

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS' (DMOS') ROLES AND PERFORMANCE – LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT: Destination success is a combination of tangible (product, location, and accessibility) and less tangible attributes (service and community experience). All these factors determine the visitor experience. While some of these are beyond the control of DMOs, for a large part organizations can assure their managerial process. Thus, DMOs' managers can have a strong influence upon destination success. The aim of this paper is to investigate how DMOs' activity can contribute to tourist destinations' competitiveness and success. In an attempt to provide a holistic view of the DMO concept, the paper examines and reviews DMO roles and specific activities, and the relationship between DMO's success and destination's success. Through DMO's performance evaluation, there can be identified areas for economic improvement, efficiency, capacity and effectiveness of achieving strategic and operational results, which can further increase the destination's competitiveness.

KEYWORDS: Destination Management Organization (DMO), performance, sustainability, tourism destination.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, more than ever, destinations compete fiercely against each other to attract both tourists and investors. This puts significant pressure upon states and regional/local authorities from the perspective of destination management. As data provided in Table 1 reveal, Romania does not perform well in terms of tourism competitiveness. One of the most pertinent explanations for this situation derives from the inconsequent organization of tourism promotion at governmental, regional and local levels. Decisional centralization, as well as political implications in the management of tourism have led to the country's poor performance and competitiveness. In this context, a discussion of destination management organizing and strategies is needed and more than welcome.

Table 1. Romania's Competitiveness on the Global and European Tourism Markets

	2015	2013	2011	2009	2008	2007
Romania's Travel & Tourism global competitiveness	66	68	63	66	69	76
Government prioritization of the T&T industry	117	129	116	121	119	107
Effectiveness of marketing and branding	120	123	118	119	118	111
<i>Total number of countries</i>	141	140	139	133	130	124
Romania's T&T competitiveness at European level	32	35	34	34	32	36
<i>Total number of European countries</i>	37	42	42	42	41	41

Source: [29].

Cooper and Hall [1] bring up the impossibility of governments to continue to coordinate and control all activities, including those related to hospitality and tourism, and the substantial shift from government to governance. This transformation has at its core the change of the relative role of governmental and public institutions related to: governmental agencies, welfare and public economic support systems, including sponsoring and subsidies, environmental, social and cultural projects, etc. Today, states tend to pull back and direct interventions tend to be replaced in this respect by the cooperation with the private sector enterprises and/or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Such cooperation can imply the government or its departments and offices, state/public agencies and institutions, entirely/partially state-owned enterprises, the private sector, and NGOs. The role of the state is that of encouraging the development of networks and partnerships and of steering them in the desired direction. Rhodes [8;25], as quoted by Cooper and Hall [1], presents the

characteristics of governance: organizations are interdependent; governance, as a concept, is wider than government, implying roles for non-state actors (such as: the private sector, NGOs, and stakeholders); consequently, the delimiting between the public sectors and all the other ones is rather unclear; network members interact continuously, needing to exchange resources and to negotiate shared purposes; network relations are based on mutual trust and preserved by the established interaction rules; many networks are self-organised and are significantly autonomous in relation with the government; governments can steer networks imperfectly and indirectly, although they do not occupy privileged positions within them. Given the complexity of the networks and their heterogeneous structures, Jessop [13], as cited by Cooper and Hall [1], refers to *meta-governance*; this implies “the steering of multiple agencies and organizations, which although operating autonomously of one another, remain linked together through their involvement in common policy issues and associated funding and benefits”. Obviously, DMOs fit perfectly in such a context, as:

- DMOs are very often partially or fully funded by the states;
- DMOs can even belong to the formal governmental structure (as state agencies);
- DMOs play a key role in bringing together other public agencies, tourism producers and even destination communities for purposes closely related to tourist destination development and/or marketing;
- of course, DMOs do not own the tourist products they develop, promote and sell [1].

Moreover, as Shkira and Qirici [28] point out, over the past nearly 15 years, at destination/local level “tourism stakeholders have gradually shifted focus from the traditional marketing and promotional functions to the more coordinated strategic approach of destination management.”

2. DESTINATION MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION – A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A first step of this approach is to determine the development of specialized literature in the field of tourist destination management. In this respect, the analysis conducted by Morrison [22] has been updated, as observed in Table 2. It is impossible not to notice the dynamics of the literature dedicated to this subject. Thus, nearly 98 % of the papers covering *destination management* have been written during the past fifteen and a half years, with some 69 % of the literature dedicated to this subject being produced beginning with 2010. Further, concerning *destination marketing*, almost 97 % of the literature was generated since 2000, while around 67 % of the papers result since 2010. *Destination branding* is a somewhat newer subject, thus enjoying a lower representation; a significant percentage of the literature on this topic (99.6 %) has been produced between 2000 and 2016, with nearly 77 % in the time-span of 2010 and 2016. Even newer is the subject of *Destination Management Organisation/Organization (DMO)* – both spellings have been considered for accuracy reasons. Obviously, the specialized literature has developed especially beginning with the year of 2000, with about 99.5 % of the papers being produced in this time span. Like in all other cases, most of the contributions were elaborated between 2010 and 2016 (around 77 %).

Table 2. Literature on Destination Management, Destination Marketing, Destination Branding, and Destination Management Organisation/Organization: 1970-2016

Time Period	<i>Destination Management</i>	<i>Destination Marketing</i>	<i>Destination Branding</i>	<i>Destination Management Organisation/Organization</i>
1970-1979	0	12	1	0
1980-1989	12	60	6	1
1990-1999	285	491	18	3 + 6
2000-2009	3,970	5,140	1,480	156 + 290
2010-2016*	9,260	11,700	5,000	478 + 1,080
Total	13,527	17,403	6,505	2,014
2000-2016 (%)	98 %	97 %	99.6 %	99.5 %
2010-2016 (%)	69 %	67 %	77 %	77 %

* To the 30th of May 2016

Source: based on [22] and on Google Scholar (excluding citations and patents).

Citing Goeldner and Ritchie [3], Minguzzi [6] explains that “destination management consists of the integrated management of those processes necessary in establishing an exchange between a destination and its visiting tourists. Therefore, on one hand, it involves the management of services offered and tourist attraction factors, while, on the other hand, managing demand, dependent on tourist flow and customer satisfaction”. Further, given that more and more researchers argue the importance of the relationships between the different actors of the tourism destination, quoting Gunn [4], Minguzzi [6] shows that “the implementation and success of a tourism development plan is often based on the support of the stakeholders in the community, which include the citizens, entrepreneurs and community, leaders, guests”.

Building on Leiper’s model [21], Pike [7] explains the need for DMOs “in seeking to promote the destination, to connect better the supply and demand aspects of tourism, to maximize the use of destination resources”. In the *Encyclopedia of Tourism*, Anderson [5] considers that the term *destination management organization* (DMO) refers “to either a convention and visitor bureau, a state/provincial/regional tourism office or a national tourist organization/administration. These organizations are the entities mandated to undertake the process of tourism destination management. DMOs have become the principal organizations responsible for leading, co-ordinating, stimulating and monitoring tourism development and marketing for a destination area”. The same specialist, Anderson [5] defines destination management as “the integrated process of managing any of the three tourism types (urban, resort and rural). It covers four key elements: the destination offering (visitor experience, destination image and attractiveness); the visitor mix (market research); marketing communications (awareness and promotion); and organisational responsibility (leadership and partnership)”. Morrison [22] defines destination management as: “the coordination and integration of all of the elements of the destination mix in a particular geographic area based upon a defined tourism strategy and plan”.

The destination mix elements are the attractions and events, facilities (hotels, restaurants, etc.), transportation, infrastructure, and hospitality resources. In addition, destination management encompasses the image-making, branding, and marketing and communications of all that the place has to offer to tourists.” Although DMOs began to be theorized only during the past 15 years, Morrison [22] explains that they have in fact existed all-over the globe, in various forms for more than a century (either as governmental departments, or as quasi-departmental structures). Basically, DMOs can function at any of the following levels:

- at *national* level, as NTAs (National Tourism Authorities) or as NTOs (National Tourism Organizations), having responsibilities related to the management and marketing of national tourism; in fact, such structures can even develop at transnational level/beyond national borders (for example, the European Travel Commission is a non-profit organization that cooperates with 32 European NTAs and NTOs for the development and promotion of European tourist destinations, via Visit Europe [33]);
- at *regional/provincial/state/county* level, as DMOs or RTOs, being in charge of the management and marketing of tourism in specific geographic/historic areas, defined for that purpose; the area may, not must, be an administrative/local government region (e.g. county, state/land or province);
- at *local* level, contributing to the development and promotion of tourism in areas limited to a city/town[31].

The UNWTO [31] synthesizes the main purpose of a DMO: “to lead and coordinate activities under a coherent strategy”; DMOs are not supposed to control their partners’ activities but they are expected to “bring together resources and expertise and a degree of independence and objectivity to lead the way forward”. Consequently, they “must develop a high level of skill in developing and managing partnerships” [31], as they have the overall responsibility for the coordination and integration of the destination mix elements (physical products: attractions, facilities, transportation, and general infrastructure; people: guests and hosts; packages:

organised by tour-operators, travel agencies and others; and programs: events, festivals, activities, etc.), and, of course, for destination marketing. Obviously, the latter is an important part of the destination management process. DMOs are complex structure, as they re-join numerous public and private sector stakeholders [31]: national/regional/local government/public authorities; agencies established for economic development; town centre management organizations; national park management; providers of transport services; tourist attractions, events and cultural organizations; providers of hospitality services (accommodation, restoration, leisure and retail operations); intermediaries (tour operators, travel agencies, organisers of events, cultural organizations, etc.); agencies representing the destination; media; local/regional tourism consortia and partnerships; agencies encouraging and supporting business development; organizations focusing on developing skills.

According to a survey conducted by the UNWTO [31], worldwide, DMOs are organised as: National Tourist Authorities (NTAs), National Tourism Organisations (NTOs), Regional/provincial/state/county Tourist Organizations (RTOs), Local/city tourism organisations, Resort organizations (in coastal resorts; ski/other sports resorts), Product based (dedicated to a specific tourist product, such as: bird-watching, adventure tourism, etc.), other organisations (convention bureaus or regional/small area DMOs, etc.). Most commonly, DMOs get involved in: tourism product development activities, providing services related to the development of physical resources (e.g. signage of visitor centres); human resource development and vocational training; assistance and advice for hospitality and tourism businesses; classification and/or licensing of tourism businesses; regulating of the tourism industry [31, p.15]. Depending on the level where they appear, DMOs fulfil certain of the roles listed below.

Indeed, DMOs have undertaken many marketing activities but their role is, in fact, much larger: to become strategic leaders in destination development [31]. In fact, Minguzzi [6] states “the critical role played by the DMO is recognized like fundamentally for enhancing of the tourism on all different levels or type of destination: without the effective leadership and coordination of an efficacy DMO, a destination is ill-equipped to be either competitive or sustainable”.

The specialists from UNWTO [31] describe how destination governance can take place:

- within a department of a single public authority;
- as a public authorities’ partnership, serviced by partners;
- as a public authorities’ partnership, serviced by a joint management team;
- public authority/authorities’ outsourcing delivery to private companies;
- public-private partnership (often as) a non-profit organization; or
- association/company established by a private-public partnership and/or trading, exactly for specific purposes.

Starting from the destination’s heritage (attractions, amenities, accessibility, human resources, image and price), the DMO – as leader and coordinator – fulfils three key roles [31] in its attempt of providing leadership for the management of a tourist destination as revealed by Enright and Newton [16] quoted by Tıgu [10]. The first one consists of the creation of a suitable environment for tourism development: policy-making, legislation, regulations and taxation (e.g. planning and infrastructure; human resources development; product development; technology and systems development; related industries and procurement). The second includes marketing, with the clear role of getting people to visit the destination (e.g. destination promotion (including branding and image); campaigns to drive business (especially micro, small and medium enterprises); unbiased information services; operation and facilitation of (online) bookings; customer relationship management). The last one implies quality issues regarding the delivery on the ground (quality of services and of the experience itself), respectively exceeding expectations (e.g. destination coordination and management for visitor “quality of experience”; product “start-ups”; development and

management of events; development and management of attractions; training and education; business counselling/advice; strategy, research and development).

Today, the roles of DMOs can be synthesized as it follows:

- a critical and vital role in efforts to ensure that the expectations of stakeholders (both internal and external) are satisfied to the greatest extent possible [6];
- DMOs' role is not just limited to contributing to developing new tourism initiatives but it also implies the management of resources (human and internal) in all stages of destination development;
- to involve in the establishment of relationships among regional infrastructures and the existing market;
- to make use of legislative and management tools during destination planning and management aiming to make sure that stakeholders' benefits from tourist activities are shared on a fair basis among them, relying on sustainable practices and ensuring the regeneration of the resources involved in the production of hospitality and tourist services [6, 13];
- being part of the national/regional/local administrative power, DMOs have political and legislative powers, respectively financial means needed for imposing a rational management of the natural and built resources; moreover, DMOs can grant long-term and long-lasting benefits for all stakeholders;
- to capitalize on long-term strategies and to harvest on their results in cooperation with other national/regional/local organizations;
- to be representative for local/regional interests at regional/national levels;
- to maximize profitability of local/regional/national enterprises and to maximize the multiplier effects of tourism;
- to contribute to the development of destination brands and of homogenous and coherent destination images;
- to optimize hospitality and tourism impacts by ensuring sustainability in the balance of economic and socio-cultural benefits with the environmental costs [6];
- to provide leadership in the management of tourism within destinations [10, 12];
- to enhance the well-being of destination residents;
- to give their best in ensuring that visitors are provided experiences that are at least highly satisfactory, and highly memorable;
- to provide effective destination management and stewardship [12];
- to take care of the management and maintenance of tourist attractions and to ensure their preservation.

Sheehan, Presenza and Minguzzi [27] bring up the historic disputes concerning the shift of DMOs more towards management or marketing. In their attempt of delimiting the marketing and management roles of DMOs, the three authors split their roles into three categories, explaining their specific activities, as listed in Table 3, below:

Table 3. The Roles and Specific Activities of DMOs

<i>Role</i>	<i>Specific Activities</i>
<i>External Destination Marketing (EDM)</i>	DMOs manage the selling of destinations and of their tourist products, carrying out activities such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - web-marketing; - advertising, both classic and based on new media; - familiarisation tours; - sales blitzes; - direct sales; - direct mail; - cooperative programs; - events, festivals, conferences, fairs, etc.
<i>Internal Development Role (IDD)</i>	DMOs undertake all other types of activities for the maintenance and development of the destination, except for marketing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - visitor services, including visitor management; - measuring and evaluating visitor satisfaction;

<i>Role</i>	<i>Specific Activities</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - information and market research, with the purpose of helping stakeholders better understand: market demands, industry supply, and the existing gaps between the two parts; - ensure high-quality development of human resources; - resource stewardship for sustainable destination management and development; - contribute to the attraction and raising of financial resources, including venture capital;
<i>Overall Destination Management (ODM)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - coordination of stakeholders; - management of crises.

Source: [27].

Successful destinations result from successful and sustainable destination management, and, obviously, depend on the success of DMOs. Wray et al [11] quoted by Klimek[20] characterize effective DMOs; these should have: a long-term vision of destination development; the capacity to clearly designate responsibilities to stakeholders and to develop appropriate operational structures; and a transparent and responsible decision-making process, which involves all stakeholders.

3. DMOS' PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Playing different roles [24] like: coordinator of many elements from the tourist sector, leader for tourism development in the local community, adviser of visitors and assistant for visitor services, etc., DMOs grant destinations the construction of tourism success. So, before starting talking about DMOs' performance, it is important to firstly discuss what constitutes success and performance in tourism.

In the process of evaluating the success of a tourist destination, Ritchie et al[26] considered the visitors' perspective as the most important factor. Besides this, the economic success measured through economic indicators (*How many tourists arrived in a destination? How much did they spend? How many people are employed in tourism? How many business activities were developed in tourism?*, etc.) represents a common and visible attribute in a destination's evaluation. In fact, many studies take into consideration for the measurement of a destination's success just a single aspect from among the following ones: the effectiveness of marketing activities [13], the product offerings [17;23], the pricing [14], and the quality [18].

For a holistic perspective of the destination's success, Ritchie and Crouch [26] argued to add output variables and to measure success from the stakeholders' perspective involved in the tourism system. According to them, a destination's competitiveness is related to its ability to create added value and, thus, increase the local wealth, the attractiveness in a sustainable manner. The study also points out five key determinants for destination's competitiveness, like: destination policy, planning and development, destination management, core resources and supporting factors. To sum up, a new perspective regarding the DMO is defined. Ritchie and Crouch [9;26] present the DMO as a management organization, which includes marketing as a key function: *If the DMO does not provide leadership and direction for tourism development in the destination, who will?*

While efforts to explore the success criteria for a destination's competitiveness have gained considerable attention, few studies have investigated the effect(s) of the DMO upon a destination's overall success. Dwyer and Kim [15] pointed out the importance of the internal managerial function for destination competitiveness. Bornhorst, Ritchie, and Sheehan [12] argue that managers of DMOs must be aware that their success will be determined by how well these are run and managed as organizations. The quality of the managerial processes will attract and retain good employees, who are professional, accountable and respected by other tourism stakeholders in the destination. This is how the ability of the DMO to attract more funds, partners and resources will be constructed. Spyriadis[34] suggests that in order for a DMO to perform its business planning successfully, appropriate tangible and intangible resources need to be attained and used efficiently and effectively. According to him, the

business objectives and priorities of a DMO need to be aligned to its rationale for existence and strategic impetus; therefore, the DMO is expected to contribute to external value creation. In conclusion, the performance of a DMO's management activity influences the success of the destination, and, in this light, it is important to be able to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization.

Morrison [22] suggests that for DMOs "efficiency usually means doing things at the lowest cost, while effectiveness measures the degree of success in attaining goals and objectives. Part of the task in ensuring efficiency is through day-to-day management of the DMO and through the application of an internal control system". A DMO's effectiveness reflects the degree to which the actual and desired outputs coincide for both its official (strategic) and operative (operational) goals. This match can influence the DMO's accountability and legitimacy within the destination and among wider stakeholders [22]. Overall, there are few studies with a close focus on the DMO's performance variables and models [9, 15,34]. Bornhorst et al. [12] presented the variables associated to both DMO and destination success; Frechtling[2] conceptually examined the application of BSC to DMOs; while Spyriadis [34] suggests a systematic and robust performance evaluations of DMOs by combining both outward-looking and internal perspectives of DMO effectiveness. However, there remained several gaps in the literature with regard to DMO performance evaluation.

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