple random selection method, with an electronic random number generator.

The data collection process was carried out between May and June 2016, and was a part of a wider project focused on antecedents of cooperation in dyads and networks. Data was collected using pen and paper interviews. This technique ensures a better understating of research aims and questions (Tsaur, Wang 2011), when the phenomenon under consideration may be new to respondents (Bagdoniene, Hopeniene, 2015). Also, face-to-face data gathering methods increase the response rate, alleviate issues with missing data, and save time.

The final sample consisted of 368 companies represented predominantly by women (62%), aged between 31 and 40 years (37,8%). The majority of companies (54,9%) are family businesses operating in the most attractive tourist regions in Poland.

We followed a conventional quantitative approach for management studies (Venkatraman, Grant, 1986), and for those rare quantitative studies in tourism (Morris, Koçak, Özer, 2007; Tsaur, Wang 2011), that is a survey questionnaire with multi-item approach for measurement of variables. A 5-point symmetric and equidistant Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree and 5=Strongly Agree) was used. We use 5-point scales as scholars claim that 5-point scales may increase the response rate and are less confusing for interviewees (Bouranta et al. 2009).

To measure rational, structural and cognitive antecedents of collaboration we have used 4 items. The relational antecedent receives six items. Three items were used to measure collaboration: one referring to collaboration in general, the other referring to collaboration with a specific partner, and the third to collective collaboration. We have used control variables

including: company's age, company's size and experience measured by membership duration in the respective LTO.

We have checked for data distribution normality. Finally, we have tested for common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003). T Herman's one factor test using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed (Kraus et al. 2012). The results show that the is no risk for CMB as 65.33% of the total variance is explained by the factor with the highest level of eigenvector, while the threshold for studies in management is 70% (Fuller et al. 2016). In order to test our hypotheses we develop a simple structural equation model linking directly each of the antecedents to collaboration.

3. Results

We have used structural equation modeling to analyze our data in a simple model where we directly link each of the four antecedents' categories to the outcome variable. Figure 1 shows that we strictly follow a multi-item approach, both to antecedents (4 to 6 items per antecedent) and to the outcome variable (3 items). The model fit for collaboration antecedents is acceptable according to most commonly used metrics (CMIN/df = 6,123; GFI = ,82; CFI = ,85; RMSEA = ,11). However, only structural antecedents display a statistically significant relationship (0,001), while the three remaining antecedents do not (results above 0,246).
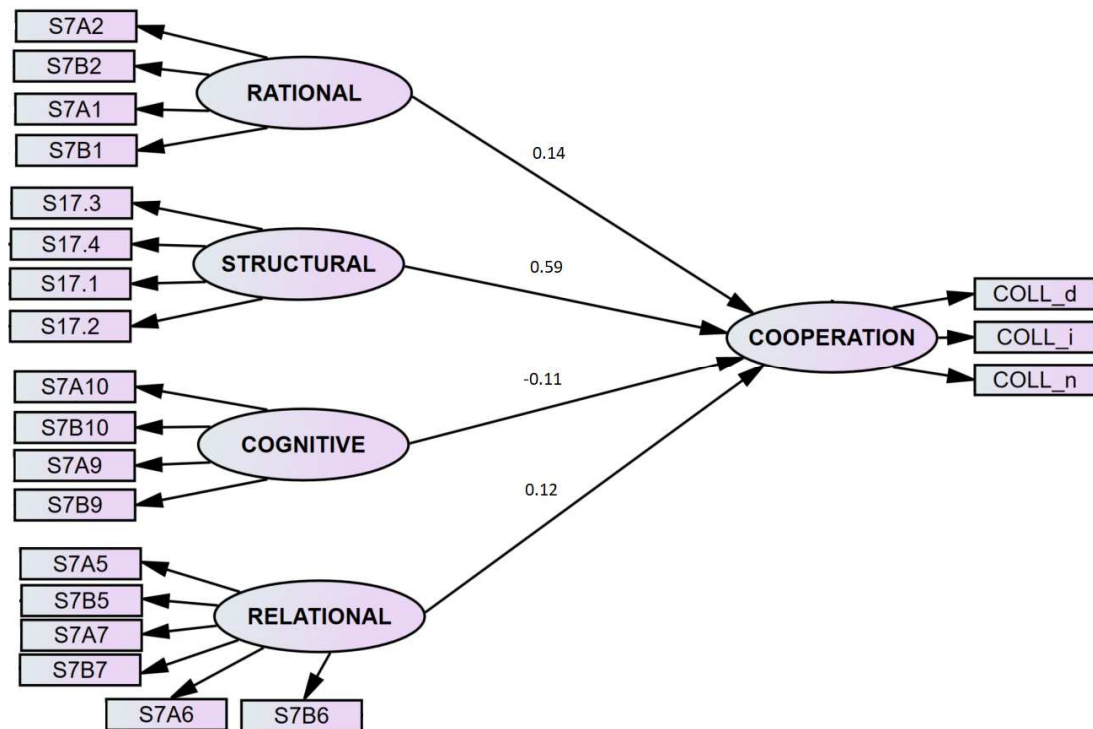
Figure 1: Structural model for cooperation (standardized estimates)

Our data do not provide support for most hypotheses H1, H2 and H4, actually supporting only one hypothesized relationship:

> *H1: Rational antecedents are a condition for interorganizational collaboration (estimate = ,14; p =,267) - rejected*
>
> *H2: Structural embeddedness fosters collaboration formation (estimate = ,59; p = ,001) - not rejected*
>
> *H3: Relational antecedents positively impact collaboration formation (estimate = ,012; p = ,246) - rejected*
>
> *H4: Cognitive antecedents drive collaboration formation (estimate = - ,11; p = ,284) - rejected*

4. Discussion

The existing body of literature links collaboration formation with various antecedents. Most of them seek to explain collaboration in terms of strategic objectives that firms in general and tourism firms in particular may seek (Wang, Xiang, 2007). Furthermore, scholars have been

suggesting that within the strategist view of collaborating firms antecedents relative to structural and relational embeddedness foster the creation of inter organizational relationships (Gulati, Gargiulo, 1999). Our data collected on a random and representative sample of Polish tourism firms listed in Local Tourism Organizations do not provide support for prior theoretical claims. While the models for both dyads and networks display a good fit, and are statistically significant, the association between most antecedents types and collaboration is not supported.

We believe that one reason that explains the hypotheses on rational, cognitive and relational antecedents rejection is connected with the strategic view of collaboration. Following Doz (1996) we find our results clearly in contradiction with the widespread claim that tourism firms strategize and seek collaboration in order to achieve strategic objectives. Rather than that, we believe that our data suggest collaboration to be a regular operations baseline, strongly embedded in existing relationships, yet not an exceptional decision connected with a particular antecedent. In other words, collaboration appears here much more as a business model, than a strategy.

Another explanation of rational, relational and cognitive hypotheses rejection can be associated with the strategy emergence, rather than deliberate formulation (Czakon, 2010). In the emerging strategy view the collaboration decisions cannot be traced back to rational, , relational or cognitive antecedents, but instead to opportunities and pressures exerted by the environment. Collaboration in tourism firms may well be a far less deliberate process than conceptualized so far. In other words, tourism firm collaborate because they are pushed to it by external pressures, rather than autonomously choosing to work with others. The interconnectedness and interdependence of the tourism industry (Xiang, Wang, 2007) makes firms collaborate, leaving a very limited room for opting out.

By confirming the structural antecedent importance in establishing collaboration we strengthen the argument that tourism is a networked industry where structures drive phenomena under scrutiny (Baggio et al. 2010). Differently from other industries by structures we do not mean technological interdependencies, but rather embeddedness of businesses in a nest of social and business relationships. This may suggest that the thread of research taking collaboration as a social phenomenon (Gulati, 1995), rather than purely business one, is justified in the view of our respondents.

The negative association of cognitive antecedents with collaboration, even if non-significant, may suggest that tourism firms would resign from collaborating the more they are knowledgeable about prospective partners.

Conclusions

Interfirm collaboration attracts a copious attention for many years in the general management literature and in tourism research. Numerous, widely cited conceptualizations link collaboration with clear-cut objectives that firms pursue. Hence, collaborating with a selected partner (in dyads) or a number of purposefully chosen partners (in networks) appears as an option among others, or an increasingly interesting alternative to autonomous operations. However, few of these conceptualizations have been thoroughly tested, and even less in the tourism industry.

Our study aimed at filling this gap by providing a generalizable test of antecedents association with collaboration. We have developed two sets of four hypotheses, linking rational, relational, structural and cognitive antecedents to collaboration between tourism firms operating in the 124 local tourism organizations. Our data do not support prior literature claims that these antecedents drive collaboration, with the exception of structural antecedents. We believe that our results suggest the strategizing view of collaboration in tourism, and deliberate collaboration in general to be overstated. Tourism firms remain in such a close and strong interdependence, that collaboration is necessary, not just a strategic option.

A limitation may be connected with industry specificity. Few industries have been found to be interdependent both in so many ways as tourism. Therefore, our results are limited to tourism only. Furthermore, data collection focused on local tourism organizations leaves beyond the scope of our study those firms that do not recognize collaboration as a necessity. Hence, our results may be biased by the purposeful selection of the population.

While our data did not provide support for widely claimed antecedents impact on collaboration it calls for further scrutiny. Counterintuitive findings require even more detailed analysis and further interpretation that confirmatory studies. We believe that exploring the importance of social relationships in tourism collaboration is promising. Similarly, we believe that the counterintuitive results for cognitive antecedents call for a more focused attention in future research.

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