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ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL TOURISM MARKETS BY LOCAL ACTORS

A systems thinking-based analysis on enhancing the collective capacity of a destination to attract the desired type of tourism: the case of the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area



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Dissertation presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Science (PhD): Tourism

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ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL TOURISM MARKETS BY LOCAL ACTORS

A systems thinking-based analysis on enhancing the collective capacity of a destination to attract the desired type of tourism: the case of the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (Southern Ecuador)

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Cover pictures of the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (declared as a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 2013), from left to right:

1. Cutin de Philip, endemic frog in the Andean region of the Massif. Picture courtesy of José Cáceres.

2. Sale of fresh crabs in the Pacific Coast region of the Massif. Picture courtesy of Fabián Rodas.

3. Cuenca city, World Heritage Site by UNESCO (1999), in the Andean region of the Massif. Picture courtesy of Ecuador's Ministry of Tourism.

4. White heron in the Pacific Coast region of the Massif. Picture courtesy of Fabián Rodas.

5. Traditional Weaving of the Ecuadorian Toquilla Straw Hat, declared as Intangible World Heritage by UNESCO (2012), in the Andean region of the Massif. Picture courtesy of Ecuador's Ministry of Tourism.

6. Baby llama in the Cajas National Park, the core zone of the Cajas Massif Biosphere Reserve, located in the Andean region. The Park is part of the Qhapaq Ñan (Andean Road System), the first multi-national World Heritage Site declared by UNESCO (2014). Picture by Santiago Rodríguez Girón.

PREFACE

During my days in charge of tourism management of protected areas or facilitating decision-making among multiple stakeholders, before starting my doctoral process in Belgium, I had the opportunity to experience the needs, challenges and opportunities for development in regions of great natural and cultural diversity, such as Ecuador, my country of origin. Urged by a professional and social environment that, faced with the demands of daily life, tends to prioritize management in search of quick solutions to urgent problems, I recognize that for some time I have observed with a bit of scepticism the contribution that long scientific research processes could make to solving problems of daily life. At the same time, however, I learned that societies require long-term sustained processes to make real progress in their development. Therefore, the need for a different space and time began to emerge in me. A space in which I could reflect on my accumulated experience and structure it to transmit it to other people or institutions with similar challenges in the field of tourism as a means of development. This is how the ideas of management and academics came to be reconciled in me in order to undertake a process that allows me to systematize and complement my experience in the form of the doctoral work that I present in this thesis. The journey began in 2010 with my first contact with KU Leuven, and in 2014 I dedicated myself to my doctoral process, to be completed in 2018. This process has reminded me that with tenacity one can conquer any challenge, even if it means disarming the stablished mental structures that guided me and walk conceptually and emotionally "naked" for a while, outside my comfort zone. This situation, of course, creates uncertainty, but by welcoming it, this situation also opens up the opportunity to take new approaches to face the future. And certainly, thanks to researching with the support of and at the demanding level of one of the most solid academic institutions in the world, this rethinking of structures has also meant a personal enrichment for me.

It is said that, in order to complete a doctorate, not only do you have to be deeply interested in the subject of study, but you also need a great deal of tenacity because passion, over many, and sometimes long periods, will not be enough. For this reason, I would like to thank especially those who were open to my proposals and who also knew how to criticise them in a constructive way, all those who deliberately or unintentionally influenced me in such a way that today I find myself celebrating this challenge accomplished. Unfortunately, I cannot name everyone here, but of course I must expressly thank my promoter Dominique Vanneste, who with great patience, dedication and detail supported my initiatives and contributed to them. To the co-

authors of the articles that form part of this thesis, to the members of my Advisory Committee and to the Jury for their interest in my work and for contributing their time and effort in long discussions, sometimes exciting, sometimes exhausting, but always enriching. To my colleagues in the Tourism Group and the Geography and Tourism Division with whom we share similar challenges and therefore always useful suggestions. To my Belgian friends, especially Lien, Catherine and Herman with whom fate made us coincide in my home town in the past and now in their home town, and who always made me feel like I had a house in their house. To my beloved family in Ecuador, to my friends and family in Belgium and Germany, all of whom are the source of strength and recharge of energy for daily life. But I especially want to thank my beloved wife Janinna, who accompanied me through this intense process from the very first moments and intentions of realizing it and has been with me every step of the way. She has supported me in everything that has been within her reach and much more, she has listened to me and questioned me constructively in moments of doubt, and she has known how to motivate me when my strength was exhausted or when things got difficult. I know that she has lived through my doctoral process as personally as I have, and that is why I dedicate and share the happiness of this moment of culmination with her. Thank you all very much, for so much.

PREFACIO

Durante mis días a cargo de la gestión turística de áreas protegidas o facilitando la toma de decisiones entre múltiples actores, antes de iniciar mi proceso doctoral en Bélgica, tuve la oportunidad de experimentar las necesidades, desafíos y oportunidades de desarrollo en regiones de gran diversidad natural y cultural, como es el caso de Ecuador, mi país de origen. Urgido por un entorno profesional y social que ante las exigencias de la vida diaria tiende a priorizar la gestión en busca de soluciones rápidas a problemas urgentes, reconozco que por un tiempo observé con cierto escepticismo el aporte que procesos de investigación científica podrían realizar para resolver problemas de la vida cotidiana. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo, aprendí que las sociedades requieren procesos sostenidos a largo plazo para lograr avances reales para su desarrollo. Por ello, empezó a surgir en mi la necesidad de contar con un espacio y tiempo diferentes. Un espacio en el que pudiera reflexionar sobre mi experiencia acumulada y estructurarla para transmitirla a otras personas o instituciones con desafíos similares en el ámbito del turismo como medio de desarrollo. Así fue como las ideas de la gestión y lo académico llegaron a reconciliarse en mí para emprender en un proceso que me permita sistematizar y complementar mi experiencia bajo la forma del trabajo doctoral que presento en esta tesis. El camino empezó en el año 2010 con mi primer contacto con KU Leuven, en 2014 me dediqué de lleno a mi proceso doctoral para concluir en 2018. Este proceso me ha recordado que con tenacidad se puede conquistar los desafíos que uno se fije, aunque ello implique desarmar las estructuras mentales establecidas que guiaban mi gestión y andar conceptual y emocionalmente "desnudo" por un tiempo, fuera de su zona de confort. Esa situación por cierto que provoca incertidumbre, pero al acogerla también abre la oportunidad de revestirse de nuevos planteamientos hacia el futuro. Y ciertamente, gracias a realizar mi investigación al cobijo y en el nivel de exigencia de una de las instituciones académicas más sólidas del mundo, este replanteamiento de estructuras para mí ha significado también un enriquecimiento personal.

Se dice que, para culminar un doctorado, no solamente se tiene que estar profundamente interesado en el tema de estudio, sino que además se necesita muchísima tenacidad porque la pasión, en muchos, y a veces largos periodos, no será suficiente. Por ello, quiero agradecer muy especialmente a aquellos que se abrieron a mis propuestas y también supieron criticarlas de forma constructiva, a todos quienes consciente o inconscientemente influyeron para que hoy

me encuentre celebrando este desafío cumplido. Lamentablemente, no puedo nombrar a todos aquí, pero por supuesto debo agradecer expresamente a mi promotora Dominique Vanneste, quien con mucha paciencia, entrega y detalle apoyó mis iniciativas y supo aportar a las mismas. A los coautores de los artículos que forman parte de esta tesis, a los miembros de mi Comité Asesor y al Jurado por interesase en mi trabajo y aportar su tiempo y esfuerzo en largas discusiones, a veces emocionantes, a veces extenuantes, pero siempre enriquecedoras. A mis compañeros del Grupo de Turismo y de la División de Geografía y Turismo con quienes compartimos desafíos similares y por lo tanto sugerencias siempre útiles. A mis amigos belgas, especialmente Lien, Catherine y Herman con quienes el destino nos hizo coincidir antes en mi ciudad natal y ahora en su ciudad, y siempre me hicieron sentir que tengo una casa en la casa de ellos. A mi querida y extrañada familia en Ecuador, a mis amigos y familia en Bélgica y Alemania, todos quienes son la fuente de fuerza y recarga de energía para la vida diaria. Pero especialmente deseo agradecer a mi amada esposa Janinna, quien me acompañó en este intenso proceso desde los primeros momentos e intenciones de realizarlo y ha estado conmigo a cada paso. Ella me ha apoyado en todo lo que ha estado a su alcance y mucho más, me ha escuchado y cuestionado de forma constructiva en momentos de duda, y me ha sabido motivar cuando las fuerzas se agotaban o las cosas se ponían difíciles. Sé que ella ha vivido mi proceso doctoral tan personalmente como yo, y por eso es a quien dedico y con quien comparto principalmente la felicidad de este momento de culminación. Muchas gracias a todos, por tanto.

ABSTRACT

Tourism has long been sought as a promising path for local development. With this objective in mind the attraction of international markets is particularly interesting because they stimulate innovation, offer varied segments and generate income from abroad. Furthermore, the steady increase of international travellers and the wide dissemination of communication technologies create a positive environment for exploiting those opportunities. In such a context, any destination endowed with world-class attractions, entrepreneurial capacity and political will seems in the perfect position to benefit. Nevertheless, the usual case with the potential of tourism for local development is that there are large gaps between what is envisioned and what is implemented. That is mainly because tourism is a complex phenomenon, especially in international contexts, where there are multiple levels of participants. Hence, a destination, as a collective of actors trying to act together, is rarely capable of proactively attracting the desired type of visitors. As a result, tourism develops in improvised ways, with little or no influence by local actors on the final outcomes. Therefore, this doctoral dissertation draws upon knowledge about how to improve the influence of a destination on the determinants of international market access with the perspective of supporting local development goals. For that, this study combines a systemic approach, collective action studies and a novel analytical model. First, to lay the theoretical foundations, I discuss systems thinking and social capital in the context of the tourism phenomenon. Second, I introduce a tourism-specific integrative model and analytical methodology. And third, taking Ecuador, and more specifically the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area as the destination, and Germany as the source market, I look at social capital to study how to improve the capacity of a collective to influence the key determinants of market access. The proposed integrative model proved useful for guiding an organised questioning process, analytically linking social capital and tourism as phenomena that behave as complex systems. Findings highlight the importance of collective trust as a key dimension for bridging the gap between vision and implementation. Also, it was identified that market access enhancement depends more on internal determinants, such as having sustained processes, than on external determinants, such as marketing capacities. To tackle such determinants, collectives require actors with: the ability to facilitate cooperative environments at different levels, the appropriate networking structures and specialised professional skills. Summarising, there are factors that can indeed enhance a destination's capacity to attract specific types of visitors, but the complexity of achieving it as a collective is usually underestimated and approached in a superficial manner.

RESUMEN

El turismo ha sido visto durante mucho tiempo como un medio prometedor para el desarrollo local. Con ese propósito en mente, atraer mercados internacionales es especialmente interesante porque estimulan la innovación, ofrecen segmentos variados y generan ingresos desde el exterior. Además, el aumento constante del número de viajeros internacionales y la amplia difusión de las tecnologías de la comunicación crean un entorno positivo para aprovechar esas oportunidades. En este contexto, cualquier destino dotado de atractivos de clase mundial, capacidad empresarial y voluntad política parecería estar en la posición perfecta para beneficiarse. Sin embargo, el caso habitual con respecto al potencial del turismo como medio para el desarrollo local es que existen grandes brechas entre lo que se visiona y lo que se implementa. Esto se debe principalmente a que el turismo es un fenómeno complejo, especialmente en contextos internacionales, donde hay múltiples niveles de participantes. Por lo tanto, un destino, considerado como un colectivo de actores que tratan de actuar juntos, rara vez es capaz de atraer proactivamente al tipo deseado de visitantes. Como resultado, el turismo se desarrolla de manera improvisada, con poca o ninguna influencia de los actores locales en los resultados finales. Por lo tanto, esta tesis doctoral trata sobre cómo mejorar la influencia de un destino en las determinantes de acceso a mercados internacionales en la perspectiva de apoyar a los objetivos de desarrollo local. Para ello, este estudio combina un enfoque sistémico, estudios de acción colectiva y un novedoso modelo analítico. En primer lugar, para sentar las bases teóricas, discuto el pensamiento sistémico y el capital social en el contexto del fenómeno turístico. En segundo lugar, introduzco un modelo integrador específico para el turismo y una metodología analítica. Y tercero, tomando a Ecuador, y más específicamente al Área de la Biosfera del Macizo de Cajas como el destino, y a Alemania como el mercado emisor, me enfoco en el capital social para estudiar cómo mejorar la capacidad de un colectivo para influir en las determinantes clave de acceso al mercado. El modelo integrador propuesto resultó útil para guiar un proceso de cuestionamiento organizado, vinculando analíticamente el capital social y el turismo como fenómenos que se comportan como sistemas complejos. Las conclusiones ponen de relieve la importancia de la confianza colectiva como dimensión clave para superar la brecha entre visión y aplicación. Además, se identificó que la mejora del acceso a los mercados depende más de determinantes internas, como la sostenibilidad de los procesos, que de determinantes externas, como la capacidad de comercialización. Para abordar estos factores determinantes, los colectivos necesitan actores con: capacidad de facilitar entornos de cooperación a diferentes niveles, redes de trabajo con la estructura adecuada y habilidades profesionales especializadas. En resumen, hay factores que pueden mejorar la capacidad de un destino para atraer tipos específicos de visitantes, pero la complejidad de lograrlo como colectivo suele subestimarse y abordarse de manera superficial.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL MARKETS BY LOCAL TOURISM ACTORS

We are living in a globalised world which strongly influences tourism due to conditions that facilitate the mobility of people (Mihajlović & Čolović, 2014). Social, cultural, economic and political interchanges between countries, as in the case of the European Union, make national borders no longer a limitation to the mobility of people in a way that was not conceivable only a few decades ago (Ball & Piper, 2002). In addition, people around the world increasingly have personal mobile devices that, through communication technologies, provide faster and more personalized access to information (Berne, Garcia-Gonzalez, & Mugica, 2012). This facilitates access to services according to the specific needs of travellers, further improving their mobility (Judd, 2006; Pearce, 2008). Furthermore, long and short distance air carriers have given proof of dramatic transformations in the last decade, offering more destinations, direct booking, lower fares and customised service solutions (Taneja, 2017). In such a context, medium and small actors from host societies that are traditionally in a less favoured position to reach international markets, in comparison to bigger players, now have the opportunity to access information and pursue collaboration on an international level. This state of affairs has implications for tourism on a local all the way up to a global scale, offering a potential for tourism development which, in turn, increases its potential for harmful impacts (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). Some examples of potential negative tourism impacts are: more powerful foreign actors taking over the resources of host societies, monetary benefits leaking to foreign economies, overcrowding of public spaces, excessive pressure on natural and cultural resources (Lansing & Vries, 2006).

The current state of global connectivity strongly influences the dynamics of the tourism phenomenon because tourism is essentially related to people's mobility, which is greater than ever (Duncan, 2012). This is reflected by the fact that international tourist arrivals reached a record of 1.23 billion in 2016, the seventh consecutive year of above-average growth following the global economic crisis of 2009 (UNWTO, 2017). As a worldwide export category (OECD, 2008), tourism ranks third after chemicals and fuels and ahead of automotive products and food, growing faster than world trade for the past five years (UNWTO, 2017). This increase in number of visitors is accompanied by the diversification and transformation of their

preferences (Hoffman, Fainstein, & Judd, 2003). Such transformation opens new opportunities for tourist destinations to attract specific segments looking for certain types of experiences (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005) such as more direct contact with local cultures (Mihajlović & Čolović, 2014). Due to these increasing trends among international travellers and the diversification of their preferences, tourism continues to raise the expectations of host societies as a promising means of improving the quality of life (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Macbeth, Carson, & Northcote, 2004; Reed, 1997; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2017). This, in turn, leads in some cases to the investment of large amounts of resources in projects (Judd, 2006) for tourist destination development through the enhancement of infrastructure, skills and tools with the expectation of attracting visitors.

Taking the aforementioned into consideration, it can be argued that economic, political, social and technological conditions are favourable to increase destinations' capacity to attract international markets. However, for most destinations, there is still a gap between stated intentions and concrete implementation (Bohlin et al., 2016; Sinclair, 1998; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016, 2017). Implementing activities and obtaining the desired results in tourist destinations is highly challenging because tourist destinations are not managed by single, top-down corporate organisations (Haugland, Ness, Grønseth, & Aarstad, 2011), but by diverse groups of actors from different sectors, such as small and medium enterprises (Pearce, 2008; Song, Liu, & Chen, 2013; Thomas, Shaw, & Page, 2011; Vanneste & Ryckaert, 2011, 2012) or different governmental institutions. Tourist destinations often comprise vast territories, with administrative and geographical interrelations at different levels (Saarinen, 2014; Stoffelen, Ioannides, & Vanneste, 2017), making the achievement of collective initiatives specially complex, and even conflictual. Conflicts may arise, for example, in the following forms: groups against tourism initiatives, clashing interests regarding how to manage natural resources for tourism, groups interested on using local resources for other purposes such as mining, or authorities from different sectors and with different visions with overlapping duties on the same territories. These and other aspects of tourist destinations pose really complex challenges. Thus, despite the apparently favourable global conditions discussed above, most destinations still have a limited capacity to act collectively (Macbeth et al., 2004) to attract international visitors in a proactive way (Jensen, 2009). As a result, in most cases, tourism develops in a spontaneous and disorganised way. In those contexts, local actors have very limited influence on the outcomes of the tourism phenomenon and try to take advantage of the circumstances in an individualistic and opportunistic manner.

Within a multi-actor and multi-level international tourism context, the role of coordinating actors within the destination is fundamental for facing the challenge of improving the destination's capacity to act collectively, and if benefits for host societies are expected (Beritelli, 2011; McGehee, Lee, O'Bannon, & Perdue, 2010; Thomas et al., 2011; P. W. Williams & Elkhashab, 2012). Often, those coordinating roles are undertaken by some type of public, private or mixed collective organisation, generically called Destination Management Organisations (DMOs). DMOs are actors that can potentially *foster collective actions towards common purposes* (Pike & Page, 2014), a capacity that in this thesis is referred to as *'Social Capital' (SC)* (R. Burt, 1993; Coleman, 1990; Häuberer, 2011; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). This is because DMOs usually are a connective hub between public, private, academic and nongovernmental agents related to tourism. They mediate among the interests of those agents, and are expected to fuel agreements among the actors. Nevertheless, the contribution of DMOs and their strategic purpose in destinations have been questioned due to the limited competences and skills that most have in practice (Pike & Page, 2014). Consequently, a decline of state funding and the introduction of private-led DMOs are taking place, while the increasing importance of networking calls for a transition from a centralised leadership approach towards a distributed leadership approach (Benson & Blackman, 2011). Ideally, in a distributed leadership context different forms and combinations of citizen-, firm- and state-based collectives can perform functions through a collective social process (Hristov & Zehrer, 2017). Thus, there is a need to reflect on different ways in which key coordinating actors (regardless of whether they are called 'DMOs' or something else) can catalyse collective actions in tourist destinations, as well as a need to reflect on the transformations these coordinating players should embrace to pass from orthodox centrally controlled approaches into a facilitation of a cooperative environments approach. From that perspective, positive social capital (in the sense of collective actions that support local development goals) is important as a potential enhancer for a collective to self-determine its own development path.

Therefore, in an international context where local and foreign actors participate, and in which host communities look for improvement of life conditions through tourism, two important questions need to be addressed: *who are those called upon to deploy development initiatives? and, who are those called to sustain processes?* It is well known that efforts led by and depending on external entities, such as management models imported from foreign aid agencies, or policies imposed as top-down approaches by central governments (Sharpley,

2009), might not result in the desired outcomes (Neilson, 2014). Although external support is useful, the crucial factor for long-term positive effects from tourism development is that local actors engage in identifying their necessities and goals, and that they engage in achieving collective and sustained actions in accordance with their own terms and values (Beritelli, 2011; Brohman, 1996; Macbeth et al., 2004; Okazaki, 2008; Sharpley, 2009). There are no guaranteed 'pre-packaged' recipes that assure a successful implementation of sustainable development processes because every context has its own specificities and dynamics. Therefore, fostering positive social capital and coordination for collective actions according to the specific context of the destination is a critical aspect for its development (Beritelli, 2011; Ooi et al., 2015; Williams & Elkhashab, 2012). Coordination is crucial, in the first place to allow local actors to discuss and agree upon the type of desired tourism development, and afterwards, for them to act accordingly with a proactive approach towards attracting the desired type of visitor (Sharpley, 2009). Cooperation and coordination are especially relevant for proactively reaching international markets, where the number of participant layers increase and the environment is less familiar. Thus, I support the idea that the enhancement of social capital is fundamental for a destination's capacity to access international markets.

Nevertheless, to study and understand how social capital in a tourist destination can be enhanced towards specific purposes is a complex task. This is due to the multi-actor and multi-levelled nature of destinations, where social capital may also manifest in unexpected forms hindering collective purposes. For example, when one or some groups use their relationships for opposing tourism initiatives that they may consider environmentally or socially harmful, for boycotting innovative initiatives because of fear to lose power, or for taking unfair advantage of their knowledge and experience to the detriment of fellow participants (Levien, 2015). Unexpected outcomes have a special relationship with tourist destinations because, due to its nature, a destination cannot be approached from a top-down corporate perspective only with the expectation of centrally controlling processes. In this sense, the unpredictability of the tourism phenomenon cannot be tackled from an industrial-economic perspective. The emergence of the tourism experience cannot be compared to the process of assembling a 'product', as in a factory, where the environment can be better controlled, results are more predictable and monetary profitability is the main consideration. These arguments are not to neglect the fact that industries, in the broader sense, are also exposed to uncertainty due to complex multi-actor and multi-levelled environments, nor are they to neglect that there are some forms of tourism that partially resemble industrial processes (Leiper, 2008; Smith, 2004),

such as the case of all-inclusive resort packages. These arguments are made to underline that the 'production process' or, more precisely, the emergence of tourism experiences, is of a different nature than manufacturing products or the provision of services. This different nature is reflected in three aspects, the tourism experience: (1) cannot be delivered to peoples' homes but requires people to move to an unusual environment, (2) cannot be tested beforehand, and (3) does not allow the delivery of two identical 'products' because tourism is a subjective experience individually perceived 'on the spot' (Nicolau, 2013). These characteristics of tourism make the study of enhancing collective actions in destinations particularly complex.

On the basis of the previous arguments I argue for a more systemic approach to tourism that considers: 1) the tourism experience, as well as social capital, as non-pre-existent static entities or objects that can be pre-produced and stored for later use (Bourdieu, 1986; Häuberer, 2011; Leiper, 1979; Nicolau, 2013; Putnam, 1995b; Smith, 1994), but as latent or potential phenomena that catalyse or emerge 'on the spot', only when and while two or more actors combine and mobilise their individually owned resources towards common aims; and, 2) that the study of specific functions and elements of complex phenomena, such as the tourism experience or social capital, is as important as understanding their connection with the whole context (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004; Mai & Smith, 2015; McDonald, 2009).

Taking that perspective, this research looks into Social Capital (SC) theory to study the key factors in a destination (seen as a collective of actors) being able to proactively attract the desired type of international visitors, and also examines the theoretical usefulness of Systems Thinking (ST) to study tourism and the role of SC within the context of tourist destinations. There is theoretical and practical value to understanding this Systems Thinking – Social Capital relationship, especially for destinations looking to develop or enhance their capacity to attract the type and quantity of international visitors that meet their development goals (Brohman, 1996; Haugland et al., 2011).

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Accessing international tourism markets in a way to attract the desired visitors is a complex process. The tourism sector has taken the form of a global network characterised by an increasing number of layers (Kracht & Wang, 2010), such as: community and professional organisations; small, medium and large firms; government bodies; distribution channels; or internet-based platforms. These layers, in turn, are formed by diverse types of players who interact at different locations from local to international scales.

Within this complex context, only organisations with enough resources and skills realise a path to proactively attract the type of desired visitors. In many cases, there is still high dependency of destinations on stronger actors who are usually internationally based (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). And in some cases, actors such as air carriers, hotel chains or international travel agencies could be so influential that they determine the emergence, continuation or decline of a tourist destination (Jensen, 2009; Mosedale, 2006). Very often, destinations' actors can only react in an improvised and individualistic way to the arrival of international visitors, trying to take advantage of incoming flows that are driven by more powerful actors, or that arrive spontaneously due to existing circumstances. But at the end of the day, most host societies have no collective understanding or influence on how and why visitors start or stop arriving.

One core reason for this reactive behaviour is that, in most cases, actors at the destinations are scattered in their initiatives (Beritelli, 2011). They usually compete with each other and are unable to implement well-coordinated efforts (Von Friedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006) for improving their capacity of attracting international tourism markets (Zhao, Ritchie, & Echtner, 2011). In addition, collective arrangements are hindered when there is a lack of policies, inefficient regulations, actions limited to vaguely targeted marketing and implementation weakness. Within those circumstances, the pursuit of joint purposive actions is constrained, producing uncertainty and dependency (Mihajlović & Čolović, 2014). This is why most of the revenue from international tourism flows does not get to the national or local host societies, and why local actors economically and socially often do not profit from booming international tourism markets (Mesquita & Lazzarini, 2008). Conversely, although host societies are usually not the most benefited by international tourism economic revenues, they are the ones dealing with the potential negative effects of tourism activities, such as

overcrowding, displacement of residents, pollution, or exploitation of local resources by better positioned foreign actors.

In addition, from a paradigmatic perspective tourism is generally referred to as an 'industry' (Hoffman et al., 2003; Judd, 2006), where growth in number of visitors and economic benefits tend to be the key factors guiding the efforts of destinations (Erkus-Öztürk & Eraydın, 2010; Simpson & Bretherton, 2010). This neglects that tourism can be a powerful positive force to mediate multiple stakeholders needs as well (Chang, 2012), potentially leading to social and environmental improvements, which are also among the explicit or implicit motivations for actors to be involved in any for-profit enterprise (Bourdieu, 1986; Polanyi, 1944).

Nevertheless, neither the desire for growth, nor the quotation of sustainability principals, nor the opportunities offered by a globalised world will make any difference for host societies. Host societies need to become capable of self-determining what 'development' means for them, act accordingly in a collective way, and do it under their own terms according their context (Brohman, 1996; Sharpley, 2009). Therefore, social capital, understood as the capacity for collective actions towards common purposes, needs to be studied at the destination level (Dinica, 2009). And the role of social capital in enhancing the attraction of a destination to international tourists needs to be understood and fostered (Bianchi, 2012; Haugland et al., 2011). Strengthening the capacity of local actors to reflect on their own needs, act together and effectively attract the type of visitors that meet those needs, could help to mediate between local development objectives and market expectations (Okazaki, 2008).

1.3 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.3.1 Purpose of the study

As destinations' host societies aim for benefits from international tourism, the relations of how connections between destinations and markets happen must be analysed. In some cases, it is the influence of international leading firms which drives tourist flows and shapes destinations. In other cases, visitors arrive spontaneously and tourism develops in an improvised way, without any proactive process from the actors at the destination. In any case, destinations' local actors have very low or none influence on the type of arriving international visitors. Therefore,

if there is any expectation for changing the flow of influence, from a reactive into a proactive approach, it is important to analyse (using systems thinking and social capital as theoretical frameworks) the relationship between the coordination capacity of the destination and the effectiveness of its collective actions for attracting international visitors.

Therefore, the purpose of this study, in terms of understanding how local actors can collectively improve their access to international markets, is threefold:

a) determining the relation between systems thinking, social capital and the tourism phenomenon, as the theoretical basis for this study;

b) introducing a tourism-specific model and methodology to study the complexities of tourism with a systemic approach, as the methodological basis for this study, and;

c) exploring how social capital can be enhanced (in the case study) to tackle the determinants of international market access, as the empirical basis for this study.

Understanding the relationships between the social capital of a destination and access to international markets opens up the possibility of understanding how to maximize local benefits from both a social (Hall & Page, 2012) and economic (Bianchi, 2012) perspective. This is because reflecting on the barriers and enhancers for market access from a social capital perspective allows for thinking about relationships from the perspective of different actors at different local and international scales (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001), which brings the focus to key non-economic factors. On the one hand, the primary interest of local actors is in promoting tourism that can contribute to the satisfaction of their needs and their life improvement. And on the other hand, a tourism development model based on a balance between local needs and the expectations of markets must be put in place to ensure long-term benefits. In that context, my research draws upon the relationship between two components that form the case study, namely, *the destination* and *the target market for that destination*. In this way, the dynamics in that relationship can be studied from different perspectives, that is, from within and from outside the destination.

With that destination/market relationship in mind, I argue that a destination can sustainably develop as claimed in a wide range of literature (Mihajlović & Čolović, 2014) only by

effectively translating the expectations of local actors into effective collective actions towards common goals.

Therefore, this study aims to represent an innovative contribution in aspects not previously studied, such as:

a) the relationship between systems thinking and social capital theories in the context of the tourism phenomenon;

b) the applicability of systems thinking as the basis for a tourism-specific model with a methodology to apply it as an analytical tool to support decision-making, and;

c) social capital at the destination level and its role in influencing the determinants for international market access.

1.3.2 Research questions

Acknowledging the challenges of a collective trying to drive the tourism flows that support its perspectives for life improvement generates several research questions, which steer this research. However, there is an overarching research question.

General research question:
How to enhance the social capital (SC) of a tourist destination to enable local actors to access international markets, in a way to attract the desired types and quantities of tourism flows? (In the research question, the expression 'desired types' refers to the types of visitors that meet the development goals of the destination).

The answer can bring valuable and innovative reflections in different ways:

- By departing from the need for a perspective broader than only the commercial or economic views, I will approach the tourism phenomenon in a more systemic way: as a complex social phenomenon that also has economic and environmental implications.

- By drawing upon research indicating that social capital is a resource that can potentially facilitate or hinder collectives for achieving common goals, I will identify the dimensions to assess social capital at the level of a tourist destination, considered as a collective of actors trying to act together.

- By considering how social capital can facilitate self-determination and collective action at the local level to influence the determinants for international market access, I bring insight into the relation between the local and the global.

- By studying the relationship between systems thinking and social capital theories, through the phases and functions performed by tourism actors, I generate insights that contribute to the study of tourism as a complex phenomenon. Furthermore, these insights can provide principals or tools potentially applicable in other cases.

Therefore, the Statement of the Problem can be subdivided in different specific questions.

Specific research questions:

1. What is the relationship between systems thinking and the tourism phenomenon, and its usefulness as a theory to study the complexities of tourism in a more holistic way?

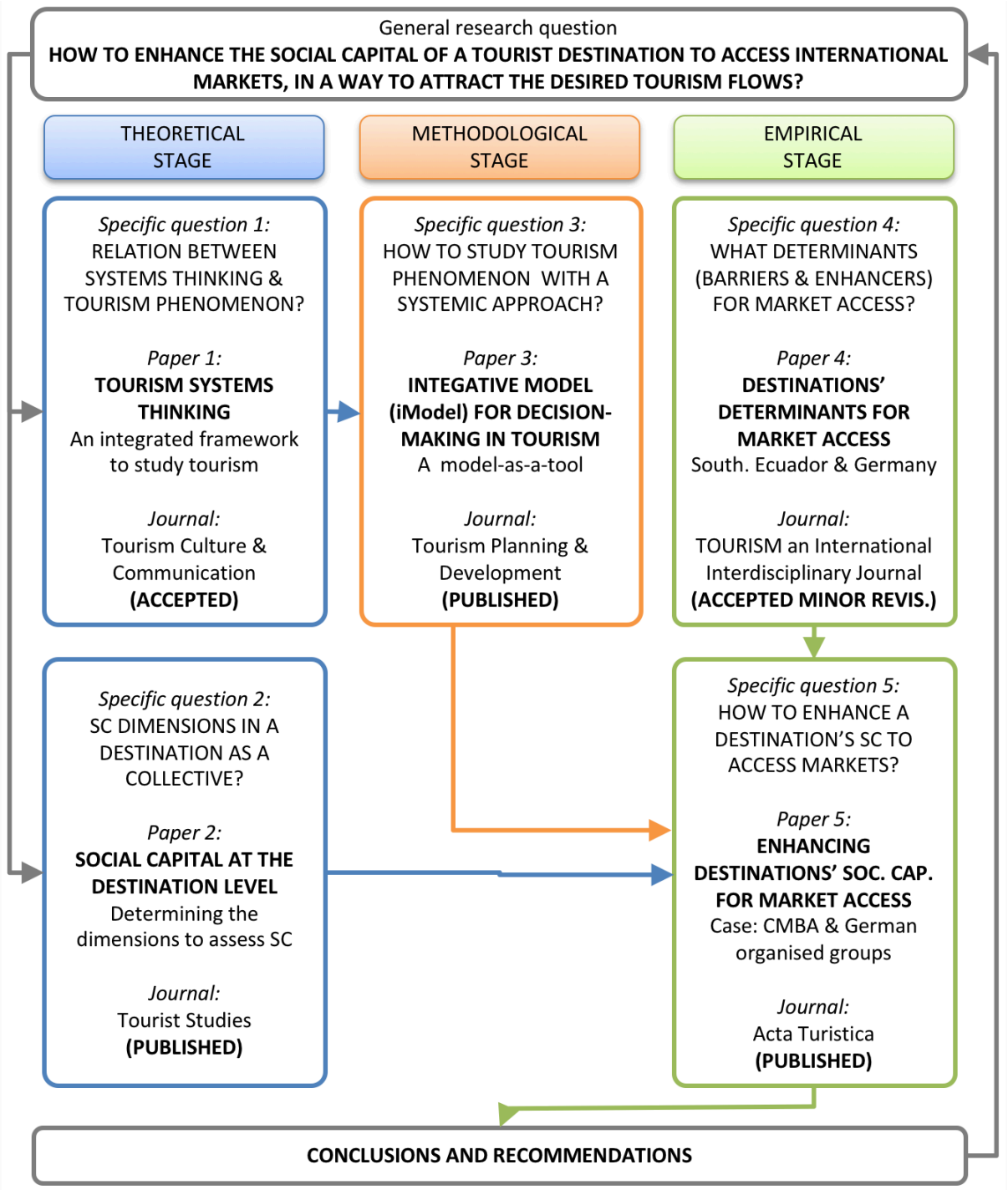
2. Which are the most suitable dimensions to assess social capital at the level of the tourist destination considered as a collective of actors?

3. How can different aspects of the tourism phenomenon, such as social capital, be studied with a systemic approach that allows for tackling complexity in an organised way?

4. What are the determinants that hinder or facilitate access to tourist destinations as collectives to international tourism markets?

5. Considering the above questions together, what conditions, actors or strategies can enhance the social capital of a destination to address the determinants of access to international markets and attract the desired type and quantity of visitors?

Figure 1. **Relationship between Research Stages - Specific Questions - Papers**



Author's elaboration.

1.4 POSITIONALITY

In the following paragraphs I will attempt to position myself in relation to my research process by tackling three key issues (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). First, I locate myself in relation to the research subject by reflecting upon the personal lenses through which I see the subject based on my background. Second, I locate myself in relation to the participants by reflecting upon how I perceive them, and how they could perceive me. And third, I locate myself in relation to the research context by reflecting upon my potential influence on the process.

This statement of positionality is important because I believe that there is no single way to understand the social world, and especially because I, as a researcher, am part of that social world. The personal background of researchers unavoidably brings ontological and epistemological assumptions that will influence the views of how things work or should work (Sikes, 2004). Therefore, through this statement of positionality I expect to present an open exposition of how and why I believe I might influence the research process. Hopefully, this will provide me, the analytical process and the reader with the possibility to make an informed judgement on how trustworthy and truthful the research results are.

The following positionality statement will be revisited at the end of this thesis in light of the research results presented and discussed in the 'Taking a few steps back' section. The purpose is to reflect on, and to try to understand how, where, when and in what way I could have influenced the research process, or the research process has influenced me.

First, in relation to my personal lenses and positions that have the potential to influence the research, my academic training prior to my doctoral research, and my professional experience, were primarily focused on problem-solving skills for tackling practical managerial challenges. During my previous professional career, I have performed roles as planner, facilitator and manager for sustainable tourism development and management of natural resources. In those contexts, the need for involvement and empowerment of local actors was always a key factor. That was the case when working in Ecuador, for example, at the Galapagos and Cajas National Parks (specifically related to sustainable tourism), or for the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area initiative and the Paute Bain's Water Source Fund (related with development in more general terms). In all of those cases, one of the bigest challenges was determining how to facilitate

cooperative processes that allowed political, economic and social participants to interact and use their resources and capacities collectively for unleashing the positive development potential they have. This long lasting and still present desire for supporting initiatives with practical positive impacts led by local actors is one of the first personal positions that I bring into my perspectives on the research subject.

Throughout my professional experience as a practitioner, daily managerial concerns and strategic thinking with an implementation approach were absorbing conditions that created the habit of thinking in more practical than theoretical terms. Within that context of daily management demands in my previous professional experience, I always regretted the lack of time to structure the knowledge I gained based on valuable experiences in a way that could be useful for other cases. This was one of the main reasons why I decided to move to the 'academic' side. This need for translating experiences into the form of, for instance, conceptual frameworks or decision-making tools, represents another personal position from my background that influences my research approach. Nevertheless, this experience-based desire for structuring knowledge that supports local development through tourism is a coin with two sides in relation to this research. On the one hand, my experience gives me a richer set of perspectives and perceptions from the 'practitioners' or managerial side, something that a purely academic researcher will not have. On the other hand, however, my practitioner's side lacked the expertise of systematising past experience in more theoretical terms and transferable forms of knowledge, as demanded in the 'academic' role. Thus, during the initial and intermediate stages of the research process, special efforts will be devoted to developing the theoretical and methodological components of the research. This is reflected by the fact that Papers 1, 2 and 3 (out of the five papers in the thesis – Figure 1) are theoretical or methodological, while findings from Paper 4, although empirically-based, also reflect back on theory to provide new tourism-specific determinants for international market access. These efforts provide, therefore a stronger theoretical structure to the whole research process to counterbalance my previous more empirical approaches.

There are some other personal positions that influenced by my professional experience. I was confronted with multi-stakeholder challenges and pressure, such as tourism planning in protected natural areas that served as strategic water sources for urban centres. Within those challenging contexts, at some point it was unavoidable to considering more centrally controlled processes as a counterbalance for participatory approaches as to simplify the achievement of

results. This was related to the role of authorities, as in the case of my experience in the Cajas National Park, that might tempt me to relay too much on strict management procedures, top-down approaches or legislation as more direct 'problem solvers' of complex social processes. However, my experience also taught me that absolute control of dynamics and total elimination of uncertainty is impossible in social contexts, especially in tourism, which implies the participation of different types of players. Although a healthy leadership from influential actors is desirable, achieving higher levels of collective coordination is hardly ever possible with fully centralised approaches. Therefore, my position on this issue is that in investigating how to improve local capacities for development through tourism, I must remain open to approaches that are more innovative, dynamic and participatory than centrally controlled approaches.

Second, regarding my position in relation to the participants in the research, one of my previous roles in the case study area, the Cajas Massif Biosphere Reserve, was the tourism management of the Cajas National Park, which covers a minor percentage of the Biosphere's territory (see Figure 3). During that period, my relationship was mostly with actors related to tourism activities in the National Park or its surrounding territories. My next role, as coordinator of the Interinstitutional Committee for the Declaration of the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area, led me to interact with actors at a broader local, national and international level. However, in contrast to my previous role, most of these actors were not directly related to tourism nor were they contacted with that perspective, because the process of the Biosphere declaration tackled a broad range of sustainable development initiatives. Therefore, because of my first-hand knowledge of the dynamics, socio-political structures and actors in the region I expect that my former involvement as an actor in the study area is an advantage for the practical aspects of my research process. I consider that this will certainly hold true for the early stages of my empirical work when I had to identify key actors as starting points and explore aspects of the case study. All this perhaps would not be so evident for researchers unfamiliar with the area. For example, it could be harder for researchers not familiarised with the actors of the case study to access certain data, to be invited to participate in activities as an observer, or to inquire about the status of social or political processes that only someone with previous involvement could know about.

Nevertheless, as my research subject focuses on tourism in the broader territory of the Biosphere Reserve, and in relation to international markets, I had to deal with regional, national and international tourism related actors that I had no contact with previously. Therefore, although some key tourism actors (such as DMOs, tour operators, associations or governmental

agencies) are known by me, I did not work with all of them as a staff member or as part of those organisations which, I expect, allowed me to maintain a certain balance between objectivity and possible preconceptions on the case study. Furthermore, by the moment I entered in contact with previously known actors for the purpose of my research, I made clear not be linked or talking in the name of any institution related to the Cajas Massif anymore. This put me in a mixed position within my research process. To some extent I can be considered an 'insider', because of my previous knowledge of the context and links. But I can also be considered as 'outsider' because I did not represent any local organisation during my research, and because the scope of the research led me to territories, actors and contexts not previously known by me. For example, I could already foresee the relevance of connecting with communitarian tourism initiatives (cacao farmers or the Saraguro ethnic group) around the Biosphere territory, with influential tour operators and DMO in the capital city of Quito at the national level, and with international tour operators at the selected source market of the case study. Therefore, the nature and extent of the research subject combines insider-outsider perspectives within the research process. On the one hand there will be perceptions based on previous relationships with the actors in the Cajas Massif. On the other hand, there will be fresh views and perspectives based on new contacts generated throughout the research process about the relationship between the Cajas Massif as a destination and Germany as the source market. Furthermore, performing my role as a researcher without an institutional link or without being a representative of any local actor, might allow me to observe attitudes from previously known actors as if I was an 'outsider' this time. For instance, some local tour operators whose activities in the Cajas National Park I used to supervise could speak more critically about those relationships, now that I no longer had an institutional relationship with the Park's administration. In short, I believe that the fact that I had previous knowledge of the context of my research area, but that I could approach previously known and new actors from a researcher's perspective, with the support of a foreign university, could provide me with an interesting combined insider-outsider profile and allowed me to dig deeper without the actors feeling that institutional relations could be compromised by expressing their thoughts.

Third, regarding my position in relation to the research context and process, considering the aforementioned relationship with the study area, it is unavoidable that this will have an impact on the research process. While knowing several actors is an advantage, this kind of mental pre-configuration may also constrain the scope of the research to a limited circle. However, for two reasons the nature of the research question pushes me to also go beyond familiar contexts. The

first reason is because my former role in the Cajas Massif was not specifically related to tourism, which required me to contact tourism actors throughout the research process within and around this vast territory that were not known by me. The second reason is because the research subject has an international scope which urged me to contact actors such as national level tourism authorities or foreign tourism organisations and companies related to the study area. Thus, I consider that this combination between familiar and unfamiliar contexts produced contrasting impressions and inputs throughout the research process that helped me revealing and questioning my own preconceptions.

Due to the broad nature of the research, I might have ended contacting an excessively broad range of participants. In this sense, it is the research question that helped to differentiate between those actors who have a relevant relationship with the research subject and those who do not. In light of the general research scheme (see Figure 1), I think that a wider diversity of actors was useful for Paper 4, which draws upon determinants for international market access with a broader scope. For Paper 5, identification of a smaller group of particularly relevant actors seemed more useful because it draws upon the specific relationship, from the perspective of a key actor at the destination, between a clearly defined destination in Southern Ecuador and a specific market segment in Germany.

Another concern in relation to the general research process refers to the influence that my conscious or unconscious preconceptions, after more than fourteen years of professional experience on the ground, may have on the research. In that regard, I consider that the decision of residing abroad, in the country of my academic host institution, is positive as this allowed me to take a temporary contextual distance, to explore related cases within different contexts, and to reflect back on my study area in an iterative way adding the ‘outsider’ perspective. Or at least, I am closer to the perspectives of those who are fully outsiders to the study area. This allowed me to have a refreshed view on my previous perceptions as an insider such as a better perspective on the comparative importance and attractiveness of the Cajas Massif as a destination within the international context, or by reconsidering the role that influential actors (should) play on complex social processes for local development though tourism. I hope that my mixed involvement with the study area (being a former insider but researching on it as an outsider) will stimulate a constant and contrasting reflection between different perspectives throughout this manuscript. Physical distance and not being involved with the affairs of the study area on a daily basis could also be deemed as a downside for enriching the research

process. However, my research does not propose to draw its conclusions based on implementation results. Therefore, the managerial involvement I had before is not deemed as a necessity for my research purposes nor for recommendations.

In view of these considerations, my positionality aims at playing the role of an external observer who, nevertheless, has the potential to dig deeper into the study case because of his experience and contacts. Therefore, this research project aims at building several tourism-specific elements that provide a clear theoretical basis (systems thinking principles -Paper 1-, social capital dimensions -Paper 2-, and international market access determinants -Paper 4-), a detailed methodology (the integrative analytical model -Paper 3-), and clearly defined conceptual and analytical factors which reduce personal bias as much as possible. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, which theoretical principles and methods are used is also a matter of making the best possibly justified choices. Furthermore, the mere involvement of a person researching about something, regardless of the method used, or previous experience, involves a certain degree of influence from that person's perspective. Either throughout the design, the collection of data, or the interpretation of results processes. However, the best possible efforts will be put into this research to provide it with a theoretical framework and methodology that inform and assure the readers that the research outcomes are trustworthy and transparent.

1.5 GENERAL METHODOLOGY OF THIS STUDY

This study uses a systems thinking-based approach to tourism for exploring the relationship between the social capital of a destination and its influence on the determinants of access to international tourism markets. Systems thinking, social capital and tourism theories all consider the interactions of their elements and their dynamics as the source of observed phenomena. Within that context, the methods applied for the general research process will have a qualitative nature which will help to study not only the what and the how of those dynamics, but also to reflect on the why. That, in turn, will allow me to use my specific case to shed light on more theoretical and generalizable constructs (Bryman, 2012; Von Friedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006).

This research attempts to go further than taking existing theory and methodologies to combine them as the basis of new theoretical insights based on a study case. It attempts to do so but also

to contribute with new tourism-specific theoretical and methodological constructs for tourism studies. Therefore, the general methodological approach of my study consists of three stages (see Figure 1), each one representing a specific challenge. The challenge in the first stage (theoretical) consists of discussing the translation of existing systems thinking and social capital theories into the field of tourism, with special focus on the tourist destination level, to produce a tourism-specific theoretical basis for my research. Drawing upon the previous stage, the challenge in the second stage (methodological) consists of developing a new model capable of explaining the emergence of different forms of tourism and a methodology for its analytical application, which will represent the tourism-specific methodological basis for my study. And finally, the challenge in the third stage (empirical) consists of identifying tourist destination-specific determinants for market access, and of demonstrating the model's applicability to my study case to answer the general research question, which will represent the empirical basis of my study.

The specific outputs of the research stages are presented in chapters II to IV, which contain five papers:

- Chapter II contains Papers 1 and 2, the tourism-specific theoretical basis or stage 1;
- Chapter III contains Paper 3, the tourism-specific methodological basis or stage 2; and,
- Chapter IV contains Papers 4 and 5, the empirical basis from case studies or stage 3.

Each paper stands as an independent article containing its own more or less similar structure: introduction, methodology, literature review, results, discussion, and reflections on its specific contribution to tourism literature. Additionally, papers 1 to 5 tackle each of the previously stated specific research questions from 1 to 5, respectively. Simultaneously, the five papers are also complementary building blocks within the whole research project, the interconnection among the Papers, illustrated in Figure 1, represents the general research approach. Furthermore, the papers are also discussed at a more interconnected general level in Chapter VI, General Conclusions.

However, despite the fact that this research as a whole has a general research approach (Figure 1) and a general methodology (Chapter III - Paper 3), each one of the papers is also produced through its own internal methodological process. Although the specific methodology of each paper is descried within each one of them, there are some details that could not be included in each paper. This was due to factors such as constraints in the length of a paper format, or because such details were not deemed critical in the specific paper as a stand-alone piece of

work. Therefore, in the following paragraphs I include more detailed explanations of the methodology used for each paper, and simultaneously I explain how the outcomes of each paper progressively interconnect to and contribute with the general research process.

Paper 1 (accepted for publication in the form in which it is presented in this thesis) argues that tourism is a complex phenomenon to understand and that a systems thinking approach is useful to tackle such complexities. With this perspective in mind, this conceptual paper develops a literature-based discussion that progressively moves from independent concepts being contextualised within tourism into their integration within a tourism-specific conceptual framework. In other words, the paper starts discussing independent notions and concepts and derives towards a clearly structured set of interrelated concepts. To do so, the paper goes through four steps. First, the paper describes seven complexities of the tourism phenomenon that are discussed in a scattered manner in the broader tourism literature. Second, the article discusses eight systems thinking concepts within the context of tourism and explains how each of those concepts help to tackle the previously described complexities of tourism in a more integrative from. Third, based on the eight concepts of systems thinking as applied to tourism, an integrated tourism systems thinking conceptual framework is proposed, and the relationships among the concepts are discussed. As part of its conceptual integration, the framework differentiates between three groups of concepts that help to describe tourism: Components, Structure and Properties. And fourth, the paper presents some suggestions and a short example of how the framework could guide tourism analysis.

The contribution of this paper to the general research process is making the conceptual link between tourism as a complex phenomenon and systems thinking. Also, within the general research process the results from Paper 1 will later serve as the theoretical basis to develop the systems thinking based integrative model of Paper 3.

Paper 2 (published in the form it is presented in this thesis) argues that social capital has been little discussed as the object of study in tourism. Rather, social capital has been mostly used as a conceptual means to explore other aspects of tourism. Paper 2 also argues that social capital has not been addressed at the level of the tourist destination seen as a collective of actors. Therefore, Paper 2 attempts to identify the key dimensions to study and assess social capital at the level of a tourist destination and the conditions to foster those dimensions. This conceptual paper draws upon existing social capital theory. Text analysis was conducted to select the

sources and categorise their content through the following five steps. First, the selection criterion was whether a publication discussed the specific key characteristics of social capital and not just its theory in general terms. As a result, thirty-nine publications were preselected from the vast social capital literature. Second, the content of the preselected publications was analysed in more detail to identify those that explicitly pointed out and differentiated between key characteristics of social capital. As a result, sixteen publications on social capital were deemed useful. Eight were non-tourism related publications and eight were tourism related publications. Third, different categories were created through the analysis and grouping of similar notions among the key characteristics described in the selected literature. Then, a keyword was selected to name each category, which would represent one of the identified key dimensions of social capital. For example, content using different terms but referring to similar notions such as such as 'groups', 'organisations', 'structure', 'relations' or 'network' were grouped under the category named 'networks'. Fourth, the paper discusses different levels of scope of social capital (bonding, bridging and linking) as a way of visualising how relationships within a destination can have different levels of aggregation. And fifth, the paper uses the three identified key dimensions and the three levels of scope to introduce a conceptual social capital assessment matrix for tourist destinations.

The contribution of this paper to the general research process is making the conceptual link between the tourist destination as a collective of actors and social capital. Also, within the general research process the results from Paper 2 will be used later in Paper 5 as the guiding criteria to apply analysis of the final case study, using the integrative model proposed in Paper 3.

At this point, within the theoretical stage (Figure 1) of the general research process, I have established the theoretical connections between tourism and systems thinking through Paper 1, and between tourism and social capital through Paper 2. In each paper I have built tourism-specific conceptual frameworks that will be used later as the guiding criteria to develop the methodological and empirical stages.

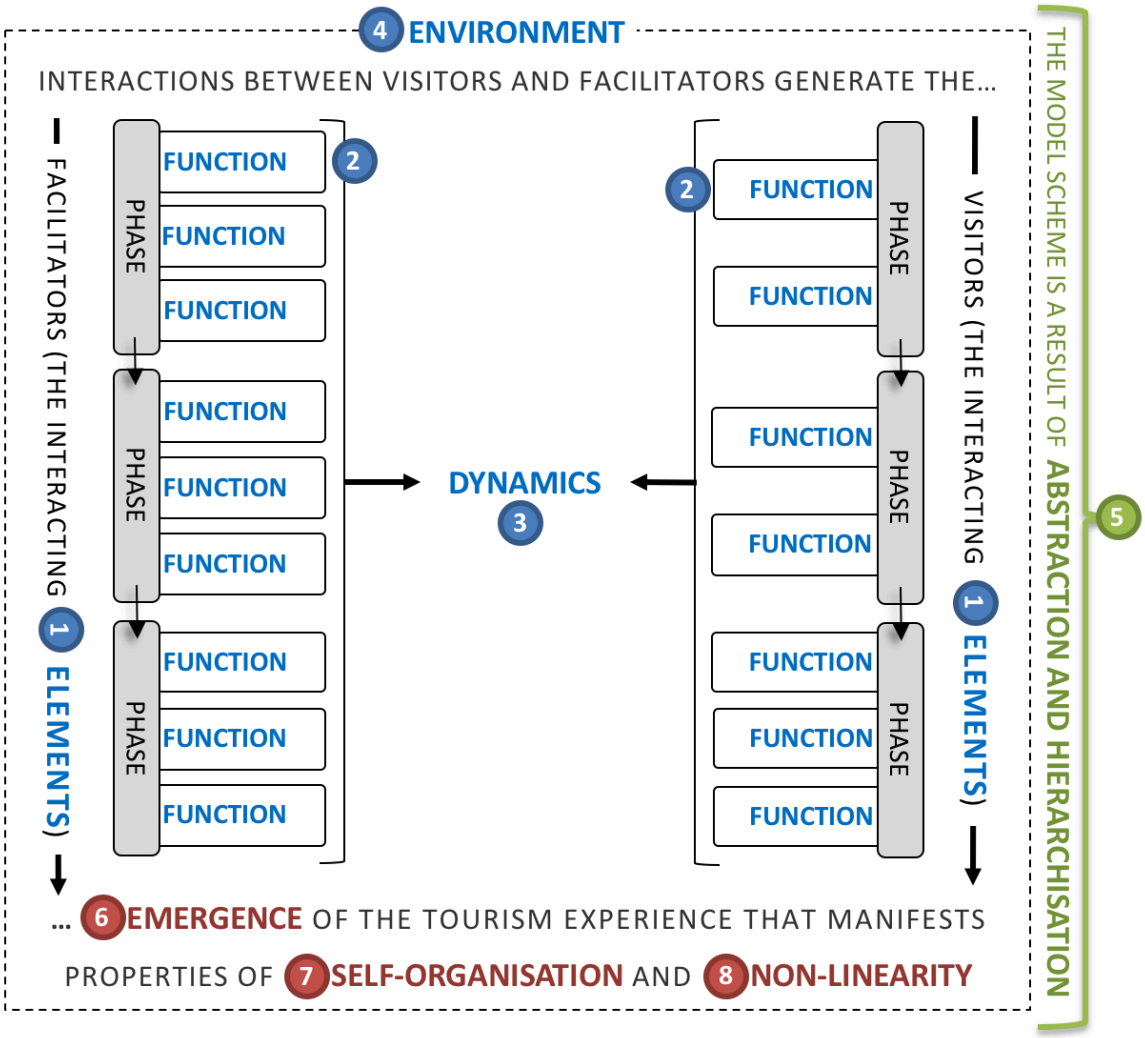
Paper 3 (accepted for publication in the form in which it is presented in this thesis) draws upon the tourism systems thinking conceptual framework introduced in Paper 1 to build an integrative model (iModel) for decision-making. This paper basically argues that existing conceptual models that present a schematic or visual illustration to describe and study the tourism phenomenon are mostly based or related to industrial paradigms or commercial

perspectives on tourism. The paper does not neglect the broader existing literature conceptually approaching the description of tourism from more integrative social or environmental perspectives. But the paper highlights that when it comes to researchers or practitioners looking for a concrete schematic model that could serve as a tool to ease practical analysis, the available options are very much influenced by paradigms using industrial analogies on tourism. This is specially the case for authors presenting a systems-thinking based scheme, which is one of the purpose of the current paper. Paper 3 also does not deny the fact that among the diverse forms of tourism there are many cases that may resemble to a certain extent industrial production processes or that are mainly commercially driven. On the contrary, the paper acknowledges that, but attempts to propose a conceptual model for tourism that does not depart from one specific perspective and allows for exploring the phenomenon from different social, environmental or economic perspectives, or from the relationships between such perspectives.

That is why the model proposed in Paper 3 is based upon systems thinking principles. If we observe carefully, the eight concepts of the 'Integrated Tourism Systems Thinking Conceptual Framework' (Figure 5, in Paper 1) are the building blocks of the 'iModel' scheme (Figure 9, in Paper 3). Figure 2 presents a simplified illustration of the relationships between the conceptual figures of Papers 1 and 3:

- Concepts 1 to 4 (in blue in Figure 2) from the conceptual framework of Paper 1, are the building blocks of the iModel's scheme in Paper 3. They represent the components of the tourism system;
- Concept 5 (in green in Figure 2) from the conceptual framework of Paper 1 is represented in the scheme of the iModel as a whole in Paper 3. It allows visualisation of the structure of the tourism system; and,
- Concepts 6 to 8 (in red in Figure 2) from the conceptual framework of Paper 1 refer to the properties of the tourism system which can be studied through the analytical application of the iModel from Paper 3.

Figure 2. **Relationship between the concepts of the Tourism Systems Thinking Conceptual Framework** (Paper 1) **and the iModel's scheme** (simplified version from Paper 3)



Author's elaboration

In addition, Paper 3 goes one step further than existing models that provide a schematic illustration of how tourism works and proposes a concrete methodology for the model's application as an analytical tool. The iModel's scheme and its methodology for application were developed through an intensive and iterative process of theoretical work, contrast with practice and consultation with experts. This allowed me to progressively improve the model through different testing phases. In Paper 3, several elements of existing models are considered as a conceptual basis to build the iModel, while their limitations are also identified. The complete iModel's development process took between August 2014 and May 2017. From the first version based on a literature review pertaining to systems thinking and tourism (2014), the

process went through experience-based assessments with Belgian DMOs (2015), feedback from internal and international tourism research panels (2015, 2016, 2017), input from extensive fieldwork observations, work with Ecuadorian DMOs, and other Ecuadorian and German stakeholders (2015, 2016, 2017). The development of the iModel, therefore, is based on a mixed methodology with qualitative data gathering (interviews) as the main methodological format and critically debating and testing the applicability of the iModel's logic in several expert panels and case studies. A detailed description of the iModel's development stages follows:

Table 1. **iModel development stages**

STAGES	DESCRIPTION
Broader literature review on: (Aug - Oct 2014)	a) Systems thinking to approach tourism as a dynamic phenomenon; b) Identifying tourism's constituent elements and functions.
Focused literature review on: (Nov 2014 - Jan 2015)	Works that explicitly present a tourism model, to: a) determine each model's conceptual approach; b) reflect on its elements and functions; c) assess whether it proposes a methodology for decision-making.
Experience[1] based assessment: (Feb 2015)	A first draft model was elaborated based on the literature review and a desk assessment of the model was conducted based upon 14 years of the main authors' experience in destination management in Ecuador.
Testing on study cases[2]: (Mar - Apr 2015)	The model was tested as a guiding tool to analyse three DMOs at different territorial levels in Belgium, via in-depth interviews, desk research and field observations.
International seminar reviews[3]:	An improved version of the model was used as the work subject during a 5 months-long international seminar on tourism at the Doctoral level. Discussions along the seminar provided feedback for further improvement.

[1] Facilitation of local-based tourism planning in Galapagos National Park; tourism planning and management of Cajas National Park; coordination of the Cajas Massif Biosphere Reserve Interinstitutional Committee; diverse joint initiatives with the Ministry of Tourism, Cuenca DMO, Azuay Chamber of Tourism, Hotel Association of Cuenca; implementation of a Tourism Information System.

[2] In-depth interviews with several officials at the provincial DMO level (Westtoer), the higher regional level (Toerisme Vlaanderen) and the local municipal level (Toerisme Brugge).

[3] The seminar was composed by: two intensive group-work periods – one full week each –, in Sweden and one in-between individual-work period, in Belgium. It was attended by 8 Doctoral tourism researchers from around the world working on diverse destinations who participated in the discussions.

(May - Sep 2015)	
Internal reviews: (Nov 2015 - Dec 2016)	Different versions of the model were assessed during Doctoral seminars of the Tourism Research Group of the main university hosting the research.
Input from fieldwork[4]: (Dec 2015 - Mar 2016)	The model was strengthened by the fieldwork in the Cajas Massif Biosphere Reserve, a broad region in Southern Ecuador. The experience and data collected about that region helped to further reflect upon the model's structure and purpose.
Assessing relevance by practitioner: (Dec 2016)	Presentation of an advanced version of the model to the Technical Coordinator of Cuenca city's DMO, at the tourism core of the Cajas Massif Biosphere Reserve, to test perception on relevance and applicability.
Presenting to international panel: (Apr 2017)	Presentation of a refined version of the model, with a methodology for application in diverse contexts, for the consideration and feedback from an international group of tourism experts at the UNESCO-UNITWIN conference.
Final adjustments: (May - Jun 2017)	Generation of the final version of the iModel and preparation of a scientific article for publication.

Author's elaboration

At this point in the general research process, Paper 3 provides: an integrative tourism model built upon the theoretical constructs of the Tourism Systems Thinking paper (number 1); and an analytical methodology that will be applied later in the research process in Paper 5.

Paper 4 (accepted for publication with minor revisions in the form in which it is presented in this thesis) identifies the key factors that destinations need to tackle in their process of internationalisation. In other words, Paper 4 points out the determinants for achieving precisely what the final part of the research subject refers to: accessing international tourism markets. In that sense, it can be said that while Paper 2 takes an inward view of the destination as a collective of actors by exploring its social capital, Paper 4 takes an outward view of the destination by exploring the challenges of that collective for connecting with international markets.

[4] 55 in-depth open-ended interviews to public, private and community actors were performed in the region, as well as several field visits for observation took place, in addition to participation in tourism development planning workshops of the city of Cuenca and its region of influence (the Cajas Massif).

The elaboration of Paper 4 used a mixed methods approach, combining a tourism internationalisation literature review, an exports literature review and open-ended interviews, through the following steps. *First*, a literature review of tourism internationalisation was conducted. In this step, it was found that the tourism literature discusses the wide range of determinants for international market access in a scattered way, with different authors referring to one or a few specific determinants. There were no sources presenting determinants for international tourism market access in a consolidated form. Thus, using NVivo software for qualitative data analysis, the content of several publications in tourism internationalisation were examined. Similar notions identified throughout diverse sources, but referring to the same determinants for internationalisation, were systematically grouped under the same code. The criteria to select useful publications for this step was whether the publications expressly referred to internationalisation in tourism and its related barriers or enhancers. As a result, 19 works, spanning between 1998 and 2017, were deemed as relevant. Through this process, an initial set of 29 determinants for tourism internationalisation was put together. *Second*, in order to expand the consideration of other determinants not tackled by tourism literature, I analysed available literature on the exports sector. This was deemed a useful reference for two reasons: a) although the exports sector and tourism have some fundamental differences, they also share many similar challenges (discussed in Paper 4) in the process of reaching markets abroad, to the point that some consider tourism as an exports activity (OECD, 2008); and b) the exports literature has a much longer period of data collection and consolidation, which might point to valid determinants that were not tackled or identified in the more scattered and younger tourism literature on internationalisation.

Thus, in this step I drew upon existing consolidated lists of export barriers for small and medium enterprises from extensive studies that together represent 48 years of data, from 44 countries. Through this process an integrated set of 50 determinants from the exports sector was generated. Many of the determinants from the exports literature confirmed those generated from the tourism internationalisation literature review. Other determinants were not relevant at all for the case of tourism. While some determinants pointed at new key conditions not identified in the tourism internationalisation literature. This is further discussed in Paper 4. When combined according to coincidence in concepts, both sets of determinants, those from the tourism and those from exports literature, produced a temporary new set of 67 determinants. This provided an initial conceptual base for comparing with the empirical data to be collected from fieldwork. *Third,* 30 open-ended interviews were conducted in Ecuador, considered as

the destination, and Germany, considered as the source market, regarding barriers and enhancers for international tourism market access. Fieldwork took place in Ecuador from December 2015 to March 2016, and in Germany in March 2017 during the ITB Berlin Trade Fare. In total, 30 interviews were conducted: 16 in Ecuador and 14 in Germany, the latter consisting of Ecuadorian and German actors who can already access the market. Interviewees were asked to talk about the conditions they consider that help or hinder them from taking collective actions when attempting to access international markets, if the interviewee was at the destination, or when attempting to consolidate Ecuador as the destination, if the interviewee was already at the market. As the paper's subject refers to determinants for tourist destinations considered as collectives of actors, the selected interviewees were tour operators and governmental tourism institutions because they play special coordination roles among the actors of a destination to facilitate market access. No predefined categories or determinants were mentioned to the interviewees, so they could freely talk in their own terms about what they consider important regarding the subject. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Afterwards, as in the previous steps, using NVivo software for qualitative data analysis, similar notions identified among diverse interviewees, but referring to the same determinants for internationalisation, were systematically grouped under the same code. As a result of this round, three different sets of determinants were generated, each one from a different perspective: a) actors at the destination, b) Ecuadorian actors in the market, and c) German actors in the market. By considering both ends of the process (destination and source market), I obtained a richer diversity of determinants from the field, which I could later contrast with the sets of determinants derived from literature in the previous steps. Finally, in the *fourth* step, I consolidated the five sets of determinants for international market access stemming from the tourism literature, the exports literature, actors at the destination, Ecuadorian actors in the market, and German actors in the market. Then, I contrasted the five sets and grouped similar notions under the same determinant. For example, while one set mentioned 'unsustained processes' as a barrier, another set mentioned 'sustained processes' as an enhancer, thus, both notions were grouped under the determinant 'Implement and sustain efficient processes'. In this way, the similar determinants from the five sets where progressively grouped under the same code or label.

This process confirmed some findings from the literature, while contradicting others, and proposed new determinants identified in the fieldwork. For example, an eliminated determinant

initially suggested by the exports literature but that was not confirmed by any of the other four sets of determinants was 'Meet export packaging/labelling requirements'. This is because in tourism there is no need for physical 'packaging' in the conventional sense of delivering products inside boxes. Conversely, an example of a determinant confirmed by almost all the sets is whether there is 'enough quantity and qualified personnel for internationalisation'. A new determinant not previously identified in the literature but from the fieldwork was precisely the abovementioned example, the capacity to 'Implement and sustain efficient processes'. In summary, this contrasting and consolidating process produced a final set of 46 determinants, classified into 10 categories, for tourist destinations international market access. The contribution of Paper 4 to the general research process is that it provides a clear set of considerations that destinations as collectives need to observe when attempting to access international tourism markets.

To summarise, at this point of the general research process the elements available to tackle the general research question are: a systems thinking-based analytical model (in Paper 3, which in turn, is based on Paper 1) as the methodological tool to study the case of the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area; the key dimensions of social capital in a tourist destination (from Paper 2) as the criterion for assessing the destination's capacity to act collectively; and the determinants for international market access (Paper 4) as the factors that a destination needs to collectively tackle through its social capital.

Paper 5 (published in the form it is presented in this thesis) is the meeting point of the previous papers. All the conceptual and methodological components generated throughout the research process are connected in this work through their application in the final case study. The tourism systems thinking (Paper 1) based iModel (Paper 3) is used to analyse the relationships between the social capital of a destination (Paper 2), and the determinants to access international markets (Paper 4) to reflect on how to improve a destination's collective capacity to attract the desired type of visitors according to its tourism development vision. In other words, Paper 5 tackles the general research question, which refers to how tourist destinations can enhance their social capital for attracting the desired markets in a proactive way that supports local development goals. This implies the necessity of determining a specific destination-target market relationship to be used as the case study.

Thus, Paper 5 identifies the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (CMBA), in Southern Ecuador, as the destination component of the case study. From the destination perspective, a key actor approach was deemed as an appropriate entry point for exploring the dynamics of the destination. Such a determination helps focus the analytical process, given that studying social capital's wide range of possible relationships, among a diversity of destination's actors, and using the iModel's detailed analytical methodology, would represent an unmanageably broad scenario of possible interconnections.

The Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation (MF) was selected as the key actor or entry point for the analytical application of the iModel to explore the destination's dynamics. The MF was identified and confirmed during fieldwork as a key facilitator for the study area because stakeholders at the local (e.g. small tour operators, Spanish schools, attraction managers, universities), regional (e.g. tourism authorities, provincial tourism organisations), national (e.g. other DMOs, tourism authorities, international tour operators), and international (e.g. German certifier, Ecuadorian actors at the German market) levels referred to the MF when talking about key actors or conditions required for enhancing collective actions towards international markets. The MF, from its headquarters in the city of Cuenca (the touristic core of the CMBA), is the actor actively facilitating participatory processes in the region to reflect upon local development through tourism. Moreover, the MF is formally constituted by a collective of actors. Thus, by its own nature any action taken by the MF takes the form of a collective action, making it an ideal central actor for the case study from the destination side.

On the other hand, the target market side of the case study is focused on German organised groups. This was decided based on a) statistics indicating the importance of the German market for the CMBA ('Case Study' section), and b) based on the interest and collective efforts currently led by the MF in relation to international tourism. Thus, the final analytical application in Paper 5 was focused on how a key collective actor such as the TCMF can enhance the social capital of the CMBA to proactively attract German organised groups that match the destination's development goals. In this way, the analysis is not only accurately focused, but also offers a more practical appeal for the stakeholders that hope to improve tourism development through the facilitating role of the MF.

With a key actor and the target market segment clearly defined, the methodology (from Paper 3) allowed an ordered questioning and analytical process to be conducted in Paper 5 regarding

how the social capital of the destination influences the determinants for international market access. This questioning process generated an 'Extended report' (see Table 2) for the case of the CMBA in relation to German organised groups. The extended report provides a detailed and structured description of the case study from the perspective of each of the three social capital dimensions (networks, norms & trust and collective action), analysed in light of each one of the iModel's functions, in relation to the determinants for international market access.

As an example, Table 2 bellow shows a fragment of the extended report, showing the analytical results in a summarised way only of the 'Design' function (one out of 9 functions) within the iModel. To have an idea of the analytical depth applied in the case study, we must consider that the complete analysis of the 9 functions, at the three levels of the sub question of iModel, was applied for the case study.

As the iModel is a systematic questioning methodology, conceived as an analytical tool to be applied by one or several analysts, based on available information sources, in the case of Paper 5 the iModel was applied from the perspective of the MF, the identified key actor facilitating collective actions in the CMBA. Thus, the abovementioned methodological decisions and the application of the iModel in Paper 5 were based on the following information sources: a) four sessions with the MF's Projects Manager (December 2016, February 2017, August 2017 and January 2018) to introduce, apply, and evaluate the iModel's utility; b) available official relevant documents such as plans, policies, reports and statistics; c) fourteen years (2000 – 2014) of the author's experience in tourist destination management related to the case study area; and, d) relevant data from three fieldworks (Dec 2015 – Mar 2016 in Ecuador, March 2017 in Germany, and April 2017 in Ecuador), where eighty open-ended interviews were conducted, plus several field visits and participation in workshops took place.

The interviewees were actors taking part in international tourism activities in Ecuador and related to the CMBA, located at the CMBA, elsewhere in Ecuador or in Germany. Although these interviews were generated for Papers 3 and 4, which have a more general focus on the tourism phenomenon and internationalisation, they were also relevant supportive sources for the application of the iModel because together they provide updated information on the context of the case study. Furthermore, fifteen of those interviews were conducted with actors directly involved in the CMBA - German Organised Groups relationship analysed in Paper 5, which also served as more specific information sources.

Paper 5 contributes to the general research process by providing a connective application example of the iModel from Paper 3, using systems thinking (Paper 1) and social capital (Paper 3) theories for exploring how a key facilitator can enhance a destination collective capacity to influence the determinants (Paper 4) for international markets access.

Table 2. **iModel's Extended Report**
(shortened example fragment, only of the Design function,
taken from the iModel application on the CMBA case study in Paper 5)

The iModel shows the relationships between social capital dimensions and the determinants for international market access

SUB-QUE.	SOCIAL CAPITAL DIMENSIONS	**CONCEPTION PHASE**
		Design (De)
WHAT IS THERE NOW? (antecedents)	NETWORKS who & where?	• There is collaboration only at the level of punctual delivery of information exchange about Cuenca with inbound tour operators from Ecuador, in Quito, such as South American Tours, Geo Raisen and Positiv Turismo, who have access to the target market, but nothing about working together to design the offer together. *(Determinant: **Destination does not perform collective actions** = Barrier)* • There has also been collaboration with public organizations such as Quito Turismo DMO, Ministry of Tourism, Guayaquil Turismo DMO in general information and promotion, but not for product design. *(Det: **Destination does not innovate for and adapt for target markets** = Barrier)*
	NORMS & TRUST how?	• The MF is a municipal entity of the Cuenca canton with its own legal personality. However, its statutes define and limit it as a tourism promotion agency. *(Determinant: **Destination does not have appropriate organisational/institutional structures** = Barrier)* • Cuenca has an updated regional tourism development plan for the period 2016 - 2021, generated through participatory processes, generated through participatory processes. *(Determinant: **Destination can perform collective initiatives** = Enhancer)* • Although this plan establishes a vision and type of tourism desired at a general level, it does not propose specific products in a detailed form. *(Det.: **Destination does not have an offer that justifies the travel distance** = Barrier)*
	COLLECTIVE ACTIONS what & when?	• At the beginning of 2016, South American Tours was interested in incorporating the Sígsig's toquilla straw hand-weavers into its tours, which benefits the destination. Talks and visits were made by the director of operations of South American Tours. The CTMF acted as promoter and facilitator of this connection; however, the initiative has not crystallised due to a lack of specific monitoring. *(Determinant: **Destination cannot foster private – private initiatives** = Barrier)* • There was an initiative with Quito Turismo DMO to connect Cartagena-Quito-Cuenca in a single offer. However, there was a change in Quito Turismo's management and the initiative vanished.

SUB-QUE.	SOCIAL CAPITAL DIMENSIONS	CONCEPTION PHASE **Design** (De)
		(Det.: ***Destination cannot implement and sustain efficient processes*** *= Barrier)*
WHAT IS LACKING? (diagnosis)	NETWORKS who & where?	• We do not know exactly, nor do we have structured information, who are the Ecuadorian inbound tour operators, German outbound tourist agencies, or other Ecuadorian service providers with whom the destination could work to serve the target market. *(Determin.:* ***Destination cannot identify foreign business opportunities*** *= Barrier)* • There is no structured or formalised knowledge of the target market at the TCMF or destination level. *(Determinant:* ***Destination does not have a defined target market*** *= Barrier)*
	NORMS & TRUST how?	• The TCMF does not have the appropriate structure (legal, financial, process, dedicated staff) to carry out product design. At the moment it is intended as a promotional agent only. *(Determinant:* ***Destination does not have appropriate organisational/institutional structures*** *= Barrier)* • There are no formal or informal agreements with tour operators or public organizations for cooperation in the offer design for the target market. *(Det.:* ***Destination has no private – private nor public – private initiatives*** *= Barrier)*
	COLLECTIVE ACTIONS what & when?	• Although the 2016-2021 Plan identifies in general terms that experiential tourism is the type of offer that the destination wishes and has the potential to develop, there is no product design management for the target market (structuring itineraries, identifying suppliers, calculating costs, profitability, price and return) either within the TCMF or in collaboration with tour operators or partner institutions. *(Determinant:* ***Destination does not dedicate managerial time for internationalisation*** *= Barrier)* • There is no detailed or official profile agreed upon the destination's stakeholders in the target market (country, location, age, tastes, income, standards of services and facilities required) that connects with the type of desired tourism. *(Determinant.:* ***Destination does not have a defined target market*** *= Barrier)*

SUB-QUE.	SOCIAL CAPITAL DIMENSIONS	CONCEPTION PHASE **Design** (De)
HOW TO TACKLE THE PROBLEM? (action plan)	NETWORKS who & where?	• Connect with other destination management organizations in Quito (Quito Turismo DMO), Guayaquil (Guayaquil Turismo DMO) and in the province (Azuay Provincial Government) to design integrated products within national circuits that are more attractive internationally. *(Determinant.: **Perform collective initiatives** = Enhancer)* • Alliances with Guayaquil actors are especially strategic as it is the closest international air gateway to Cuenca. *(Determinant.: **International flight connections** = Enhancer)*
	NORMS & TRUST how?	• Create and implement a specialised unit in the TCMF (including legal framework, financial resources—e.g. seed funding, trust fund, tourism tax, new business models—, processes and dedicated staff) to coordinate the offer design function for the target market. *(Determinant: **Appropriate organisational/institutional structures** = Enhancer)* • Establish specific cooperation agreements with Ecuadorian tour operators and destination management organisations and/or German outbound travel agents interested in becoming commercial or strategic partners in design and implementation of new offers for the target market. *(Determinant: **Private – private and public – private initiatives** = Enhancer)*
	COLLECTIVE ACTIONS what & when?	• Determine the specific profile of the target market (country, age, tastes, income, standards of services and facilities required) with the commercial and strategic partners and make it official. *(Determinant: **Defined target market** = Enhancer)* • Design products of an experiential nature (structuring itineraries, identifying suppliers, calculating costs, sales price, profitability and return) in collaboration with DMOs, Ecuadorian tour operators and German outbound travel agents interested in becoming commercial or strategic partners. *(Determinant: **An offer that justifies the travel distance** = Enhancer)*

Note: the shadowed cells represent critical issues to be tackled.
Author's elaboration.

At this final point of the research process, a detailed analysis of the case study is obtained. Paper 5 reflects upon how the social capital of the destination can be enhanced to tackle the determinants for international market access through the facilitation of a key influencing actor, in order to attract a specific desired market in a proactive way.

To summarise, the methodological approach of the research starts with broader theoretical perspectives and progressively focuses more specifically on the research question and the case

study. In that sense, although Papers 1, 2 and 3 argue for perspectives broader than only the economic side of tourism, this does not neglect its importance. On the contrary, the commercially related aspects of tourism are also key for achieving local development. The purposes of Papers 1, 2 (theoretical) and 3 (methodological) are offering more open approaches that allow for highlighting or making connections with other aspects of my case study, for example, looking into social capital while the economic side of the tourism phenomenon is still taken into consideration. Within that approach, as the research subject is about accessing international markets in a proactive way that attracts specific types of visitors, it is natural that the research process also incorporates the commercial side of tourism in its final phases (Papers 4 and 5).

1.6 THE CASE STUDY

As the purpose of my research is to learn about the influence of a destination's social capital on the determinants for market access to attract the desired type of international visitors, the case study was selected considering that the study area offers the conditions to explore the relationships of interest. That is, the study area: 1) already deals with international tourism flows; 2) includes a diversity of public and private active actors in the tourism sector; and 3) has an explicit interest in dealing with international markets.

It is not a condition that the study area has a specific level of control over access to international markets, as the intention is not to assess successful performance only, but to understand positive as well as negative characteristics of social capital in relation to attracting international markets. However, within the perspective of the research questions it is expected that the case study incorporates a range of participants and dynamics that allow one or several of the following analytical approaches: mapping of actors and relationships, categorising the types of dynamics, determining associations between dynamics that allow for explanations or insights (Srivastava & Thomson, 2009) in a more generalisable way as to contribute to theory development, as well as to recommending practical strategies.

The case study has two components: *the destination* and the *exemplary international target market*. The following paragraphs identify and describe each of the case study components.

1.6.1 The destination component of the case study

The Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (CMBA) has been selected as the *destination component*. This subsection describes the destination in terms of: A) general characteristics, B) tourism, and C) social capital.

A) General characteristics of the destination component.

In general terms, UNESCO's declaration of a Biosphere Reserve represents a global recognition of areas whose institutions work or are committed to working in a coordinated manner for regional sustainable development. Within that context, the notion of Biosphere Reserves considers three basic elements: 1) human beings and their productive and social activities to satisfy their needs, 2) nature and the preservation of its processes to ensure the survival of species as its fundamental need, and 3) development as the binding concept that is expressed in actions to combine and satisfy both previously stated needs. In that sense, Biosphere Reserves seek to integrate three main functions: conservation of biodiversity, economic development, and logistical support for research, monitoring, education and training. Ideally, Biosphere Reserves are expected to serve as learning laboratories for sustainable development, where innovative approaches, scientific knowledge, and governance modalities are tested. The inclusion of local communities and counterparts interested in the planning and management of the area in its entirety is of special importance. Each Biosphere Reserve is divided into three main zones: a) the core zone of conservation, monitoring and non-destructive research, b) the buffer zone surrounding the core zone, consisting of areas for encouraging compatible activities with good environmental practices, and c) the transition zone for joint activities of stakeholders with regard to the sustainable management of the resources in the area (Rodríguez Girón, Rodas López, Schubert, & Vasco Tapia, 2014)

The declaratory of the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (CMBA) as a Biosphere Reserve was promoted by local actors as a management model for sustainable development within the new broader Territorial Planning model of Ecuador. Its nomination, and final recognition by UNESCO, was the result of a collective initiative initiated by an interinstitutional Committee formed by six local public and private institutions plus one international agency. The final nomination dossier was submitted to UNESCO along with 24 formal support letters, representing 58 local actors from the public, private and communitarian sectors. The declaration of the CMBA as a Biosphere Reserve took place on May the 28th, 2013 during the

yearly session of the Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Program at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, France. The CMBA is a large region with an area of 9,766 km^2, 15 Municipalities, and 833,372 inhabitants in southern Ecuador. The city of Cuenca is its main urban centre and touristic core, with 505,585 inhabitants (Rodríguez Girón, Rodas López, Schubert, & Vasco Tapia, 2015).

Figure 3. **Territory declared by UNESCO as the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (CMBA)**



Author's elaboration, modified from Rodríguez Girón et al., 2015.

The CMBA functions as a large productive and ecological unit. One way of describing the linkages between society, nature and economy is through the dynamics of the Cajas Massif's

waterflows, as follows. Due to the effect of high temperatures, the moisture from the Pacific coast (0 masl), the Inter-Andean Valley (2,500 masl) and the Amazon Basin (1,000 masl) evaporates. This steam rises on the slopes of the mountain range until reaching the moorlands -páramo- (4,550 masl). At this altitude, the vapour condenses into liquid and falls as rain. Finally, gravity causes water to find its way back to the lowlands again, closing a continuous water loop between the lowlands (0 masl) and the highlands (4,550 masl) of the CMBA. These dynamics form rivers, lagoons and waterfalls that feed the different ecosystems on their way back towards the Pacific coast, the Inter-Andean Valley and the Amazon River basin where the water originated. Such environmental conditions within the biosphere have supported the livelihoods of many people and their diverse and productive activities, including agriculture, livestock, fishing, various industries, hydroelectric generation, trade and more. All of these productive activities enabled the development of urban centres and administrative regions where authorities were created, and their respective competences were divided into territorial units such as parishes, cantons and provinces (Rodríguez Girón et al., 2015).

Thus, from a *functional and biogeographic* perspective, the CMBA is a solid structure that dynamically exchanges within itself resources and processes of environmental, productive, industrial, social, technical, scientific and historical-cultural services. It is physically delimited in a very clear way: to the North the Cañar River, to the South the Jubones River, to the West the Gulf of Guayaquil, to the East the Inter-Andean Valley. The CMBA is crossed from north to south by the western mountain range (Southern Sierra) of Ecuador and contains plains that extend to the Pacific Basin and to the Atlantic Basin.

From an *ecosystem* perspective, the CMBA contains a very high diversity of climates from the Andean moorland -páramo- (4550masl), inter-Andean scrub, montane forest, cloud forest of the foothills, coastal rain forest, dry forest, dry scrub, desert and mangroves (0masl). The foothills of the mountain range in this part of the country are the first conservation priority in the continental territory of Ecuador. Thanks to the first decentralization experience, since the year 2000 the CMBA has a properly managed protected area in its Core Zone, the Cajas National Park. In general, there is a municipal investment of approximately 12 million dollars annually related to environmental management of ecosystem conservation and research. About 50% of the CMBA's territory is declared as a Protected Forest and Vegetation Area, although its conservation has not been effective, so there is a high rate of deforestation. It is expected

that the Biosphere Reserve Declaration will encourage greater commitment by the involved actors to address this challenge.

From a *productive* perspective, the CMBA is an area that generates environmental services such as water, carbon sequestration, or use of natural resources. It is the area of greatest hydroelectric generation in the country at present and with several projects for new generators. The CMBA contains one of the most important industrial zones of Ecuador in the canton Cuenca located in the Inter-Andean valley. There is a municipal project in the Canton of Cuenca to develop a new industrial ecopark, which will encourage the inclusion of less polluting technologies and production processes in industries. The Cajas Massif contains one of the most important areas of banana, cacao and shrimp production of Ecuador in the Pacific basin. In addition, here are two important mining projects for the central state (Rio Blanco and Quimsacocha), which have brought controversy to the region due to its potential harmful effects on water sources. It is expected that with the Biosphere Reserve Declaration, the authorities and the general public will become more concerned and aware of supervising this type of extractive activity.

From the *academic and scientific* perspectives, the CMBA has a high academic development at the University and Postgraduate levels in relation to the country. The University of Cuenca offers the first PhD program in Ecuador in the field of hydrology. In addition, some universities have been cooperating for several years with international academic institutions to continue training professionals at the Doctoral level. The German Research Foundation (DFG) began its scientific research on ecosystems and monitoring climate change in the Cajas Massif in 2013. This is the largest ecosystem research program supported by the German government outside its territory, with the participation of 15 German and five Ecuadorian universities.

From a *multisector management* perspective, the CMBA has more than 30 verified good practices of institutional-based or community-based responsibility that cover the entire territory. These are potentially replicable seed models for sustainable development initiatives. The CMBA has spaces to promote and replicate good practices through solid inter-institutional coordination and action, such as: the Promotion Committee for the Declaration of the Biosphere Area (I. Municipality of Cuenca + Planning National Secretary Regional Zone 6 + Ministry of Environment Regional Zone 6 + Ministry of Foreign Affairs Zone 6 + Provincial Government of Azuay + Nature & International Culture + German Cooperation GIZ); the

Jubones Basin Consortium (12 Municipalities + 3 Provincial Governments); and the Regional Integration Agency of Cuenca (7 Chambers of Production + Universities of the region + Related Ministries + Local and Regional Governments). Furthermore, the conception of the CMBA as a dynamic territory of social, productive and ecosystem interactions supports the consolidation of the Cuenca-Azogues, La Troncal, and Santa Isabel development poles visualized in the Territorial Planning of Ecuador

Finally, from a *territorial-administrative linkages* perspective, the solid biogeographic functional structure of the CMBA dynamically exchanges resources and processes that reach all or part of: four provinces, 15 cantons, and four Planning Zones (5, 6, 7 and 8) according to the National Territorial Plan established by the National Planning Secretariat of Ecuador. This represents an opportunity of joint coordination for the development of these interdependent areas. Also, the CMBA includes the water production areas of three hydrographic districts: the Paute River basin, the Cañar River Basin, and the Jubones River Basin.

B) Tourism characteristics of the destination component.

The CMBA offers the required conditions to be part of the case study, as it receives international visitors and has a diversity of actors in tourism with an explicit interest in international markets. This is described in the following paragraphs in terms of: Actors in tourism, Resources for tourism, and International visitors.

Actors in tourism:

- There is a salient coordinating actor in the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation (MF) (http://cuenca.com.ec/es), an entity initially created only for the promotion of the city but which in practice also leads participatory tourism development planning processes and deals with tourism flows.
- In 2016, Cuenca received 763,013 tourists (overnight visitors), combined between domestic and international (GIER, 2017b).
- There is a representation of tourism related public organizations located in the city of Cuenca, with competences:

  - At the provincial level, through the Azuay's Provincial Government Tourism Public Enterprise, GPA Tours (www.azuay.gob.ec/prv/index.php/2016/05/20/gpa-tours)
  - At the national level, through the Coordination Office of Zone 6 of the Ministry of Tourism, for the provinces of Azuay, Cañar and Morona Santiago (http://www.turismo.gob.ec/coordinacion-zonal-6/)

- There is a broad and diversified number of experienced tourism firms and actors, as registered by 2016 (http://servicios.turismo.gob.ec/index.php/portfolio/turismo-cifras/20-oferta-turistica/servicios-turisticos/247):
  - Inbound tour operators: 99
  - Inbound / Outbound tour operators: 141
  - Accommodation facilities: 502
  - Restaurants and bars: 2.451
  - Recreation facilities: 54
  - Tourism transportation: 42

- There are two universities offering, already for more than a decade, higher education degrees in tourism:
  - University of Azuay, Scholl of Tourism, title granted: National Guide and Tourism Management & Development (http://web.uazuay.edu.ec/estudios/turismo/turismo.htm)
  - University of Cuenca, Faculty of Hospitality Sciences, title granted: Tourism Engineer (https://www.ucuenca.edu.ec/la-oferta-academica/oferta-de-grado/facultad-de-ciencias-de-la-hospitalidad/carreras/turismo)

Resources for tourism:

- There is a combination of natural and cultural attractions with several UNESCO international recognitions, such as:
  - The Historic Centre of Cuenca, as World Heritage Site (UNESCO, 1999) (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/863);

  - The Traditional Weaving of the Ecuadorian Toquilla Straw Hat, as Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2012) (https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-weaving-of-the-ecuadorian-toquilla-straw-hat-00729);
  - The Cajas Massif Biosphere Area, as Biosphere Reserve (UNESCO, 2013) (http://www.unesco.org/new/en/natural-sciences/environment/ecological-sciences/biosphere-reserves/latin-america-and-the-caribbean/ecuador/macizo-del-cajas/);
  - Several sections of the Qhapaq Ñan, Andean Road System, as the first multi-national World Heritage Site (UNESCO, 2014) (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1459).

- There is a broader diversity of productive, natural and cultural resources, with varied local, national or international relevance, are present in the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (http://www.biosferacajas.org/documentos/biosfera_en.pdf).

International visitors:

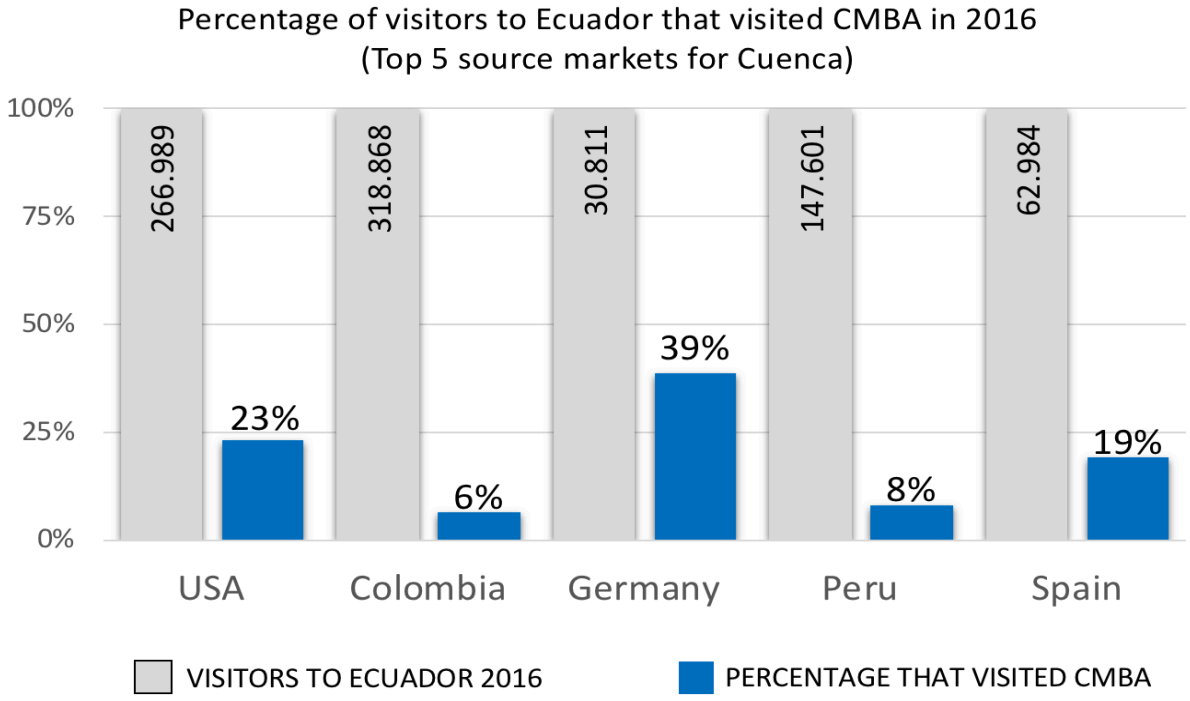
- In the region there is a clear tourism-related paradox. In spite of the multiple international recognitions by UNESCO (three World Heritage and 1 Biosphere Reserve) within the territory of the CMBA, only 198,994 international tourists visited its touristic core, Cuenca in 2016 (GIER, 2017b), out of the 1,418,159 foreign visitors that arrived to Ecuador during that year (MTE, 2017b).

- This means that only 14% of the total international visitors arriving in Ecuador visit the CMBA.

- And from those international visitors arriving in Cuenca and the CMBA, the distribution among the top five international source markets in 2016, was:
  1. 31% from USA (ca. 61,688 visitors), representing 23% of the North Americans tha entered Ecuador (266,989 total).
  2. 10% from Colombia (ca. 19,899 visitors), representing 6% of the Colombians that entered Ecuador (318,868 visitors).
  3. 6% from Germany (ca. 11,940 visitors), representing 39% of the Germans that entered Ecuador (30,881 visitors).

4. 6% from Peru (ca. 11,940 visitors), representing 8% of the Peruvians that entered Ecuador (147,601 visitors).
5. 6% from Spain (ca. 11,940 visitors), representing 19% of the Spaniards that entered Ecuador (62,984 visitors).

Figure 4.



Author's elaboration.

Data source: GIER, 2017b; http://servicios.turismo.gob.ec/index.php/portfolio/turismo-cifras/19-inteligencia-de-mercados/balanza-migratoria/3

- These low numbers of international visitors in relation to the national total, are partly because the CMBA has no international airport or borders, making it a sort of 'continental island' in terms of international connectivity.

- Additionally, the region does not have strong knowledge about the profile and behaviour of current international incoming flows. It is just since June 2016, that Cuenca started to monitor these things. This is thanks to a trimestral statistical report conducted by the Group of Research on Regional Economy of the University of Cuenca (GIER, 2016a), commissioned by the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation (MF), who provide the data presented here.

C) Social capital of the destination component.

The destination component of the case study offers the conditions to study social capital in both enhancing and hindering forms to understand why a destination with potential has not been yet able to collectively and proactively attract the desired type of international visitors. Social capital is present in the CMBA in the following forms:

- The Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation (MF) is a collective entity as, according to its statutes, its board of directors is formed by representatives from different sectors (Gobierno Municipal de Cuenca, 2002):
  - The Mayor,
  - The City Council delegates from Tourism, Economy and Culture,
  - 1 delegate from the Ministry of Tourism,
  - The President of the Azuay's Chamber of Tourism,
  - The President of the Ecuadorian Tourism Trade Fair,
  - 1 delegate from the Universities that teach tourism,
  - 2 delegates from the legally established Tourism Associations,
  - 1 delegate from the legally established Artisan's Associations.

- The existence of private associations pursuing local and regional tourism development, such as:
  - Azuay´s Province Hotels Association (www.hotelescuencaecuador.com);
  - Azuay's Province Chamber of Tourism (http://camaradeturismodelazuay.blogspot.de)
  - El Oro's Province Chamber of Tourism (http://turismoeloro.com)
  - Guayas' Province Chamber of Tourism (https://capturguayas.com)
  - National Association of Inbound Tour Operators, to which several local Operators belong, such as: Expediciones Apullacta, Hualambari Tours and Terra Diversa (http://optur.org/operadores-turismo-ecuador/)

- The existence of various UNESCO declarations within the CMBA, also represent the mobilisation of social capital towards a common goal:
  - The declaration of the Historic Centre of Cuenca, as a World Heritage Site (UNESCO, 1999) (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/863) was led by the

Municipality of Cuenca and depended upon several institutions and the owners and residents of the historic buildings to commit for the management of their properties according to special rules for heritage preservation.

- The declaration of the Traditional Weaving of the Ecuadorian Toquilla Straw Hat as Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2012) (https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/traditional-weaving-of-the-ecuadorian-toquilla-straw-hat-00729), included the participation of artisans from towns located at different parts of the east and northeast areas of the CMBA, as well as from outside of it, located in the Manabí province.
- The Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (UNESCO, 2013), counted with a detailed participatory process and with 58 public and private organisations issuing formal letters of support for the Declaratory of the Massif as a Biosphere Reserve (Rodríguez Girón et al., 2014, p. 195).
- The identification and inventory of the Qhapaq Ñan's sections that cross the CMBA required intense coordination among several local and national public and academic institutions and with local residents along the road's sections. This enabled compliance with the requirements to be included in the declaration of this Andean Road System as the 1st multi-national World Heritage Site (UNESCO, 2014) (http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1459).

1.6.2 The target market component of the case study

The second component of the case study, the *exemplary international target market*, inclusion of the market perspective in the research. Under the orientation of and in agreement with the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation, plus available data on the relevance of international visitors arrivals (GIER, 2017b; MTE, 2017b; UNWTO, 2016), the selected market of interest was the segment of German organised groups. This market was selected for several reasons:

- Germans are third in absolute numbers among the international source markets currently visiting Cuenca (GIER, 2017a), see subsection 'I.C International visitors'.

- However, Germans are the first in terms of the percentage (38%) of the total visitors to Ecuador from one country that also visit the CMBA, as shown in Figure 4. This suggests that Germans have a special affinity for the destination.

- Moreover, if we consider that United States Americans (1st place in absolute number of visitors) also visit Cuenca due to resident relatives or to study Spanish, or that Colombians (2nd place in absolute number of visitors) also visit relatives or are motivated by work affairs, then, we can say that Germans are the ones most likely to be coming to Cuenca for leisure trips.

- Germany is traditionally a world's leader in outbound travellers and per capita expenditures abroad (UNWTO, 2016), with 11 million Germans expressing interest in traveling to Latin America between 2014 and 2016 (Sonntag, 2014).

- Germany has the world's highest density of travel agencies with leisure trips sales still dominated by physical travel agencies (DER Touristik, 2015), which makes it especially relevant as a source market for organised groups.

- And most importantly, the German market in general values experiential and more informative journeys. In order of importance, Germans prefer nature, family, adventure, sightseeing, culture, and study trips (Sonntag, 2015). This is exactly the profile that the destination component of the study case prefers, in relation to its development goals through tourism.

Therefore, the issue of how to improve the CMBA's access to German organised groups presents an interesting context to explore the determinants for international market access from different perspectives: that of local actors at the destination, that of local actors in the target market and that of German actors in the target market. The study case also offers the opportunity to reflect on how its elements fit together with a systemic perspective, in terms of social capital's dynamics and their relationship with (sustainable) tourism as a means to reach local development goals.

1.7 OVERVIEW OF THE PAPERS IN THIS MANUSCRIPT

It is important to mention that this manuscript is partially paper-based (see Figure 1). Therefore, in this section, I briefly describe the content of each one of them.

Because each paper is written as a stand-alone article intended for publication, when read together, they may repeat some elements. Due to restrictions on the length of an article, and within the context of a thesis manuscript, Papers 1 and 2 could appear somewhat limited, therefore, each of those papers within the corresponding chapters of this thesis, are complemented by extended preliminary theoretical introductions.

Starting with the summary, papers 1 and 2 develop the tourism-specific theoretical basis of the study.

Paper 1 discusses the conceptual relation between systems thinking and tourism seen as a complex phenomenon. The paper proposes the conceptual basis for a systemic terminology, which allows for referring to tourism as a dynamic phenomenon and in a more integrative way. This terminology stresses the need for a perspective broader than the 'product' or 'industry' discourses, considering more than only the commercial or economic aspects of tourism. The first part of the paper draws upon the broader tourism literature, identifying and discussing seven aspects in the complex nature of the tourism phenomenon. Then, the second part of the paper, based on both non-tourism related and tourism related systems thinking literature, stablishes the conceptual connections between systems thinking and the previously discussed seven complex aspects of tourism. Afterwards, based on the conceptual connections developed in the second part, the paper presents an integrated conceptual framework for addressing the tourism phenomenon as a multi-layered and multi-dimensional dynamic system. This makes it possible to describe and refer in a structured way to the different aggregation levels that allow for the emergence of the tourism phenomenon. Finally, the paper presents an example of a possible way of using the integrated framework for practical analysis of a tourism case study.

Paper 2 discusses social capital at the level of the tourist destination. It proposes a conceptual social capital assessment matrix at the tourist destination level, considering destinations as groups of actors trying to act together. Outside the field of tourism, social capital has been studied at the individual, family, community and corporate levels. However, in the tourism

related literature social capital has been used as a means to study other aspects of interest, instead of studying social capital itself as the aspect of interest, or instead of discussing how to study social capital at the destination level. Therefore, by conducting a review of non-tourism related and tourism related literature on social capital, this paper identifies social capital's key dimensions, and social capital's levels of scope in a destination. The resultant social capital assessment matrix proposes three key social capital dimensions and relates them to three levels of scope within the dynamics of a tourist destination. This assessment matrix allows for explanation of social capital as an emerging process from the intragroup to the intergroups levels of aggregation of actors in a destination. And at the same time, Paper 2 explains social capital as an outcome that feedbacks into its own process in a continuously. This means that results from a destination's efforts have direct effects on strengthening or weakening itself as a collective.

Paper 3 develops the model and methodological tourism-specific basis of the study.

Paper 3 builds an innovative and integrative tourism-specific approach for the study of tourism as a complex phenomenon from the ground up. It draws upon the conceptual work of Paper 1, on tourism systems thinking. This paper also refers to practical analytical application from different perspectives, for example, based on the work in Paper 2 regarding the dimensions of social capital at the destination level. Paper 3 first discusses the limitations of current dominant discourses of tourism as an 'industry' or as a 'commercial product' (Bianchi, 2012; Hall & Page, 2012). Then, it critically discusses some existing tourism models, mostly influenced by those paradigms. Afterwards, the paper proposes three pillars for the new model. Finally, the article introduces a conceptual and schematic integrative model (the iModel) of the tourism phenomenon and a methodology for the analytical application of the model. The development of the iModel was the result of over two years of an iterative process of design, testing, discussion and refinement, based on: theory, field work, practical experience, case study testing, and feedback from internal doctoral seminars, from international doctoral seminars, and from international scientific conferences. This iterative process provided input and feedback to generate progressively refined versions of the iModel. For a detailed description of the iModel's development path, refer to Table 1 in the section 'General Methodology of the Study' of this thesis. When the iModel reached a mature state, it served as the tourism-specific conceptual and methodological basis for the empirical research on the final case study, exposed in Paper 5.

Finally, Papers 4 and 5 develop the empirical basis of the study.

Paper 4 discusses the determinants for tourist destinations to access international markets. It draws upon literature on internationalisation and empirical cases of tourism actors relating Ecuador, as the destination, and Germany, as the source market. The data collection combined three types of sources. The first source was a tourism-specific literature review on determinants for internationalisation, covering a time span of 19 years (1998 – 2017). The second source was exports literature on barriers for internationalisation, covering a time span of 48 years (1960 – 2008) of research. And the third source was semi-structured open-ended interviews, field visits and collection of related documentation. The interviewed actors were selected among tour operators and tourism governmental institutions, because they play special coordination roles in destinations, influencing social capital. In total, 30 actors in Ecuador and Germany were interviewed between December 2015 and March 2017. The collected data allowed me to create five lists of determinants for international market access, emerging from the different literature and empirical sources. Based on those lists, I consolidated a final list of 46 determinants specific for tourist destinations access to international markets, classified by categories and priority.

Paper 5 discusses the relationships between the social capital of a destination and the determinants for international market access. It does so by using the tourism systems thinking-based iModel form Paper 3. Paper 5 analyses the social capital's dynamics of the destination using the key or central actor approach suggested in Paper 2. Paper 5 also explores how those dynamics influence the determinants for international tourism market access introduced in Paper 4. Paper 5, thus, brings together all the building blocks developed in the previous stages of the research through their empirical application in the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area, in Southern Ecuador, in relation to attracting German organised groups. This methodology helps to tackle the general research question on how to enhance a destination's collective capacity in a detailed way, while maintaining the connection with the whole context and provides support for decision-making in the destination. This methodological approach also responds to a pledge in the literature to bring together socio-cultural, market and research approaches in a more balanced way (Bianchi, 2012; Hall & Page, 2012). This is done by looking into social capital enhancement at the destination level as a path for self-determination and development, and relating that approach to proactive ways to attract international visitors. Paper 5 also

demonstrates, by drawing on a practical case, how the proposed iModel bridges systems thinking and social capital within the context of tourism, contributing with new insights into this relationship for the field of tourism studies.

1.8 LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations of this study. A general one is the novelty of the tourism-specific theoretical framework (Papers 1 and 2) and methodology (Paper 3) developed for this study. While innovative propositions are welcome for the advancement of research in any field, the obvious trade-off is the need for a wider critical discussion over time on such constructs to refine them. Given that the purpose of doctoral research is to propose novel approaches to current knowledge, and that the consolidation of tourism as an academic interdisciplinary field by itself is still in process, this trade-off was deemed acceptable. Moreover, each paper has also its own limitations. While Papers 1 and 2 draw upon a wide literature review, they cannot possibly represent a full review of all existing literature in their respective subjects. However, this was balanced by taking into consideration as much tourism-related literature on those subjects as possible, to have stronger fundaments for their application on the field of tourism. In Paper 3, the introduced tourism-specific model could result in limited or incomplete for analytical application in some cases. Thus, although in Paper 5 the model's applicability for the final case study (with a specific focus on social capital) proved useful, its usability for a broader study and understanding of tourism as a multifaceted phenomenon is still to be tested. Nevertheless, Paper 3 introduces a method to configure the model for different analytical needs, and in its final section there are some ideas for analytical application from other aspects of interest apart from social capital, leaving an open invitation for further testing. Finally, Paper 4 presents a list of determinants with a priority ranking, pointing the key conditions that destinations need to tackle to access international tourism markets. However, due to the dynamic nature of tourism, the prioritisation proposed in the list might be irrelevant for the specific context of certain cases, which may demonstrate unique determining factors. In any case, the consolidated list of determinants will be a very useful starting point for inquiry on any destination case under investigation. Ultimately, this study should be evaluated on the basis of how the different independent papers also acted as interconnected pieces to support the purpose of this research and to answer its general question.

II. THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

The theoretical framework of this research is grounded in the conjunction of three bodies of literature: that on theories about systems thinking, that on social capital, and that examining tourism as a multifaceted phenomenon. Papers 1 and 2 present the development of my study's theoretical basis.

2.1 THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMS THINKING

Systemic thinking relates to two dimensions. The first dimension relates to thinking about the structure of physical or abstract objects that we want to understand, and the second dimension relates to thinking about how different disciplines may interconnect to explain complex phenomena (Dekkers, 2015). Theoretical principles with potential to guide analysis are, perhaps, what characterises systems thinking and explains its applicability on a variety of fields (Ackoff & Emery, 2006) such as management, environmental studies, engineering or tourism. Systems theories help to understand real life phenomena and to grasp the nature of their complexities, as a basis to reflect on possible ways to tackle problems in a more holistic form. The core of this chapter is systems thinking and its underlying theory, highlighting its approach to the properties of the whole, rather than on the characteristics of individual elements which may lead to linear and more limited reflections on how things work.

A systemic way to see the world is not a new approach. Aristotle postulated that the whole is more than the sum of its parts (Checkland, 1999b), an essential characteristic of systems theory. However, the scientific revolution of the 16th century led to a more reductionist and linear way of studying things. This allowed individual sciences to progress in their own independent fields, but without interconnections or deeper understanding of the real complexity of phenomena. Later, the industrial revolution, starting in the 18th century, popularized the power of controllable and predictable machines as the paradigm for progress and to tackle human life's challenges, which favoured a general reductionist and linear way of thinking in society.

However, due to continuous scientific advancements, especially in engineering and biology, there was a need to create more complex and integrative ways to approach real life phenomena. Cleland and King (1969), relate the initial ideas for integrative approaches to Henry P. Kendall

(1878 – 1959), considered one of the pioneers of scientific management. And although it is hard to identify one author alone as the creator of General Systems Theory (GST), the literature (Dekkers, 2015; Lohmann & Netto, 2017; Serra, 2016) refers to the biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972) as one of the leaders. Initially, systemic approaches stemmed mostly from attempts to explain complex relationships between entities and their environment from a biological perspective, and to provide solutions for challenging problems. However, Bertalanffy's efforts to establish a basis for communication ground between experts developed in the publication of his book 'General Systems Theory, Foundations, Development, Applications' (1968), which introduced a common language through categories of thought that could be applied for disciplines to communicate with one another, allowing the mutual stimulation of richer understanding of phenomena. Nowadays, the notion of interdisciplinary efforts to advance the development of knowledge is more familiar and aimed than in the past, much as the creators of systems theories proposed, even though not all interdisciplinary research formally uses systems theories.

One important principle from the development of systems theories is the importance of adding reflection in terms of synthesis instead of only in terms of analysis (Mella, 2009). Analysis is typical of reductionist approaches to acquiring knowledge, which separate the elements of the whole, describe their independent characteristics, and then re-join or sum-up those independently described elements, as a way to know the whole (Darbellay & Stock, 2012). Synthesis proposes to start the other way around, maintaining the undivided whole permanently in sight. It proposes to firstly identify the system that our element of interest is a part of, then outline how the system functions, and finally identify how our element of interest interconnects and functions within the entirety (Ackoff, 2008). While analysis generates knowledge based on descriptions, synthesis generates understanding based on functions and interactions, which is particularly useful as in real life we do not define things in terms of their parts, but in terms of the functions they perform. This is particularly important to realise, because explanations don't lie in the individual parts of the system taken independently, explanations lie in the relationships between the parts and in the outcomes they generate together as a system. This means that we do not understand something by describing its parts. We understand something by describing the function of its parts as a whole. This is the case with tourism, which cannot be defined by describing the involved facilitators, visitors and locations. Tourism is defined by the outcomes that emerge from the interactions between those actors, that is, by the tourism experience itself. Applying this principle to tourist destination development, we realise that

describing the destination's characteristics is not so relevant to understanding its problems, because what determines its development maybe something that is not under the control of actors within the destination or a situation that cannot be understood through atomistic analysis (Meekes, Parra, & de Roo, 2016). For example, influential decisions based on economies of scale or top-down policies could be imposed by bigger and more distant influencing players, such as transnational corporations or national-level government agencies, such as in the case of Santa Lucia (Mosedale, 2006) where airlines have the power to determine whether an island will keep existing as a viable destination. This is why a synthetic (systemic) way of studying phenomena is important, in order to maintain the attention not only on characteristics (or the 'how', which produces knowledge), but especially on interrelations between the elements and the broader environment (or the 'why', which produces understanding).

Undoubtedly, systemic thinking approaches have transformed through time. From Aristotle–a system as an organic, living and spiritual entity–, to Newton–systems as obeying principals of mechanics–, to General Systems Theory–elements and their relationship with the whole–, to Complex Systems–the manifestation of emergence, self-organization and non-linearity (McCarthy, 2004). However, common aspects among these approaches to studying phenomena are that 1) systems are composed by interacting elements and a boundary, and 2) they all support the integration of different perspectives and fields to understand the system as a whole (Dekkers, 2015).

At this point, a difference has to be noted between the notions of systemic and holistic, which although complementary, differ in their scope and detail, although both ideas propose the importance of aiming for an understanding of the whole. Holistic refers more to a general philosophical view, created by Jan Christiaan in 1926 (Lohmann & Netto, 2017). Systemic, on the other hand, and more specifically the later developments of general systems theory and systems thinking approaches, refers to a way of thinking and using a set of interconnected conceptual principals to understand and describe how things are structured and work in real life. The holistic approach is aimed at grasping all the elements of the observed phenomenon together, including its environment, regardless of whether we want to understand more specifically, for instance, the commercial or the academic side of tourism. On the other hand, systems thinking, by nature, requires the identification of the boundaries between the system under observation (the set of elements involved in a given outcome) and its environment (the

context in which the elements interact). This allows clarification of the systemic object of study and tackling specific issues in a more operational and problem-solving oriented way. In other words, holistic refers to maintaining the view of all of the parts of something as a whole, while the systemic view tries to operationalise the study of the parts–or analysis–and their relationship among them and with the whole–or synthesis (Mella, 2009).

Furthermore, within systemic approaches, there is also a difference between systems thinking and general systems theory (GST). While the former is a way of reflecting on objects or intangible phenomena that has been used already since the times of Aristotle, the latter is a formalised set of interrelated concepts that contributes to systemic thinking, created during the first half of the 20th century and which is still in continuous development (Leiper, 2000). Thus, taking a systems thinking perspective, GST calls for observing a system as a whole and dividing it into parts while maintaining the relationship with the whole. In such a perspective, a system is basically composed by its elemental units, their relationships, the system's inputs and outputs, and its environment, and should have a model design to facilitate its understanding (Lohmann & Netto, 2017).

Because of their potential for multidisciplinary application, systems theories have been applied to many fields, ranging from mathematical modelling to support for decision-making in organisations. The mathematical and more engineering, computing or ecology-oriented approaches are usually regarded as hard systems thinking, while the application of systems principles to support decision-makers with problems related to more cultural, social, political or context-dependent phenomena are usually regarded as soft systems thinking (Paliwal, 2005). Nevertheless, the words 'hard' or 'soft' do not connote 'more difficult' or 'easier'. They relate to the fact that hard systems thinking is used for more tangible and control-oriented engineered solutions, such as predicting outcomes in quantifiable terms, designing management flowcharts or cybernetics. In contrast, soft systems thinking deals more with mental structures and learning processes through observation of complexity and confusion to assess possible actions, costs and benefits, in a more qualitative way. Checkland (1999, p. 17) states: '[i]n the literature it is often stated that 'hard' systems thinking is appropriate in well-defined technical problems and that 'soft' systems thinking is more appropriate in fuzzy ill-defined situations involving human beings and cultural considerations'. While the former type of problems can be understood in quantitative terms, the latter type of problems are better understood in qualitative terms. In

other words, hard systems thinking attempts *to understand and engineer* the system under observation to solve a problem, while soft systems thinking attempts *to facilitate an organised questioning process* to reflect on the problem and to estimate possible action lines (Ramage & Shipp, 2009).

More recent developments deal with ideas of complex systems and complexity sciences (Walby, 2007), which brought about, for example, the paradigm of self-organisation introducing new perspectives to explain and understand complexity (Jost, 2004). The increasing number of elements or actors forming networked entities observed in artificially engineered systems, as well as in living organisms and societies, lead to the realisation of the deterministic idea of top-down approaches to control systems to be impossible (Dekkers, 2015). This realisation further advanced the utility of systems thinking to study and tackle complicated phenomena, which has been very welcomed in academic and engineering spheres.

However, there is also criticism of systems theories (Kihlström, 2012). For instance, already in the early days of general systems theory Phillips (1972) argued that it had been discredited because of, among other reasons, the failure to specify precisely what is meant by a 'system', the weakness of arguments against the analytic or mechanistic method, and the failure of general systems theory as a scientific theory. Although there has been a lot of advancement related to the utility and value of systems theories, their application for practical day by day decision-making by, for example, managers, still has a way to go (Dekkers, 2015). This is because often, systems theories and methods remain too general and do not arrive at specific solutions necessary for day to day managerial applications. Thus, this thesis aims to start with translating systems thinking into the context of tourism at a theoretical level (Paper 1), to later build upon that theory to introduce a practical methodology to support decision-making in tourism practice (Paper 3), and to demonstrate its application (Paper 5).

Having a vocabulary to ease interdisciplinary studies by seeing the tourism phenomenon in a systemic way is promising. Doing so could help achieving a sort of common platform, where scholars from disciplines such as sociology, politics, economics, marketing, psychology, geography, informatics, and so on, can contribute from their own specific fields and research interests into the construction of a more complete understanding of the complex phenomenon of tourism. Confronted with this challenge, Darbellay and Stock (2012) identified three stages

of scientific approaches to tourism: 1) holistic innovation, which started in 1942, but has been unsuccessful until today in the organisation of scientific knowledge of tourism; 2) disciplinary fragmentation—into tourism geography, economics, psychology, etc.—since the 70s, which is the most diffused practice nowadays; and 3) a more recent interdisciplinary approach, mainly between 1995 and 2000. These authors define such an interdisciplinary approach as: '… the organisation of an interface between different disciplines and bodies of knowledge in order to analyse the manifestations and the existing complexities of society's touristic dimensions'. They conceive this *interface* as a mediation space (Duchastel & Laberge, 1999) constituted through interactions between different knowledge domains, capitalising on the different disciplines to better understand tourism as a whole and the circulation of concepts and practices by the construction of a common vocabulary, which should be a *key issue* in interdisciplinary work.

In this context, I also argue that systems thinking offers an appropriate theoretical basis to facilitate a more integrative study of the tourism phenomenon as the complex phenomenon it is (Brouder & Fullerton, 2015; Darbellay & Stock, 2012; Judd, 2006; Nicolau, 2013; Pearce, 2008; Pearce et al., 2007; Smith, 1994). Thus, in the following section of this chapter, composed by article 1 (Figure 1), I introduce a proposal for 'An Integrated Tourism Systems Thinking Conceptual Framework'. This may support a way of thinking on tourism that is not limited by pre-established disciplinary connotations, such as business or marketing terms, often used as descriptors of tourism. A more embracing systems thinking-based terminology would allow multiple disciplines to talk from within their own fields and connect with tourism.

2.2 PAPER 1 TOURISM SYSTEMS THINKING: Towards an integrated framework for the study of the tourism phenomenon[5]

Abstract

Tourism is widely recognised as a complex phenomenon. Some academics, however, have studied tourism from their own specialisation, contributing from the perspective of their specific fields. Others have argued that the complexities of tourism should be tackled more systemically and so have used diverse concepts from systems thinking theory. Nevertheless, nobody has yet presented an integrated framework connecting existing diverse systems thinking concepts, which serves as a more structured point of departure from which to study tourism. This paper (1) starts by identifying seven complexities of tourism, (2) discusses eight systems thinking's key notions in the context of those complexities, (3) structures an integrated tourism systems thinking conceptual framework, and (4) provides an application example. Thus, this work contributes with a more structured theoretical foundations for the study of tourism as a system and with an integrated approach to understand its complexities.

Keywords: tourism studies, systems thinking, complexity, integrated framework.

2.2.1 Introduction

Tourism is widely recognised as a complex phenomenon to describe (Brouder & Fullerton, 2015; Darbellay & Stock, 2012; Judd, 2006; Nicolau, 2013; Pearce, 2008; Pearce et al., 2007; Smith, 1994), and it is much more than 'an industry' (McKercher, 2014). In this way, several authors have pleaded for a more systemic approach to tourism (Baggio, 2013; d'Hauteserre, 2006; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003; Leiper, 1979; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003) that allows an integrative study of its complex nature. Many authors, however, approach tourism as a system based on the notion of the *tourism industry* (Ford, Wang, & Vestal, 2012; Mill & Morrison, 1985; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001; Mosedale, 2006; Papatheodorou, 2004; Thomas et al., 2011), or industr*ies* (Leiper, 2008). This approach uses concepts such as production, products, distribution, supplying firms, consumers, and business as its discursive terminology, which

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puts the focus mostly on the commercial side of tourism.

Other authors suggest that interdisciplinary approaches may produce a richer understanding of tourism (Darbellay & Stock, 2012; Hall & Page, 2014; Ioannides & Debbage, 2014). Decades of academic effort from specialised disciplines such as geography, economics, and sociology led to 'disciplinary fragmentation and specialisation' (Darbellay & Stock, 2012, p. 448), hindering tourism studies from developing stronger theoretical bases. The call is thus to advance on theoretical constructs for tourism (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004; Hall & Page, 2014; Ioannides, 2006) that address its complexity in a more integrative way.

Therefore, this paper aims to identify the complex aspects of tourism; discuss systems thinking's key notions and its utility to address the complexities of tourism; and structure an integrated tourism systems thinking conceptual framework to study tourism as a complex phenomenon.

We argue that a systems thinking approach to tourism, stemming from complexity sciences (Jafari & Xiao, 2016; Lohmann & Netto, 2017; Speakman, 2016), extends beyond industrial paradigms and 'provides a potentially useful alternative framework for providing insights into the underlying dynamics of tourism development' (Russell & Faulkner, 1999). In this paper, a complex system is considered a group of closely interconnected elements, which collectively generate diverse outcomes with emerging properties that differ from those of its constituent elements, in constant interaction with its environment and without a centralised organisation (Baggio, 2008; Dekkers, 2015; Mella, 2012). This complements Network theory, which argues that 'actors do not act in isolation, but in networks of relations, which affect their behavior' (Jørgensen, 2017, p. 313). Further, a system can also be defined as a set of *networking elements*; and a network can be defined as a *set of elements behaving as a system* (Baggio, 2017). In any case, we argue for moving from deterministic and fragmented ways of describing the tourism phenomenon to more dynamic and integrative ones.

The definition of complex systems makes it clear that tourism *is* a complex system (Speakman, 2016) and this complexity *has to be* embraced (Leiper, 2008). Complex systems are not virtual frameworks; they do exist in reality (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004). Systems thinking provides the conceptual principles to tackle that complexity, acting as heuristic tools to reflect upon real phenomena and facilitate more integrative perspectives (Albert, 1995; Mai & Smith,

2015; McBride, 2005; Speakman, 2016). Hence, the structuration of a tourism systems-thinking based terminology represents a challenging (Speakman, 2016) but promising task.

Tourism researchers are traditionally viewed as specialists in, for example, economy, geography, and sociology, *with an interest in tourism*. There is no such thing as *tourismologists* and tourism studies constantly borrow paradigms from other disciplines. This leads to referring to tourism in terms from specific fields, which fall short of depicting the diverse nature of the phenomenon. As Tribe and Liburd (2016, p. 58) argue, '[w]e should maintain a vigilant watch on whose interests are being served and whose are overlooked through the tourism knowledge system and how power can form and distort the field.'

Moreover, beyond the academic sector, there is the need for other actors (visitors, residents, firms, governments, associations, and non-governmental organisations) to expand their mindset about tourism (Forrester, 2007) if they want to understand why efforts do not develop as expected. Bramwell & Lane (2013) argue that, to tackle the challenges of sustainable development, it is important to have educational approaches that enhance public understanding of complex issues and the capacity to think systemically. Deterministic and industrial analogies of consumption–production cannot explain undesired results, such as failure to attract visitors, excessive numbers of visitors, inability for collective action, and local actors' exclusion (Lansing & Vries, 2006). Actors need to improve their ability to looking into the aggregated layers of the tourism system to comprehend its structure and dynamics, as well as the interactions with its broader environment (Bramwell & Lane, 2013; Mai & Smith, 2015). Development opportunities are diminished when destinations approach tourism only in terms of products to be sold, without considering the broader context and implications. This is typical of the case of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), which in practice behave mostly as Destination *Marketing* Organisations (Pike & Page, 2014).

We argue that systems thinking allows an approaching to tourism as the multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon it is, facilitating the integration of inputs from different perspectives (McDonald, 2009), to reflect on how to leverage efforts in ways not possible only from commercial perspectives.

This article first describes seven aspects in the complexity of tourism and subsequently discusses eight systems thinking key concepts. Throughout the discussion, each concept is

translated into the context of tourism, while arguing on its utility to tackle the complex aspects of tourism. Thereafter, we present an integrated tourism systems thinking conceptual framework to facilitate the study of tourism as a complex phenomenon. Finally, we discuss the framework's analytical applicability and present an example.

2.2.2 The complexities of tourism

The World Tourism Organisation defines tourism as 'a social, cultural and economic phenomenon…for personal or business/professional purposes...some of which imply tourism expenditure' (UNWTO, 2014, p. 1). This definition already goes beyond the perception of tourism as merely a leisure-related activity (Urry & Larsen, 2011) or as an industry (Ford et al., 2012; Leiper, 2008; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001; Mosedale, 2006; Papatheodorou, 2004). Tourism 'is not restricted to the considered 'typical' tourism activities, such as sightseeing, sunbathing, visiting sites, and practising or watching sports' (United Nations & UNWTO, 2010, p. 2). These notions describe such a diverse phenomenon that the easiest way to identify tourism visitors would be to posit that anyone, regardless of the distance travelled or activity performed, is a tourism visitor provided they do not intend to migrate or to earn income from an entity at the destination (United Nations & UNWTO, 2010). Hence, tourism represents one of the largest and most recurrent phenomena of human mobility worldwide (Dubois, Peeters, Ceron, & Gössling, 2011).

With this overarching conception of tourism in mind, we will discuss seven aspects of its complex nature. Although this list is certainly not exhaustive, it synthesises crucial aspects widely discussed in existing literature.

First, people and organisations are subject to *diverse motivations and conditions* for participating in tourism. The range of expectations can be as diverse as the number of visitors or destinations. Simultaneously, each actor is subject to particular circumstances such as time, budget, demographic characteristics, laws and policies, cultural and social practices, and physical and cultural distance (McKercher, 2008; McKercher & Zoltan, 2014). This mix of motivations and circumstance generates an immense diversity of visitors' and destinations' profiles and needs (United Nations & UNWTO, 2010).

Second, each visitor interacts with a *multiplicity of facilitators,* within commercial and non-commercial contexts, for the realisation of the desired experience (Darbellay & Stock, 2012). Tourism facilitators include a wide range of actors (Baggio, 2017), including residents, firms, governments, and associations (Ioannides & Debbage, 1998), while the interactions that generate tourism experiences happen at different moments and places, adding to tourism's complexity (Darbellay & Stock, 2012; Mai & Smith, 2015).

Third, the tourism phenomenon emerges with a wide *diversity of forms and outcomes* (Darbellay & Stock, 2012; Van der Duim, Ren, & Jóhannesson, 2013). These range from independent travellers, to itineraries customised by a tour operator, to prearranged standard group packages (Pearce, 2008). Even within the same territory, visitors can be either excursionists or tourists, domestic or international, implying different types of dynamics and impacts, which increase the complexity of the tourism phenomenon.

Fourth, tourism is a *multidimensional* phenomenon (Darbellay & Stock, 2012), fundamentally of a social nature, but with environmental impacts and very often with commercial implications (UNWTO, 2014). This is true to the extent that no commercial firm is part of a tourism experience without the involvement of a visitor, although some tourism forms may emerge without the participation of a commercial firm. The multidimensional nature of tourism, therefore, is inherent to its complexity.

Fifth, tourism is characterised by its *multiscalarity*, because the phenomenon can cover different geographical, organisational, social, and political scales (Baggio, 2017; Darbellay & Stock, 2012). This applies not only to the case of international visitors who link the local and the global (Milne & Ateljevic, 2001). Multiscalarity can also relate to local visitors entering a natural park, managed by a national authority, and subject to international policies, as in the case of World Heritage Sites. So, multiple-scale relationships are established during the visitors' journeys.

Sixth, tourism is *vulnerable to influences*, because it does not occur under centrally controlled conditions as in a laboratory or an assembly plant. Tourism emerges from continuous interactions that simultaneously influence and are influenced by their environment. While the tourism experience is taking place, actors are exposed to dynamic, non-centrally controllable

and interdependent factors (Dekkers, 2015), such as culture, nature, society, laws, politics, and economy (Hartman, 2016).

Seventh, tourism is, in essence, an *intangible individual experience* perceived in a subjective way by each actor (Judd, 2006; Nicolau, 2013; Pearce, 2008). Tourism takes raw material and services not merely to assemble new products; its outcomes are of a different nature. Tourism outcomes take the form of experiences generated by interactions (Darbellay & Stock, 2012). Visitors *are not* passive actors in such experiences (Perkins & Thorns, 2001), because tourism does not exist until visitors get fully involved (Smith, 1994). Conversely to industrial processes, in tourism: visitors travel to the place of interest, instead of sending a product to the consumer; the real experience cannot be tested beforehand, as in the case of products and services; and it is impossible to replicate two identical experiences, whereas industrial assembly lines can replicate identical products – (Nicolau, 2013; Smith, 1994).

2.2.3 Translating systems thinking into tourism

In this section, we discuss and contextualise eight concepts of systems thinking as more integrative notions to tackle the seven abovementioned complexities of tourism. It is important to mention that these concepts are not new; to discuss them in the context of tourism and to connect them in a structured way to conduct tourism system analysis is. The discussion in this section points out some relationships between systems thinking and Network and Actor Network theories, because they all contribute to a more integrative approach to tourism as a complex phenomenon.

The eight concepts discussed below are the building blocks of the integrated framework introduced later in Figure 5. The concepts were chosen based on the necessity to move from ‘inside’ towards ‘outside’ the different aggregation levels of tourism as a system. In other words, it is based on the necessity of identifying individual and more simpler components and going through increasing levels of aggregation and complexity. Thus, the concepts are organised in three categories. First, the system’s Components identify and describe the tourism system itself and its functioning. Second, the system’s Structure makes sense of the relationships between the identified components. And third, the system’s Properties explain key characteristics emerging from the progressive aggregation of multiple components, as it happens in the tourism phenomenon.

The first concept is *element.* This refers to 'the smallest parts needed for the purposeful analysis of a system within a specific study' (Dekkers, 2015, p. 19). An element can be a system on its own, but this component may or may not be divided into subcomponents depending on the desired level of analytical detail. This is the simplest level of the system.

For tourism, we consider the tourism actors (visitors, residents, firms, governments, associations, non-governmental organisations, and academia) as the basic interacting elements of the system. However, Actor Network Theory (ANT) calls for considering nonhuman elements, such as objects, machines, and technologies, as also actors as well, because it is thanks to them that '[e]mblematic tourist performances involve and are made possible and pleasurable' (Van der Duim et al., 2013, p. 8). It can be argued that such nonhuman elements are merely resources that receive a meaning when enacted by human actors. However, it is also true that complex natural or artificial objects, such as ecosystems (e.g. a national park) and crowd-sourced information platforms (e.g. TripAdvisor), have their own behaviour influencing the emergence of the tourism experience. This allows consideration of, for example, natural or technological nonhuman objects as actors within the tourism system. We consider that such an approach is useful for a more integrative and sustainable view of tourism, because it helps restrain economic views and profit maximisation from becoming the only key factors (Bramwell & Lane, 2013). Thus, the notion of *element* tackles the complex aspect of *multiplicity of visitors and facilitators* in tourism, because it allows the identification of actors in the system of interest. The identification of the actors and their relationships depends on the chosen analytical depth. For example, at the individual level (a visitor, a firm, a government), at the group level in a region (a segment of visitors, a firm's association, a commonwealth of municipalities), or at the multigroup level (two regions with diverse actors acting collectively). Hence, if the chosen analytical level is at the group level, it is not necessary to describe the subcomponents of the group's members (individual characteristics such as size, departments, units). The analytical depth would stay at the level of the group's function as a whole within the system and on its relationships with functions of the other actors (other elements).

The second concept is *function*. This is a process that transforms energy from one state into another. Performing a function means to take a resource, to process it in a set of stages and to deliver an output (Dekkers, 2015; Hoff, 1992). This notion is useful in identifying the elements' individual and collective behaviour.

The tourism phenomenon emerges from the aggregation of functions performed by visitors, facilitators, and nonhuman actors, such as ecosystems or technological platforms. The behaviour of these tourism actors (i.e. the system's elements) determines the final experience. They have certain resources, such as time, budget, logistics, information, and energy. Through their interactions, at different moments and locations, resources are transformed into tourism experiences (Chen, Zhang, Huang, & Xie, 2013; Mahner & Bunge, 2001). A *functional* approach helps to tackle tourism's complex aspect of *multiplicity of visitors and facilitators* and *diverse motivations and conditions* to engage in tourism, because it focuses on the actor's motivations and roles. This explains interactions better than merely describing independent characteristics. For example, in the case of an inbound tour operator, instead of describing only its size and products, a functional approach acknowledges the resources it requires and its motivations to act. In this way, the implications of the operator's actions can be understood not only in the economic sphere, but also in the social and environmental aspects. This moves inquiry from what or who, which only provides characteristics, into how and why, which provides explanations.

The third concept is *dynamics*. Systems change over time, so it is necessary to understand their dynamics (Dekkers, 2015) by examining at their elements' functions (Ghosh, 2015) and how these affect the outcomes (Mella, 2012). By understanding the dynamics between the elements' functions, we might better understand the functioning of the system as a whole (Arnold & Wade, 2015).

In tourism, dynamics help us understand the rules that govern the system at the local level (e.g. host communities) and at the macro level (e.g. international law-making bodies such as the European Union) (Meekes et al., 2016). Zahra and Ryan (2007) suggest that complexity theory and chaos theory both contributes concepts to identify components and dynamics in social systems. This can be done, for example, through Causal Loop Diagrams, which display the feedback loops among the system's elements caused by their interactions (Mai & Smith, 2015; Nguyen, Bosch, & Maani, 2011). For example, to differentiate dynamics that facilitate working towards common goals from those that prevent collective achievement. The concept of dynamics is thus useful in addressing the complex aspect of *diversity of tourism forms* and *its sensitivity to influences*. And, as tourism interactions occur at different geographical scales and affect different spheres (social, economic, environmental) (Nicholls, Amelung, & Student,

2017), the concept of dynamics is also useful in studying the aspects of *multiscalarity* and *multidimensionality* of the tourism system.

The fourth concept is *environment.* A system has boundaries (not necessarily physical) and thus operates within an environment (Dekkers, 2015). This is the total sum of resources and other systems outside the boundaries of the system of interest that provide input to the system and consume its outputs. The system's elements have a certain autonomy, but its boundaries end the moment the system interacts with other independent systems (Mingers, 2006). The environment encapsulates all of the system's aggregation levels. This is why the overall function of a system is said to be relative to its environment (Mella, 2012).

This is highly relevant because actors generate the tourism experience by interacting with a range of non-tourism-specific systems and resources, for example, public roads or protected areas, country entry requirements or practices of host communities, and markets and public spaces used by residents. A diverse environment able to provide many resources is needed for tourism to emerge. And the notion of open systems emphasises that tourism does not occur in a vacuum because its outcomes simultaneously shape and are shaped by its environment. Also, the idea that a complex system may not have physical boundaries relates to the notion that a 'destination' does not necessarily refer to a static geographic space. Even among the same group of tourism facilitators, the territory of the destination they promote may vary. This depends on the visitors they deal with and the activities involved. Thus, the concept of environment explains tourism's complex aspects of *sensitiveness to influences* and *multidimensionality* as local or international actors and conditions may influence the tourism system outcomes.

The fifth concept is *abstraction and hierarchy.* Abstraction is the removal of layers of detail to capture the essential features of a system (Mella, 2012), whereas hierarchy refers to structural levels of organisation between larger and smaller systems (Ghosh, 2015; Mella, 2009, 2012). It is like the organisational diagram of a corporation that gives an structural overview (Ghosh, 2015; Lindsay, Downs, & Lunn, 2003). A system can include different levels, and each level can represent a system of its own, encapsulating other subsystems (Mella, 2009), thus creating a hierarchy (Dekkers, 2015).

We argue that the tourism phenomenon is a system of systems. But regardless of the analytical

depth, the tourism phenomenon emerges from the aggregation of interactions at different geographical and organisational levels (Martin & Sunley, 2012). For revealing a system's structure network theory typically involves three levels: micro (each element's properties), meso (the intermediate structure of the system), and macro (the global characteristics) (Baggio, 2017). For example, a traveller (an element – micro level) could directly interact with a hotel (another element – micro level); or contract a tour operator (a subsystem – meso level) which integrates various other elements; and they all together, along with the environment they are immersed in, form the system (the macro level). Using abstraction and hierarchy, we can reveal complex structures to explain how initially independent elements and resources support a living phenomenon such as tourism. Abstraction and hierarchy are useful to tackle tourism's complex aspect of *multiscalarity*, by visualising the different aggregation levels of actors and means (Arnold & Wade, 2015) involved in tourism as a system.

The sixth concept is *emergence*. This refers to new properties and levels of organisation, which develop from simpler elements that themselves do not possess such properties independently (Mella, 2009; Speakman, 2016). These new qualities are synthesised by the combination of dynamics between the elements' functions (Dekkers, 2015), as a result, generating a novel phenomenon (Heylighen, 2009). This means that the outcome of a system goes beyond the simple addition of its elements' characteristics (Mella, 2009).

Similarly, the tourism experience does not emerge from the actors or means that facilitate it taken independently. Tourism emerges from the combination of interactions through visitor involvement facilitated by networked relationships among human and nonhuman actors (Jørgensen, 2017). Thus, it is the relations and not the elements themselves that produce the emergence of the tourism phenomenon (Van der Duim & Caalders, 2008) as an experience that is more than just a collection of services and places. Tourism is a permanent manifestation of emergence that generates impressions and impacts with subjective meanings for the system's actors and in the environment. This is why industrial perspectives or deterministic analytical approaches fall short in tackling tourism's complexities. A hotel room, a relative's house, and attractive scenery have no value in and of themselves, because only the visitors' involvement catalyses the emergence of the tourism phenomenon. Emergence, thus, explains tourism's complex aspect as an *intangible individual experience*.

The seventh concept is *self-organisation*. It is a characteristic property of complex systems (Dekkers, 2015; Erçetin & Banerjee, 2015) that refers to the emergence of global coordination out of local-level interactions. The dynamics between the system's basic elements produce structures and outcomes at higher and more complex aggregation levels. This gives the system the tendency to adapt in response to influences from its environment (McDonald, 2009). Self-organisation relates to Distributed Leadership, which refers to a widespread leadership agency. It incorporates the activities of multiple groups of individuals and is constructed as a shared emergent process over time through interactions among leaders, followers, and their environment (Currie & Lockett, 2011).

Self-organisation defies the idea of tourism entities controlling the generation of the desired outcomes in a centralised way (Baggio, 2013). Along the same lines, network analysis demonstrates that actors within a destination may connect in varied ways, based on characteristics different from those usually considered from centralised deterministic managerial perspectives, such as location or type (Baggio, 2017). For example, distributed leadership refers to the case of organisations supporting long-haul international tourism experiences, which requires a range of leaders to work together at a physical, organisational and cultural distance with different sets of skills and attributes (Benson & Blackman, 2011). However, it does not mean that tourism should not be managed at all. Self-organisation means that management approaches should focus on fostering efficient cooperative environments instead of striving for centrally controlled organisations (Speakman, 2016). Based on some essential policies, such as favouring service providers' diversity, a destination can strengthen its actors' self-organising capacities and their adaptability in overcoming perturbations. Even highly influential DMOs need to deal with self-organisation, because destinations include varied actors (Ioannides & Debbage, 1998), making it impossible to centrally coordinate all interactions (Mai & Smith, 2015; Van der Duim et al., 2013). Nevertheless, as Russell and Faulkner (1999, p. 414) argue, 'chaos should not be seen as simply lack of order or a condition reflecting the degeneration of a system, but rather as a creative phase leading to a new, more complex order.' Self-organisation explains the complex aspect of *diversity of tourism forms and outcomes* and calls for new approaches to tourism development.

The eighth concept is *non-linearity*. It refers to outputs not proportional to the inputted efforts and is the defining feature of complexity. This is generated by dynamics between the system's elements that aggregate at different levels, leading to situations that do not reproduce past

trajectories (Erkoçak & Açıkalın, 2015). In this context, small changes can have disproportionately large effects on the system (Bramwell & Lane, 2013; Speakman, 2016). Gleick (1987) points out that non-linearity is referred to in several ways: technically, it is known as Sensitive Dependence on Initial Conditions; it is also generally known as the Butterfly Effect; and in folklore it is said that '[f]or want of a nail, the shoe was lost; For want of a shoe, the horse was lost; For want of a horse, the rider was lost; For want of a rider, the battle was lost; For want of a battle, the kingdom was lost!'.

Tourism does not work in a linear way, and the behaviour of its actors does not produce fully predictable outcomes (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004), because they act in complex non-linear relational networks (Jørgensen, 2017), for instance, negative isolated events amplified by the media, leading to massive cancellations from a certain destination. Even the well-known Tourism Area Life Cycle (Butler, 1980) linear model recognises that the final destination's fate is unpredictable, varying between different degrees of rejuvenation or decline (Zahra & Ryan, 2007). Non-linearity is natural to the tourism phenomenon (Mai & Smith, 2015) as its outcomes can hardly be understood through linear analysis (d'Hauteserre, 2006; Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004). Although there may be clear targets and well-structured organisations in place, non-linear and non-predictable outcomes are typical in tourism destinations because many actors participate. Non-linearity explains tourism's complex aspects of *diverse motivations, multiplicity of facilitators* and *vulnerability to influences,* and reminds us to reflect on the adaptive responsiveness of the tourism system (Baggio, 2008).

2.2.4 Tourism systems thinking

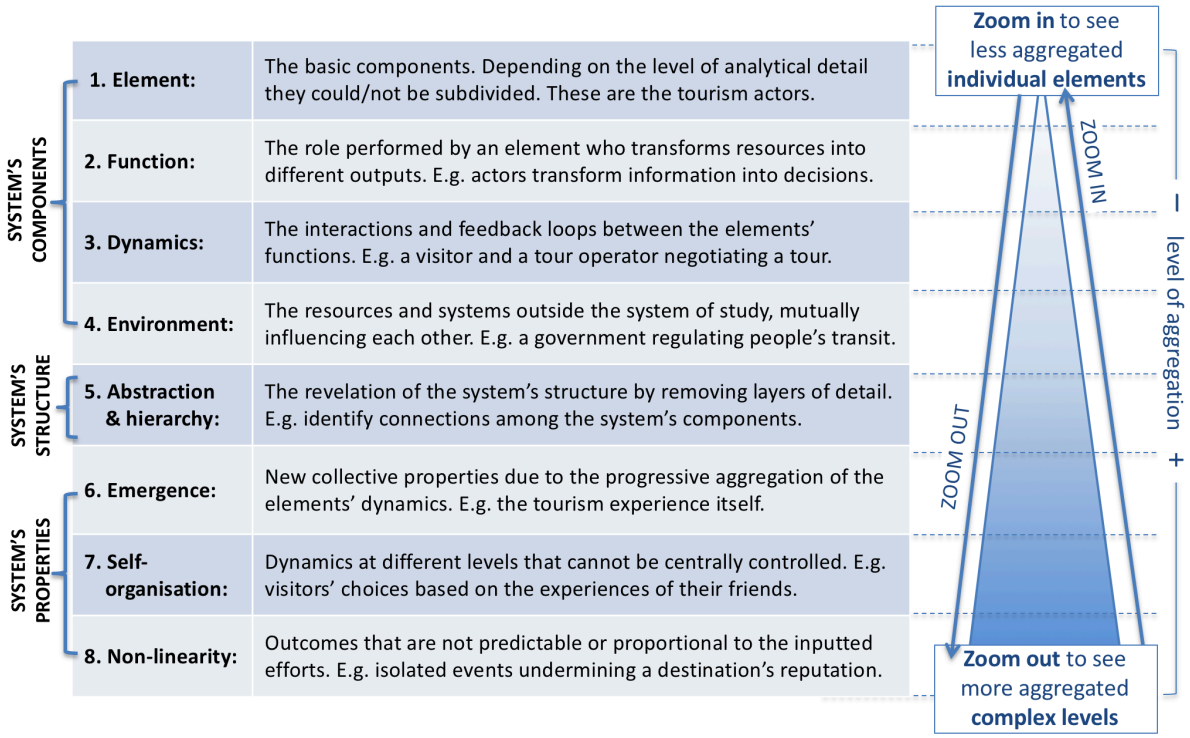
So far, we have discussed the key concepts of systems thinking in the context of tourism and how each helps tackle different aspects in the complexity of tourism.

Now, the question is: how do these concepts interconnect to describe and study tourism in a more integrative way? This question is important to overcoming the perception that a systems-based approach 'is little more than an amalgam of methods, models and metaphors from a variety of disciplines rather than an integrated science' (Speakman, 2016, p. 7).

Therefore, in Figure 5, we present an Integrated Tourism Systems Thinking Conceptual Framework that formalises a structured way of describing the tourism phenomenon. The

framework is structured so that its concepts tackle the complexities of tourism in a progressive way: from individual components and less aggregated levels inside the system towards more complex aggregation levels and properties outside the system. In this way, we can conceptually *zoom in* to see the tourism system's basic components (the *elements*) or *zoom out* to study properties at higher aggregation levels of complexity (e.g. *self-organisation*). This conceptual integration makes it possible to analytically 'dissect' a tourism system of interest while maintaining an integrated view between the parts and the whole system.

Figure 5. **An Integrated Tourism Systems Thinking Conceptual Framework**



Authors' elaboration.

Based on this integrated terminology, we can now propose the following description of how tourism works: the *elements* (the actors) of the tourism phenomenon perform *functions* (the actors' roles), whose *dynamics* (actors' interactions) progressively aggregate while simultaneously being influenced by and influencing their *environment* (actors and other systems outside the system). The aggregation levels of the tourism phenomenon can be *abstracted* (capture the essential features) to study their *hierarchy* (levels of structural organisation). This in turn, helps explain the *emerging* (previously non-existent) characteristics embedded in the final tourism experience, the actors' degree of *self-organisation* (dynamics non-centrally controllable) and the system's *non-linear* (outcomes not proportional to the inputted effort) behaviour.

Such a systemic description offers an open approach to tourism as a dynamic phenomenon with a neutral starting point for its study. This avoids the insertion of predetermined connotations, such as commercial or industrial analogies. In this way, the possibility of addressing tourism from multiple perspectives remains preserved. The framework (Figure 5) analyses tourism using three sets of interrelated systems thinking concepts: (1) Concepts 1 to 4 for the system's Components, (2) Concept 5 for the system's Structure, and (3) Concepts 6 to 8 for the system's Properties. In the following, we discuss why these concepts form part of the framework and how they relate to each other.

First, the concept of *element* represented by the human and nonhuman tourism actors allows approaching tourism cases that may not have any commercial connotation. For example, a resident hosting a relative during a weekend. Although these persons may incidentally perform activates involving monetary transactions, such as going to a restaurant or visiting a museum, the experience does not have a commercial context. In any case, the concept of element allows referring to both, non-commercially related tourism cases and commercially related tourism cases.

Second, the notion of *function* proposes approaching the tourism actors (elements) from the perspective of their roles within the system under study. In this way, the actors and their functions go together as the basic descriptors of the tourism system and its behaviour. By emphasising the actors' functions rather than on their individual characteristics we naturally think in terms of connective interactions between the actors. This is because the participation of an actor within a tourism system makes sense in terms of its interactions with others. For example, a tour operator or a resident is identified as a system's actor (or not) provided that it directly participates in the facilitation of the tourism experience.

Third, the ideas of functions and interactions among the actors connect our analysis with the idea of *dynamics*. This concept reminds us how interactions aggregate at different levels. A multileveled perspective is important because tourism dynamics are generated by diverse actors (e.g. visitors, firms, residents), performing varied functions (e.g. information search, booking, transportation), at different locations (source market, in route, or at destination). Some dynamics have a local scope, such as getting recommendations from a friend, while others have an international scope, such as taking an international flight. This points out to the observation

of how interactions generate reactions that produce new interactions in response, and how these dynamics ultimately facilitate or hinder the tourism experience.

Fourth, as dynamics among the actors continue to aggregate at diverse moments and places, their effects also reach actors and systems outside the system under observation. This leads us to consider the system's *environment,* which reacts by generating dynamics at a broader scale. This may be the case, for example, of governments, host societies, or public spaces, which, although not specifically oriented towards tourism, receive the impacts of tourism flows and react in the form of policies, changes in the attitude of hospitality, and physical deterioration.

Fifth, the concepts of *abstraction and hierarchy* remind us to maintain a connective view among the previously discussed system's components (elements, functions, dynamics, and environment). The intention is not to describe a perfectly structured, static scheme of tourism. The intention is to reflect throughout our analysis how the system's components interact and connect at different levels of aggregation. For instance, how a group of actors (e.g. a tour operator, accommodation services, certain attractions, and a community) forms a subsystem interacting at the local level, but also interacting with foreign distribution companies that represent other subsystems at the international level, while observing certain authorities' regulations that represent another subsystem in the system's environment. In this way, abstraction and hierarchy help reveal the system's essential structure.

Finally, the sixth, seventh, and eighth concepts of *emergence*, *self-organization* and *non-linearity,* respectively, describe key properties to keep in mind when trying to understand a tourism system behaviour. These properties manifest themselves progressively as a system reaches higher levels of aggregation and complexity. Tourism is a clear example of this, because it is the result of dynamics aggregated at different places and times. The property of emergence is embedded in the very nature of tourism. This is true to the extent that no tourism experience emerges without interaction with other actors, and the fact that the capacity to generate a tourism experience does not reside in any of the actors individually. In the same way, self-organisation reminds us that although coordination can be enhanced in a tourism system, the full set of interactions and outcomes cannot be centrally controlled because of tourism's complex and dynamic nature. Even highly controlled and physically delimited tourism experiences offered in cases such as all-inclusive resorts are ultimately influenced by the broader social, political, or natural environments they are immersed in. In our analysis,

non-linearity calls for a constant observation of how apparently small details can have large, unpredictable effects on the whole system. This could be the case of destinations that spontaneously become famous by word of mouth and in a few years, local residents witness tourism's unexpected transformation from a factor of life improvement into a factor of deterioration as a result of overcrowding. In summary, these properties remind us two things. First, to analyse tourism we must consider its changing and unpredictable nature throughout the process. Second, the further we zoom out or the closer we zoom in, the more levels of aggregation are revealed in the tourism system, and thus the properties of complexity are likely to manifest themselves more intensively.

2.2.5 Applicability of the framework

Although the framework is conceived to allow multiple analytical perspectives, such conceptual openness also risks remaining too abstract for practical analysis. One important question is therefore, how to operationalise these concepts to study the particularities of different tourism cases? Although a detailed exposition of possible procedures goes beyond the scope of this article, we present a brief example.

Our case study is Spanish-learning tourism in the city of Cuenca, in southern Ecuador. Four UNESCO-recognised sites coincide in Cuenca: the city centre as Cultural Heritage (1999), the intangible Heritage of the Straw Weaving Hat (2012), the Biosphere Reserve (2013), and a section of the multinational Royal Andean Trial, Qhapaq Ñan (2014). However, the city performs poorly in terms of international visitors, with only 198,994 tourists, 14% of the 1,418,159 tourists to Ecuador (MTE, 2017b), arriving to Cuenca during 2016 (GIER, 2017b). Of those, nine out of ten are independent travellers, more than half rely on family recommendations and, especially in the first quarter of the year, it is probable that visitors stay for only two days (GIER, 2017a). This suggests that the destination does not have much influence on the visitors' decision-making or on their behaviour once at the destination. For most foreign visitors, Cuenca is just a secondary destination within a larger itinerary taking them to Ecuador or South America. This is also partly because Cuenca has no international airport or borders, making it a sort of 'continental island' in terms of international connectivity.

Within this context, in 2016, as part of a broader research project, three of the main Spanish schools in Cuenca were interviewed. Using the Framework's concepts (Figure 5), we briefly

illustrate how to question and analyse this case with a systemic perspective, to reflect upon its implications for tackling Cuenca's situation as a secondary destination.

The first set of concepts (system components) in the framework describes the system itself. First, the framework suggests that the system's basic components or *elements* must be identified, proposing that these elements are the involved actors. A useful question to identify these actors is *who are the actors directly involved in the generation of the tourism experience under study?* In other words, *which elements are inside the system?* In our case study, the two central actors are Spanish schools and the Spanish students. However, depending on the type of Spanish course offered, a varied combination of other actors, such as foreign education institutions, host families, accommodation services, and tour operators, among others, could also be directly involved. This question also helps identify where the actors are located. Second, the framework suggests that the *functions* performed by each actor involved must be observed. A useful question to describe functions is *what is the service or role that each actor plays?* Thinking in terms of functions is important because things are better understood by describing what actors do (e.g. a Spanish school teaches a language) instead of describing their parts (e.g. the school's organisational structure). Further, a functional approach helps to reflect upon the actors' behaviour and to identify the resources they require. In our case study, the Spanish schools, besides teaching a language, act as the central coordinators of educational programmes with complementary activities to offer a culturally immersive learning experience. Other actors are involved depending on the activities included in each learning programme, such as excursions, cooking or dancing lessons. Third, the framework invites reflection on the *dynamics* resulting from the identified functions among the actors. Useful questions to describe dynamics are *how, when and why actors interact or not with each other?* We can now reflect on the dynamics among, for instance, visitors, Spanish schools, host families, and tour operators to generate a detailed and comprehensive understanding of how our case study's system works. Dynamics helps to think about aspects such as how visitors and Spanish schools get in touch, what makes students choose their destinations, how the process takes place from conception to involvement, who are the most influential actors in the process, whether the final experience meets expectations, and how these dynamics affect host societies. Fourth, to complete the description of the system, the framework proposes to describe its *environment*. A useful question to describe the environment is: *who are the actors, what are the circumstances and resources not directly involved* – that is, outside the system – *in the tourism experience, but have an influence or are influenced by it?* 'Outside the system' or 'indirectly involved',

however, does not mean at all not important. Describing the system's environment helps taking into consideration key indirect factors, such as educational or governmental authorities, regulations or cultural context, and access routes for complementary activities, all of which have a determinant effect on the intended culturally immersive Spanish-learning experience.

The second set of concepts (system's structure) in the framework refers to *abstraction & hierarchy*. In the previous steps, we have identified the tourism system's components and recognised different levels of aggregation. Based on this knowledge, abstraction and hierarchy help to recreate the essential structure of the case study by structuring this new knowledge. Useful questions are: *who are the system's central actors? Who is connected to the system through the central actors in a second or third ring of connections? Who decides or what determines the configuration of the experience? Are those determinants inside the system or in its environment? Are decision-makers based locally or abroad? And, do they influence only certain actors or the whole system?* Based on these questions, we present a short example describing our case study's essential features and structure in terms of its actors, their functions, their dynamics, and the system's environment. Central actors are the local Spanish schools, whose function is offering courses, and the visitors whose function is learning Spanish. In some cases, Spanish schools managed to foster dynamics in the form trustworthy partnership with a foreign educational centre, which allows them to reach students already taking Spanish courses in their home country. These are the most successful cases in terms of number of visitors and length of stay. Simultaneously, Spanish schools generate local dynamics incorporating local actors, such as host families, handicraftsmen, and tour operators depending on the configuration of the courses. The interviewed Spanish schools offer different types of courses. But in any case, once students are enrolled, they stay in Cuenca for periods ranging from one week, for short-term private lessons, to several weeks or even complete academic semesters valid as part of foreign educational programmes. In general, these schools use a culturally immersive language-learning approach that combines Spanish lessons with experiential-creative activities (e.g. cooking, dancing or handcrafting lessons), stays at local host families, and day or multiday excursions around the country. A determinant actor in the system's environment is the Ministry of Education, because Spanish schools have to comply with current legislation to operate.

Finally, the third set of concepts (system properties) recalls that, throughout the analysis, attention should be paid to the key properties of tourism as a complex system, which result

from the aggregation of dynamics at different levels. Thus, the sixth concept refers to the *emergence* of new collective characteristics from this aggregation process. This points to the fact that although Spanish schools and visitors are the central actors moving the system, the final tourism experience is not something that they can generate by themselves. They depend on the other actors and circumstances from within the system as well as from its environment. The seventh concept reminds us of *self-organisation*. Although Cuenca as a destination does not collectively promote language learning as its core tourism offer, several local and foreign actors have achieved a level of coordination for several initiatives of this kind to emerge and thrive. The eighth concept emphasises *non-linearity*. Spanish schools carefully structure their course programmes and leverage the reputation of foreign partners to attract visitors. Nevertheless, isolated events, such as an accident during an excursion or the misconduct of a host family member, can instantly ruin the reputation of a study programme that took years to introduce to a foreign educational centre. In short, a system's properties remind us that we must remain open to identifying and understanding dynamics that could generate new or unexpected results.

This systemic approach reveals an interesting opportunity for Cuenca. Spanish-learning tourism is usually deemed an incidentally tourism-related activity in the city. Nevertheless, this tourism modality has proven it ability to overcome several Cuenca's challenges as destination in terms of attracting international markets. First, visitors stay for longer periods, from one week to several months, depending on the course they choose. Second, Cuenca becomes the main destination and logistic centre for those students, capturing most of the visitors' expenditure, generating longer periods of stay, and reducing the need for constant fluxes of new visitors, which prevents the destination from overcrowding. And third, Spanish schools involve a range of local actors (e.g. host families, cooks, and artists), who usually do not have contact or feel a direct benefit from international visitors arriving through more conventional modalities such as tour packages or independent travelling. These characteristics of Spanish-learning tourism are especially important for Cuenca as a destination because they align with the vision of the city's 2016–2021 Tourism Development Plan (TurisConsulting et al., 2016). Thus, Spanish-learning tourism should be considered as a higher priority by policy-makers and local authorities.

There are several systems thinking-based approaches and tools that address tourism as a system and that could be useful complements for analytical purposes. For example, the Complex

Adaptive Systems (CAS) approach is used to examine the conditions of adaptive areas (Mingers, 2006), as well as to discuss 'how to manage CATS [Complex Adaptive *Tourism* Systems] in the context of complexity' (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004, p. 276). While Causal Loop Diagrams (CLD) are used by Mai & Smith (2015) to address issues such as the 'threats to tourism sustainability.' These are some examples that apply certain systems thinking's concepts to address the complexities of tourism study. They can be positively complemented by using the integrated framework introduced in this paper as their interrelated conceptual basis. This, in turn, will provide a mutual advantage for both perspectives: while tourism can be studied from more integrative and multidisciplinary approaches, systems thinking can be applied to tourism studies in a more structured and integrated way, overcoming the argumentation that it is nothing more than an amalgam of metaphors. Finally, for a detailed model and methodology to perform tourism analysis based on the conceptual framework introduced in this paper, look for 'An integrative model (iModel) for decision-making in tourism' by Rodriguez-Giron et al., 2018.

2.2.6 Final considerations

Complexity is embedded in the very nature of tourism. The tourism phenomenon resists easy classification into one-dimensional, deterministic industrial paradigms or fragmented disciplinary approaches. The merit of applying an integrative, systems thinking terminology to facilitate the study of tourism, is that it does not reduce the phenomenon to the domain of a specific discipline, maintaining its diverse and multi-layered essence.

Systems thinking offers a set of principles that, in an integrated way, suit the challenge of studying tourism's inherent complexities from its elemental to its more complex aggregation levels. The tourism systems thinking integrated framework introduced in this paper helps to (1) identify the *elements* of the tourism system (Dekkers, 2015), (2) focus on the *functions* of the elements in relation to the system as a whole (Mella, 2012), (3) study the *dynamics* of the system to understand its behaviour (Mai & Smith, 2015), (4) recognise the mutual influences between the tourism system and its *environment* (Mella, 2012), (5) reveal the organisational structure of tourism systems through *abstraction and hierarchy* (Mella, 2009), (6) consider the *emerging* nature of the tourism phenomenon as something more than just the sum of its elements (Dekkers, 2015), (7) recognise that outcomes in complex systems do not depend on a centralised coordination but on *self-organisation* emerging from local interactions (Farrell &

Twining-Ward, 2004), and (8) to acknowledge that results may be *non-linear* in relation to the invested efforts (Erkoçak & Açıkalın, 2015; Meekes et al., 2016).

This is not just a combination of fancy concepts. The understanding of the real nature of tourism will continue to lag if industrial and deterministic notions remain the main referential descriptors to discuss the phenomenon (Mura & Tavakoli, 2014). Whether intentionally or unintentionally, many scholars, students, governments, and practitioners will continue considering tourism a purely leisure-related activity with mostly economic importance. This reduces tourism to offer–demand dynamics and fragmented disciplinary approaches, with no reflection on the broader context, preventing the full realisation of tourism's interconnected and virtually omnipresent effects on modern societies, natural environments and economies. Therefore, the 'tourismologist' mentioned in the introduction must recognise the need for an integrated view of the complexities of tourism as a starting point for research efforts.

Thus, this paper proposes a more structured way of using systems thinking in tourism studies through an integrated terminology. Future research might consist on reviewing existing methodologies or tools, or developing new ones, based on the proposed integrated tourism systems thinking framework, to continue developing a more interconnected body of resources that advance the understanding of tourism as the multifaceted phenomenon that it is.

Finally, it should be noted that our call to embrace the study of tourism as a complex phenomenon through systems thinking, is made not merely for the sake of a more integrative academic understanding. The current state of our globalised, interconnected and increasingly fast-paced world, presents new collective challenges. This is the case of the incessant local and global increase in people's mobility out of their usual environment, for whatever reason other than migration, in other words, tourism, which has consequences in different ways for the global population. It is therefore particularly important to spread the idea, from academia to society in general, that addressing these complex challenges requires new ways of referring to current global-scale phenomena.

2.3 THEORETICAL INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL CAPITAL

Since its introduction by Bourdieu (1986), Social Capital (SC) has received intense attention from several authors. The concept has been widely explored as the object of study (Burt, 1995; Coleman, 1990; Grootaert & van Bastelar, 2002; Lin, 2001), as well as used as a heuristic tool to study other phenomena in society, such as tourism (Barbini, 2008; Jamieson, 2014; Von Friedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006; Zhao et al., 2011). The debate throughout the years regarding its nature and characteristics has led to the development of extensive theoretical constructs around the concept of social capital. One of the most recent cases is Häuberer (2011) and her 'Social Capital Theory', which builds upon a critical review of two generations of theorists. Warning that SC theory is still under construction, the author lays the basis to formalize her view of the concept in the following terms: SC applies to hierarchically structured societies and it is a resource embedded in social relationships; the concept considers that SC's actors are individuals or collectives, such as organizations or nation-states; SC emerges in the structure of relations among those actors pursuing a purpose; actors' networks could be open or closed, consisting of formal or informal relationships; preconditions to form networks are cultural societal aspects and other collective assets such as economy, technology or history; the access to social resources or SC is unequal depending on each actor's characteristics; and finally, SC influences cultural aspects of society and although it may have negative outcomes, it can also be used to increase social equality.

Departing from this embracing definition and on the basis of the broader SC literature, I will discuss its axioms, in order to have a more complete vision of the concept's different aspects.

Bourdieu (1986) starts by denoting the existence of various types of capitals. The most common and identifiable one is economic capital, represented by the economic capacity of an actor, such as their bank account balance or their ownership of property. Then, there is also cultural capital, which is represented, for instance, in the form of knowledge or skills of an individual. It also comes in the form of tangible cultural goods, such as pieces of art, books or handicrafts. Finally, cultural capital also takes the form of titles, such as university diplomas, titles of nobility or official merit medals, which can also be used as personal resources to achieve a certain goal. Social capital, on the other hand, is 'the aggregate of the actual or potential resources (economic and cultural capitals) which are linked to possession of a durable

network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition - or in other words, to membership in a group - which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a 'credential' which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word' (Bourdieu, 1986 p. 248). In other words, social capital refers to the relationships that an actor has, which are helpful when that actor needs something achievable through his/her contacts' resources and in agreement with that contact. For example, the case of an actor with an academic title that credits him/her as capable enough for his/her contacts to provide the support to lead a project or to provide the money to start an enterprise.

Burt (1993) states that actors have different levels of access to capital according to their relative position in the structure of society. The author also points out that capital refers to resources that actors dispose of and that can be used to achieve a certain purpose. He also mentions three types of capital: financial, human and social. However, Burt highlights the fact that the latter, in contrast with the former two, is not individually owned or possessed. Social capital is the potential to access others' resources on the basis of relationships among at least two actors. In that sense, social capital is not individually owned but a mutual possession of the related actors.

Lin (Lin, 2001a) takes a more classical approach and describes capital as an investment of resources in the pursuit of profit. Capitalist resources are invested to produce commodities and at the same time, capitalist resources are produced from the surplus value acquired by investors. Hence, capitalist resources can be either the factor that tigress a process or can be the result of a process. In any case, processes are involved as time and effort are needed to mobilize and use resources. On the other hand, Lin refers to human (skills, education) and cultural (symbols desired by the masses, such as titles) capitals as neo-capitals. They are individually possessed resources, with the potential to be invested and capture surplus value, such as getting a job or the support of others that recognize the acquired symbols. For the author, social capital is also a neo-capital, but in the form of an investment in social relations, expecting to profit from them by interacting with others to mobilise the others' resources when required.

The previously mentioned authors concur in the following views: 1) capital represents available resources, 2) there are different types of capitals in possession of actors in different amounts, 3) those resources can be used as means for certain purposes, and 4) social capital represents the relationships that allow actors to mobilise those resources for common purposes.

Within the context of tourism, Sharpley (2009) identifies six types of capital as the productive assets for any destination: 1) socio-cultural capital, the structures, institutions, characteristics and practices of destination communities; 2) human capital, the skills of individuals to contribute to the generation of the tourism experience; 3) environmental capital, the natural and built environments; 4) financial capital, from the public or private sectors, useful to own, develop or trade other resources; 5) political capital, which determines the destination's power relationship with external actors and its capacity for self-determination; and, 6) technological capital, which includes both ownership of technology and the skills to use it. The author identifies resources that are not only individually but collectively owned, such as socio-cultural, political or environmental capitals, for example, in the case of natural protected areas or traditional festivals. These collective resources, however, identified as part of a destination's assets, need to be mobilized together with the other individually owned resources to support tourism development. Here is when social capital, as a collective resource, emerges from its latent state embedded in the relationships among the destinations' actors to allow or hinder the mobilisation of other forms of a destination's capital (individually or collectively owned resources) towards collective goals.

The emergence of social capital, as an 'on-the-spot' emerging resource, depends on the quality of the actors' relationships. According to Von Friedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson (2006) the quality of relationships among the actors and their social capital in tourism depends on three general conditions. First, it depends on constant striving among the involved actors for a balance between cooperation and competition or, in other terms, for a healthy 'coopetition' (Wang & Krakover, 2008), between collective and individual interests, and between planning and acting. Second, it depends on the existence and practice of tacit or expressed codes of conduct that provide participants with the mental and emotional confidence to participate. And third, it depends on the effective allocation of resources such as knowledge, skills, time or leadership, that demonstrate real commitment to performing the agreed actions. Waayers, Lee, & Newsome (2012) argue that collaboration and good quality relationships among tourism actors is an emergent process that does not necessarily take place in a linear and systematic way. The authors, based on previous work by (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999), adapt and propose four categories to describe the qualities of collaborative processes: first, the scope of collaboration, which refers to conditions such as: whether stakeholders foresee the potential of positive benefits, the presence of a facilitator and stakeholders responsible for implementation, or whether there is an initial agreement on the scope of the collaboration; second, the intensity

of collaboration, which refers to conditions such as: how often and how the stakeholders are involved, frequency of exchange of information and interactions, whether actors are open to adapt their approaches, or the extent to which participants understand and respect each other's interests, arguments and attitudes; third, the extent to which consensus for collaboration emerges, which refers to conditions such as: the acceptance of the fact that not all participants enthusiastically embrace the agreements, the extent to which agreements and ownership emerges across inequalities between stakeholders, or the recognition of feasibility limitations and the willingness to implement commitments; and fourth, the capacity for tangible outcomes from collaboration, which refers to conditions such as: appointing efficient coordinators, securing resources, proper structures for implementation, monitoring of results, and ongoing networking to sustain collaborations. These diverse conditions determine the quality of relationships between actors in a collective and have different effects throughout what Mandell (1999) calls the 'continuum' of collaboration. This continuum could result in any situation ranging from weak linkages and coalitions with intermittent coordination to achieve an objective to lasting structural arrangements with a broad mission and strategically interdependent joint actions that go beyond the simultaneous actions of specific actors operating individually.

Within the process of mobilising resources towards common goals in a destination, different aggregation levels of actors have to be considered. Some authors propose four views on social capital to understand this aggregation of actors (Dudwick, Kuehnast, Nyhan Jones, & Woolcock, 2006; Okazaki, 2008; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000): 1) the *communitarian view* of SC, which focuses on a group's internal (bonding) social ties between homogenous individuals or groups, such as the members of an established Destination Management Organisation (DMO); 2) the *network view* of SC, which focuses on new social ties between individuals or groups, that is, horizontal (bridging) social ties, such as between a DMO and a tour operators' association; 3) the *institutional view* of SC, which focuses on social ties between a group and other legally or politically formalised groups in power, that is, vertical (linking) social ties, facilitating relations beyond the sector of the network, such as between the DMO and local or national governments or financial institutions; and 4) the *synergies view* of SC, which stresses the importance of social ties between all levels of the destination (bonding, bridging and linking). The consideration of this synergetic view is especially relevant in relation to a destination's capacity to mobilise diverse capitals (resources) towards collective development goals (Macbeth et al., 2004).

There is still a debate regarding how to define and operationalize the phenomenon of social capital and its characteristics. As a social construct, social capital is not a static phenomenon. Its behaviour and characteristics change over time, it can manifest in different ways depending on the case, the context, the sector, and the level of aggregation, and may imply different values, beliefs and attitudes (Barbini, 2008). Through variation in some of its characteristics, either in the composition of the groups, the way they interact or the aims they pursue, social capital's outcomes will vary. The social structure and the involved actors themselves vary over time and space (Coleman, 1990). Bellow, I attempt to group and categorise several ways used in literature to describe the characteristics of social capital:

- ***SC formality.*** Social capital can emerge 'formally', in organizations with established structures, authorities and mechanisms, for example a chamber of tourism. Social capital can also emerge 'informally', from different forms of spontaneous social interactions, for example some of the chambers' members going to a pub for entertainment (Putnam, 1995a, 2000). In both cases, relations are established, although in different contexts, they embed potential benefits for the participants (Häuberer, 2011).

- ***SC intensity.*** There is 'intensive' social capital, in compact networks with many connection points within the own community, and there is 'diffuse and extensive' social capital, when dissimilar groups and communities have connection points (Granovetter, 1985). Another way to describe social capital's intensity is 'dense', characterized by frequent contacts, or 'sparse', characterized by sporadic contacts (Putnam, 2000; Von Friedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006)

- ***SC spread.*** Social capital is 'limited' when there is a predominance of internal social networks, or social capital is 'broad' when there is a predominance of external social networks. The latter generally contributes to a better quality of social life (Atria, Siles, Arriagada, Robinson, & Whiteford, 2003). Spread of social capital can also be described as 'internal' (inwards the group), referring to social capital existing among members within a specific sector aiming for interests of the group, for instance, a tour operators' association; or 'external' (outwards the group), referring to social capital

existing because of a group aiming to provide public goods of general public interest, for instance, a public DMO looking for local development through tourism (Okazaki, 2008; P. W. Williams & Elkhashab, 2012).

- ***SC scope.*** There can be 'horizontal' relations, generating connections between members of a community, or 'vertical' relations, generating connections between dissimilar groups. The former often generates opportunities for the members of the community following previous dominant paths, while the latter brings opportunities for less powerful or excluded actors (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). Social capital scope can also be identified as: 'bonding', or relations stimulating homogeneity and reciprocity within a group of closely related members, such as relatives, friends and neighbours; as 'bridging', or relations outside the group, that generate reciprocity between actors with similar characteristics that do not have closely related social circles; and as 'linking', or relations that go even beyond actors with similar characteristics, stablishing contact with actors in a position of power (Macbeth et al., 2004; Nyhan Jones & Woolcock, 2007).

- ***SC aggregation levels.*** Social capital can be described as 'individual', related to the interests and advantages for a single person or household, stemming from relations in which no common broader objectives can be identified; or as 'communal', related to interests and advantages for a collective, stemming from more complex institutions, characterized by cooperation, policy and management pursuing collective public or private benefits (Grootaert, Narayan, Nyhan Jones, & Woolcock, 2004; Grootaert & van Bastelar, 2002). The aggregation level can also be described at the 'micro level', where social capital emerges from the relations among a limited number of actors, or at the 'macro level', where social capital emerges from the relations among a larger number of interrelated actors (Grootaert & van Bastelar, 2000).

- ***SC form.*** Social capital can as well be described by considering its manifestations. One form is the 'groups', organizations or networks an actor belongs to, and can be described in terms of their structure, the members, their hierarchical positions and connections; another manifestation of social capital is 'trust', represented in the norms, values, shared attitudes and beliefs that influence the actors' relations; another

manifestation of social capital is the 'quality' of the relations among actors, is another form in which social capital manifests; and finally, there are the 'outputs', referring to the results of the interactions among actors (Jamieson, 2014; N. Ooi et al., 2015; Zhao et al., 2011).

The previous paragraphs attempt to organize the diverse ways found in the literature to describe social capital's characteristics. Hence, for organizational purposes, certain characteristics have been grouped under a certain descriptive category (e.g. formality, intensity, spread). However, considering that social capital is a complex and dynamic phenomenon, in constant transformation and with multiple facets, some characteristics grouped under a certain descriptive category can also relate to another descriptive category. For, example, while the characteristics of 'horizontal' and 'vertical' relations were grouped within the descriptive category of social capital's 'scope', the same characteristics can also explain social capital's 'aggregation levels', as in both cases the literature describes how social capital relates to interactions among actors at different levels of the social structures. This reflects the complexity faced by authors when trying to grasp the multifaceted nature of social capital. Thus, the following table displays the multiple conceptual relationships between the characteristics used to describe social capital in the literature and the proposed descriptive categories:

Table 3. **Multi-correspondence between SC's characteristics and SC's descriptive categories**

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">CHARACTE-RISTICS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL</td><td colspan="6">DESCRIPTIVE CATEGORIES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL</td></tr>
<tr><td>Formality</td><td>Intensity</td><td>Spread</td><td>Scope</td><td>Aggregat. levels</td><td>Form</td></tr>
<tr><td>Formal</td><td rowspan="2">Describe SC's Formality</td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2">But ALSO DESCRIBE SC's Form</td></tr>
<tr><td>Informal</td></tr>
<tr><td>Intensive</td><td rowspan="4"></td><td rowspan="4">Describe SC's Intensity</td><td rowspan="4"></td><td rowspan="4"></td><td rowspan="4"></td><td rowspan="4">But ALSO DESCRIBE SC's Form</td></tr>
<tr><td>Diffuse</td></tr>
<tr><td>Dense</td></tr>
<tr><td>Sparse</td></tr>
<tr><td>Limited</td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2">Describe SC's</td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Broad</td></tr>
</table>

CHARACTE-RISTICS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL	DESCRIPTIVE CATEGORIES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL					
	Formality	**Intensity**	**Spread**	**Scope**	**Aggregat. levels**	**Form**
Internal			Spread	But ALSO DESCRIBE SC's Scope	But ALSO DESCRIBE SC's Aggregat. Levels	
External						
Horizontal			But ALSO DESCRIBE SC's Spread	Describe SC's Scope	But ALSO DESCRIBE SC's Aggregat. Levels	
Vertical						
Bonding						
Bridging						
Linking						
Individual				But ALSO DESCRIBE SC's Scope	Describe SC's Aggregat. Levels	But ALSO DESCRIBE SC's Form
Communal						
Micro level						
Macro level						
Groups	But ALSO DESCRIBE SC's Formality	But ALSO DESCRIBE SC's Intensity			But ALSO DESCRIBE SC's Aggregat. Levels	Describe SC's Form
Trust						
Quality						
Outputs						

Author's elaboration

The previous table reflects the difficulty of precisely and succinctly describing the social capital. This is because the effects deriving from social interactions cannot be reduced to the simple addition of the characteristics and resources owned by each actor. Throughout the actors' interactions new dynamics and properties emerge that would not be present if the actors operate alone (Bourdieu, 1986). Those new collectively generated characteristics influence the final social effect in either a positive or negative way (Portes, 2014; Schmidt et al., 2016). Thus, collective actions are an expression of these social interactions being a consequence or a manifestation of social capital. While Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1990), and Putnam (1995) think of social capital as a resource for collective action, Fukuyama (2001) looks at collective action as an outcome and therefore, as a critical measure of social capital. Nevertheless, different types and grades of collective action, as the output of social capital, can also be considered as a component for social capital to emerge in the first place (Barbini, 2008). This debate about whether collective actions are components or outcomes in the process of social capital also depicts the complex nature of the phenomenon. This is because the existence of

groups and relationships is not enough to speak about effective social capital as an existing resource. Moreover, if actors are connected in groups but there are no formal or informal norms, it remains problematic for actors to take collective actions and social capital remains only a potential, latent or inactive resource. Dynamics that result in collective action combine both the relationships of the group and its norms, to catalyse the emergence of social capital. In other words, groups and norms are not enough for social capital to emerge its emergence is catalysed only through interactions between two or more actors, that is, through collective actions. In that sense, collective actions have a double role in social capital's emerging process: 1) as a component: collective actions fuel the group's interactions, and 2) as an outcome: collective actions are the result of the group's previous interactions, which continuously stimulate or weaken future interactions. In that sense, social capital is a resource initially in a latent state among actors, which passes into an active state 'on-the-spot' the moment that groups, based on their norms (formal or informal), take action mobilising their resources with a common purpose and, in the same way, the moment that actors stop taking action social capital returns back into a latent state.

This approach considers that collective initiatives could have positive or negative intentions, or that social capital's outcomes could also bring negative impacts. Thus, social capital helps to structure the observation of those relationships and to understand how a destination, as a collective, behaves and why successful as well as unsuccessful outcomes result as they do in my study case and in relation to the research question. From that perspective it is important to bear in mind that social capital also manifests the negative side of social relationships. For instance, the benefits obtained by some actors at the destination, because of their membership in advantaged groups, such as a powerful corporation or certain political parties, can be experienced by others as exclusion from the same social or economic benefits (Portes & Sensenbrenner, 1993; Waldinger, 1995). Strong bonds among members of a group, such as family or friendship bonds, may impede the access of the best qualified people for certain jobs (Portes, 2014), harming the management or performance of public or private organizations at a tourist destination. Another social capital related problem is when there is excessive trust among the members of a group (Coleman, 1988; Levine et al., 2014) and the effects of wrong decisions by over-trusted leading actors at the destination, such as a successful entrepreneur or political figures, can impact society beyond tourism related actors. For instance, when over-trusted actors influence on decisions to invest scarce financial resources of a municipality on tourism development initiatives that do not bring the expected returns, generating big

disappointment and generalised lack of support to future development attempts. Another social capital problem may consist of excessive requests to successful entrepreneurs by other actors at the destination, who may expect for the successful enterprise to act as a non-profit development support agency. For instance, within a local Destination Management Organization (DMO), in which a successful firm participates as a member along with smaller firms and the local government, there might be great pressure for the bigger firm to make investments and provide resources that the other members are not willing to provide. This could at least decrease interest in participating and even prevent promising entrepreneurial ventures from consolidating long term success (Granovetter, 1995). Another negative aspect of social capital could be excessive cohesion and uniformity among the members of a destination, with two negative effects. First, the same actors participating on the basis of the same principles and practices may lead to repetition of some past poor results (Portes, 2014). And, second, excessive cohesion within the collective may prevent innovation or the incorporation of newcomers that can contribute fresh ideas and resources for destination development (Schmidt et al., 2016).

Therefore, in this research and within the context of tourism and the tourist destination seen as a collective of actors (Haugland et al., 2011; Pearce, 2008, p. 2; Viken, 2014) trying to act together, I do not approach social capital as a solution or as the method to improve multi stakeholder coordination for local development. Social capital is used as a heuristic theoretical framework to facilitate the study of the dynamics among the actors in a tourist destination.

2.4 PAPER 2 SOCIAL CAPITAL AT THE TOURIST DESTINATION LEVEL: Determining the Dimensions to Assess and Improve Collective Action in Tourism.[6]

Abstract

A tourist destination, as a collective of actors trying to act together, faces the challenge of shaping a common future and self-determine their development path. This depends on its actors' capacity to act towards collective goals. Social capital (SC) theory explains how resources are mobilised for common purposes, representing a key notion for understanding collective action. Non-tourism and tourism related literature on SC were analysed, finding that SC theory is used mostly as a means to study other aspects in tourism. Little has been discussed about SC itself as the object of interest. This article, therefore: 1) identifies the key dimensions and levels of scope of a tourist destination's SC, and 2) presents a structured assessment framework as the basis to reflect upon the improvement of the destination's capacity for self-determination. The paper contributes to tourist destination's SC theory building and as the basis for further research on the subject.

Keywords

Tourist destination, social capital, dimensions, assessment, collective action, self-determination.

2.4.1 Introduction

In general terms, an important aim for tourist destinations is to attract visitors and maximise benefits for local actors. However, two crucial questions arise: What are the expected benefits? And, what are the potential negative effects of tourism? From a sustainability perspective 'to maximise benefits' implies more than only economic revenue (Harrison, 2014; Macbeth et al., 2004). It also implies improvement of the social and ecological spheres, while at the same time, avoiding the potentially widely documented negative impacts associated with some tourism

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forms, such as conventional mass tourism (Lansing & Vries, 2006; Weaver, 2014). Beyond generalisations, however, when seeing a specific destination as a collective of actors trying to improve their life conditions through tourism, a more *fundamental challenge* is whether that collective has the capacity to act together to shape a common future and self-determine its own development path. Thus, from a self-determination perspective, it is the collective that should be able to: set the expected benefits, identify the potential negative effects to avoid and act accordingly.

Collective self-determination, however, is complex to achieve. This is especially the case in tourism, where there are many players with different interests involved in the dynamics of a destination (Hartman, 2016b). It is well known, for instance, that development efforts depending on external entities, such as aid agencies, or central governmental institutions (Sharpley, 2009), might not result in the desired outcomes (Neilson, 2014). Although support is useful, the key factor for self-determination is that the concerned actors identify necessities and goals, and achieve coordination under their own terms and values in an iterative learning process (Beritelli, 2011; Brohman, 1996; Macbeth et al., 2004; Okazaki, 2008; Sharpley, 2009; Zhao et al., 2011).

Within that context, this paper deals with social capital (SC) theory, which refers to the capacity of people to act together towards common goals (Bourdieu, 1986; R. Burt, 1993; Häuberer, 2011; Lin, 2001b; Okazaki, 2008; Putnam, 1995b), and addresses a tourist destination as a group of actors trying to act collectively. However, in tourism, SC remains highly fragmented and vaguely operationalised (D.-B. Park, Lee, Choi, & Yoon, 2012; Zhao et al., 2011). Although there are several SC's measurement and assessment techniques for other fields (Grootaert et al., 2004; Grootaert & van Bastelar, 2002; Nyhan Jones & Woolcock, 2009), they are not fully transferable for the case of tourism. There is no tourism-specific integrated conceptual structure that guides the analysis of SC's dimensions within a tourist destination structure and its different levels of aggregated actors. Having such a framework is valuable not only for a more structured study of SC in tourism, it is especially valuable to ease reflecting upon a destination's capacity as a collective to self-determine a common future through tourism.

This article, thus: 1) identifies the key dimensions and the levels of scope to assess SC as the object of interest in a destination, and 2) presents a framework for the systematic and structured

study of a destination's SC as the basis to reflect upon the improvement of its collective action capacities. This work, therefore, is relevant to qualitatively assess and reflect on SC for a broad range of tourist destinations.

First, the notion of tourist destinations as collectives of actors that require resources to act is discussed in relation to SC as a key mobilising resource. Afterwards, we explain how theory was analysed as the basis for assessing a destination's SC. Later, two focusing factors are identified: destination's SC key dimensions and levels of scope. Then, a structured assessment matrix is presented, along with some approaches for its analytical application. Finally, some conclusions are drawn, pointing out implications of the matrix for future research.

2.4.2 SC as the key resource for collective actions at tourist destinations

Tourist destinations as dynamic collectives

Tourist destinations are dynamic entities formed by heterogeneous groups of actors. The commercial sector, for instance, is mostly composed of a wide variety of SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) (Pearce, 2008; Song et al., 2013; Thomas et al., 2011; Vanneste & Ryckaert, 2011, 2012). These firms, in turn, interact with several other groups of actors such as governments, residents, communities or associations (Viken, 2014) in the process of facilitating the tourism experience (Haugland et al., 2011; Pearce, 2008). From a governance perspective, destinations are multi-layered structures that facilitate or complicate those experiences. Territorially speaking, destinations may range from a specific attraction to the combination of places in multiple countries. While local actors might define and promote 'their destination' based on political boundaries (e.g. a region or even a country), 'the destination' that visitors experience might cross political boundaries along a route (e.g. travelling through South America from Quito to La Paz via Lima) (Pike & Page, 2014; Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011). This suggests that the notion of 'destination' needs to be dynamic, with a territory in constant reconfiguration, defined by the location and mobility of the actors involved in the case of interest.

Those multi-sectoral interactions, combined with the tourist involvement within geographical settings of tourist resources, may create the perception of the 'tourist destination' as a collective entity acting in a unified way. However, dynamics within destinations are usually far from being easily unified (Beritelli, 2011; Viken, 2014). First of all, destinations often contain host

societies where not all of the members play a role in tourism or are in favour of it (Dudwick et al., 2006; Macbeth et al., 2004; Nyhan Jones & Woolcock, 2009; Taylor, 2016). Secondly, joint participation might not be the rule as tourism actors might see each other as competitors (Von Friedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006). Thirdly, even when people may subjectively perceive the destination as a unit (Beritelli, Bieger, & Laesser, 2014), the final experience is in fact facilitated by a sum of diverse actors (Haugland et al., 2011). Furthermore, some of those actors may focus mainly on the economic return, or on marketing and promotional activities and tourists' quantity, neglecting the broader implications for the destination. Lastly, what the visitor may physically perceive as one destination could, in fact, be a combination of different territorial administrative entities (Saarinen, 2014). These, complicates coordination efforts.

Thus, the relationships between governments, firms and host societies at different levels, influence how stakeholders participate, and ultimately, benefit, either economically or socially. In this complex scenario, if self-determination and positive benefits are expected for host societies, at least some of the actors must find consensus on their goals, going beyond personal interests and acting collectively towards common goals (Beritelli, 2011; McGehee et al., 2010; P. W. Williams & Elkhashab, 2012).

Resources for collective actions

Throughout this paper, the term 'capital' will be used in its broadest meaning, referring to *all forms of resources* useful to reach a certain goal (Macbeth et al., 2004; McGehee et al., 2010). If we consider a destination as groups of actors trying to act collectively towards a common goal (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Halkier, Kozak, & Svensson, 2014; Viken, 2014), then a key aspect is the availability of the required capitals to perform collective acts. The most commonly recognised forms of capital, owned by individuals, are: economic or financial capital represented in monetary, property rights or also as built capital; and cultural or human capital, represented in skills and education (Bourdieu, 1986; R. Burt, 1993). In the specific field of tourism, Destination Capitals theory (Sharpley, 2009) adds other forms of capital such as natural or built environment, the access to and skills in the use of technologies and the political capacity to deal with external actors.

In the context of a tourist destination, all the diverse capitals are required to support collective actions. A fundamental issue, therefore, is the destination capacity to facilitate the flow of those resources towards a collective aim (Beritelli, 2011; McGehee et al., 2010; Okazaki, 2008; P.

W. Williams & Elkhashab, 2012). Agreements are required for that purpose, but that is just the beginning, subsequent cooperation must be effective enough to operationalise those agreements as well (Beritelli, 2011).

This operationalisation represents a challenging task because different forms of capital are in control of individual stakeholders. Firms and residents may possess human and technological capital (e.g. logistic experience and capacities put in place), local governments may facilitate access to natural or built capital (e.g. access to public heritage sites), local communities may possess cultural capital (e.g. craftsmanship), and national governments may influence the use of economic capital (e.g. public budget for projects). Hence, diverse capitals are in control of different actors, who might have diverse or even conflicting priorities, which creates barriers that prevent agreements from becoming actual collective actions. Brokers may play a mediating role and try to foster the collective via a neutral bargaining position, but their success, again, is dependent on the trust and authority they receive from the participants (Vanneste & Ryckaert, 2011).

Social capital as the mobilising resource

SC, conversely to the aforementioned forms of capital, is not an individual property, nor a fully pre-existing resource, and its potential does not reside in the hands of one individual actor (R. Burt, 1993; Coleman, 1990). That is, SC is a semi-realised resource embedded in existing social relations and connections, and SC is fully realised only through actual interactions between several actors with a common aim (Bourdieu, 1986). SC is, therefore, a resource shared between the intervenient parts, which allows them to mobilise their independently owned capitals for a common purpose. SC is 'the sum of the actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit' (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243), and '[s]ocial capital emerges in the structure of relations or networks among individuals or collectives' (Häuberer, 2011, p. 148).

To better understand SC's nature, let us think of the simplest level of SC, that of an individual person. The person's social interactions in the past create ties with others, who can contribute with common actions in the future (Gaag & Webber, 2008, p. 29). For instance, friends or relatives providing support in a moment of need, such as helping to move, or giving a recommendation for a job. A more complex level of SC, in the other hand, is that of a collective.

For instance, an association of entrepreneurs trying to obtain the local government's support for new infrastructure. In a group of actors, SC mobilises other kinds of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Häuberer, 2011) to achieve common interests. Furthermore, in tourist Destination Capitals theory (Sharpley, 2009), SC is considered as a special *functional* resource (Coleman, 1990), which drives other resources, such as financial and human capital, into purposive actions (R. Burt, 1993).

Thus, in the context of a tourist destination, we refer to SC at the collective level, where the ability to fuel interactions between several players to support collective actions towards common goals is decisive for the development and/or survival of a destination. In that sense, it is fundamental to foster a destination's SC if it is expected that host societies can look after themselves, playing a pivotal role in planning and development strategies (D.-B. Park et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2011).

Every coin has two faces: unfavourable manifestations of SC

As SC emerges from interactions between actors at different levels and locations, its properties can be compared to those of non-linearity and not centrality as in complex systems (Hartman, 2016b; Mai & Smith, 2015). Additionally, due to the complex dynamics within a destination, SC's outcomes have a considerable degree of unpredictability. Thus, SC cannot be considered a synonym of positive results or a problem-solving theory. SC is a neutral, heuristic construct that helps to understand collectives' interactions, independently of their positive or negative, desired on undesired outcomes. Therefore, if a destination wants to enhance its capacity for self-determination, it also needs to be aware of the negative aspects of SC (Portes, 2000). For example, when actors with influence, just for the fear of losing their power position, collectively oppose to changes in laws, methodologies or newcomers to participate, limiting heterogeneity in the group, which is a key element for innovation (Schmidt et al., 2016; A. M. Williams & Shaw, 2011). An even more negative form of SC also manifests when some actors take unfair advantage of their position and social connections in detriment of fellow participants (Levien, 2015). Another scenario is when actors indeed work together, demonstrating positive SC, but towards unrealistic goals, leading to frustration, or towards damaging goals, leading to undesired impacts.

Thus, in this paper, SC is not approached with a positive preloaded connotation. SC is approached as a heuristic tool to study a destination as a group of actors trying to act together,

with its positive and negative aspects. And although SC's outcomes in a destination are not fully controllable, the purpose of this paper is helping to understand its dynamics, to reflect on how to enhance positive collective action and self-determination.

2.4.3 SC in tourism studies and the importance of assessing it

The importance of assessing SC

If we consider a destination as a group of actors *trying* to act collectively and aiming for self-determination, then it seems fundamental to understand what hinders or enhances their capacity to *actually* act collectively (Macbeth et al., 2004). SC theory offers ground to study the gap between *statements* of intention and *effective* efforts. Understanding this gap can greatly contribute to the improvement of a destination's ability to maximise benefits in more sustainable ways (Jamieson, 2014; McGehee et al., 2010).

Nevertheless, SC is a 'slippery concept' (McGehee et al., 2010, p. 497), in the sense that its assessment is difficult to carry out since its characteristics are context dependent (Dudwick et al., 2006; Grootaert et al., 2004; Nyhan Jones & Woolcock, 2009). Moreover, different authors in both tourism and non-tourism related fields, propose diverse dimensions and approaches to assess or use SC to understand collective actions.

We argue, therefore, that a destination can greatly benefit from a more structured form to *qualitatively assess* SC for its particular case (Taylor, 2016), which is especially relevant because other forms *of measuring and quantifying* SC may overlook 'the complex and often times contradictory nature of human actions and interactions' (C.-A. Ooi, Hooy, & Mat Som, 2015, p. 433). Such an structured approach would help the destination's actors to better understand their position, the relation with other destinations and with influential institutions in power (D.-B. Park et al., 2012), and to reflect on how to enhance their SC for effective collective actions (Gil & Martínez, 2012).

Finally, and perhaps the main importance of easing the assessment of SC in tourist destinations is that a collective (firms + governments + host communities) capable of reflecting on its own capacities for action empowers its self-determination (Macbeth et al., 2004). This represents the ultimate attribute that a group of actors trying to act together towards their development can achieve (Sharpley, 2009). Self-determination implies the ability to collectively reflect,

agree and act in accordance with what is deemed relevant for the destination's actors, differentiating between final purposes (improved life conditions) and the mere means (tourism initiatives) (Taylor, 2016). Such an enhanced ability for collective reflection supports the fundamental challenge: act together to shape a common future and self-determine the development path.

Social capital: a concept vaguely operationalised in tourist destinations

There is a fragmented body of literature concerning SC (Nyhan Jones & Woolcock, 2009; Sander & Lowney, 2006), and especially when applied to understand the tourism phenomena (D.-B. Park et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2011). This is mainly because SC has been mostly used as an adaptable and fragmented conceptual framework and a means to tackle other specific subjects such as: rural tourism (D.-B. Park et al., 2012), entrepreneurship (Zhao et al., 2011), sports events (Jamieson, 2014; P. W. Williams & Elkhashab, 2012) and community based tourism (D.-B. Park et al., 2012). SC has not been approached as the object of study itself, producing limited progress on understanding how SC works in the complex scenarios of tourist destinations, and this, in turn, limits our understanding on how to improve the destination's capacity to self-determine its development path. Key features or dimensions to assess SC in tourism are not clear.

This fragmentation is especially limiting, because SC is not a tangible resource, requiring therefore, other kinds of dimensions to study it (Coleman, 1990; Sander & Lowney, 2006). In many cases those conceptual dimensions have been borrowed from related research fields dealing with SC and poverty alleviation or economic development at the level of individuals and households (Grootaert et al., 2004), organisations (Grootaert & van Bastelar, 2002), communities (Nyhan Jones & Woolcock, 2009) or regions, proposing, for instance, 'six sometimes overlapping dimensions of social capital: (i) groups and networks, (ii) trust and solidarity, (iii) collective action and cooperation, (iv) information and communication, (v) social cohesion and inclusion, and (vi) empowerment and political action' (Dudwick et al., 2006, p. 1).

Little attention has been devoted, however, to identify SC's *dimensions* for the case of tourist destinations, in a way that serve as conceptual guidelines to analyse a broader range of tourism contexts. Tourism theory would greatly benefit from frameworks to study destinations' SC, analyse how to enhance it and compare between different cases.

Towards a comprehensive set of key dimensions for SC in tourism

This paper's approach does not attempt to adjust SC theory to fit the needs of a specific case study. On the contrary, based on: existing theory; previous specifically-oriented applications of SC theory on tourism and non-tourism case studies; and detailed SC assessment methodologies for non-tourism fields, this paper identifies key characteristics to assess SC at the level of a tourist destination. In other words, drawing from specifically-oriented publications, we extract general SC's dimensions applicable for assessment of a broader range of tourism cases.

A detailed text analysis of diverse literature was conducted as follows;

1. The criteria for considering a publication as a useful source was whether it discussed specific key characteristics of SC, and not only the theory in general terms;
2. Following that criteria, thirty-nine publications (journal articles, books, research reports, and methodological manuals) were preselected from the vast SC literature;
3. In a second round, the preselected publications were reviewed in more detail to filter the ones that pointed key SC's characteristics in a more explicit way, for instance: 'The *structural dimension* concerns the overall pattern of connections *within a network* of social relationships' (Zhao et al., 2011, p. 1572); or 'competitors have to adhere to *certain basic principles*, strike a balance between seemingly contradictory strategies, and live by an agreed code of conduct' (Von Friedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006, p. 58);
4. By analysing similarities in the notions of those key characteristics we could group the filtered publications' content under keywords' columns, representing SC's key dimensions;
5. Through this process, extended and detailed tables were created. Simplified versions of the full tables are displayed in Tables 4 and 5.

Results identify two types of literature. First, *non-tourism related* literature on SC (Table 4), with eight publications deemed useful for this paper. Five discuss SC in conceptual terms and three present methodologies for SC's assessment in other fields. They cover a wide time-span, starting with early theorisations of SC, by Bourdieu (1986), until an extended compilation and discussion on SC's theoretical developments and updated theorisation by Häuberer (2011). Second, *tourism related* literature on SC (Table 5), also with eight publications deemed as useful for this paper. They cover a more recent time-span, from 2006 to 2015.

SC dimensions from non-tourism literature. From this group of publications, those discussing SC from a *conceptual approach,* point to two main recurring notions to identify SC's key dimensions. The first notion relates to terms such as groups, networks, membership, structure, relations, organisations, information and communications; we term this dimension as *Networks*. The second notion relates to terms such as norms, sanctions, trust, solidarity, values and reciprocity; we term this dimension as *Norms & Trust.* These dimensions refer mostly to preliminary conditions for SC to emerge in the first place: '[b]y 'social capital', I mean features of social life–networks, norms, and trust–that enable participants to act together' (Putnam, 1995b, p. 664). This more conceptual group of literature, however, does not refer too much about a dimension for the outcomes of that 'acting together'. It is the literature that presents *methodologies for the assessment* of SC (Dudwick et al., 2006; Grootaert et al., 2004; Nyhan Jones & Woolcock, 2009), the one that, besides supporting the notions of Networks and Norms & Trust, clearly points out to outcomes. This methodological literature introduces terms such as collective action, cooperation, cohesion, inclusion, empowerment and political action: '[t]he provision of many services requires *collective action* by a group of individuals. The extent to which this collective action occurs can be measured and is an indicator of underlying social capital' (Grootaert et al., 2004, p. 14). This refers to the aspect of SC's outputs, and we term this dimension as *Collective Action,* which stems from, and feedbacks into, the two previously identified dimensions.

Table 4. **Non-tourism related literature on social capital**

Authors by year	**Essential characteristics and keywords**		
	Keywords related to the structure	***Keywords related to the cognitive***	***Keywords related to the outputs***
Bourdieu, 1986	Members in a group	Building and maintaining trust	Material and symbolic exchange
Coleman, 1990	Intentional organizations – Information potential – Authority relations	Obligations and expectations – Norms and effective sanctions	---
Putnam, 1995	Networks	Norms – Trust	Act together to pursue shared objectives

Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998	Network of social relationships – Quality or strength of social ties	Shared representations, interpretations, and systems of meanings	---
Grootaert et al., 2004	Membership in local associations and networks	Trust and solidarity	Collective action
Dudwick et al., 2006	Groups and networks – Information and communication	Trust and solidarity	Collective action and cooperation – Social cohesion and inclusion – Empower. and polit. action
Nyhan Jones and Woolcock, 2009	Groups and networks – Information and communication	Trust and solidarity	Collective action and cooperation – Social cohesion and inclusion – Empower. and polit. action
Häuberer, 2011	Structural asset of networks	Generalized trust and norms of reciprocity	Useful for actions

Authors' elaboration based on the authors cited in the table.

SC dimensions from tourism literature. The first clearly identifiable notion is related to terms such as relations, structure and organisations: 'social capital is understood as the features of social organisation, such as *networks*' (D.-B. Park et al., 2012, p. 1512); we have termed this dimension also as *Networks*. The second clearly identifiable notion is related to terms such as values, beliefs and reciprocity: 'social capital refers to the degree of shared trust, mutual understanding and respect generated or lost among stakeholders' (P. W. Williams & Elkhashab, 2012, p. 318); we have termed this dimension also as *Norms & Trust*. As for the third dimension previously identified in the case of non-tourism literature, *Collective Actions*, tourism literature refers to it in more vague ways, such as: '[t]hrough *collectively mobilising shared resources* and obligations' (C.-A. Ooi et al., 2015, p. 429). This is because, in contrast to non-tourism literature that discusses theory, dimensions and methodologies to assess SC itself, tourism literature mostly uses pre-existing SC theory as a *means to study other specific aspects* in tourism (see left column of Table 5). Thus, tourism literature is more interested on describing the outcomes of the specific aspect of interest using a SC approach, rather than theorising on SC's outcomes within the context of a destination, or rather than discussing SC's

value to understand the capacity of a collective to shape a common future through tourism. Exceptions are the works by Barbini (2008) and McGehee et al. (2010), who do reflect on SC as the object of interest in tourism. Nevertheless, an upside from this more empirical approach from tourism literature, is that there is more coincidence when authors identify SC key characteristics. This is because tourism researchers became interested only after years of SC's theoretical development, finding therefore, a more refined conceptual basis to use SC as a means to study other issues on tourism. These empirical applications are valuable in the sense that they demonstrate the utility of SC's theory in tourism studies. Their approach, however, and precisely because of the broadness of SC's literature, is conceptually fragmented and dispersed, which also confirms the need for a more structured and integrated framework to assess SC in tourism.

Table 5. **Tourism related literature on social capital**

Authors by year (and research subject)	**Essential characteristics and keywords**		
	Keywords related to the structure	***Keywords related to the cognitive***	***Keywords related to the outputs***
Von Friedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006 (collective hotel marketing)	Networking – Meet face to face – Share information	Basic principles – Code of conduct – Active dialogue – Be efficient – Be equals – Trust each other – Have fun	Drive for action is decisive
Barbini, 2008 (SC indicators)	Networks – Functioning, heterogeneity and extension of networks	Shared norms, values and beliefs – Types and degree of trust	Mobilize resources by a group – Types and degree of collective actions
Zhao et al., 2011 (entrepreneurship)	Network of social relationships – Quality or strength of social ties	Shared representations, interpretations, and systems of meanings	---
McGehee et al., 2010 (relation between forms of capital)	Social networks – Social structures – Organizations	Norms – Trust – Reciprocity	Cooperation

Park et al., 2012 (communities conflict management)	Networks	Social trust – Reciprocity – Norms	Coordination – Cooperation for mutual benefits
Williams & Elkhashab, 2012 (DMOs consortium for Olympic games)	Stakeholders – Social relations and networks – Flows of information	Shared trust, mutual under- standing and respect – Shared norms, values and reciprocity	Collectively working – Collective action
Jamieson, 2014 (rural sport tourism)	Social networks	Social trust – Social norms	Solve common problems or assist each other – Cooperate for mutual benefit
C.-A. Ooi et al., 2015 (sustainability on mountain resorts)	Networks – Resources	Social norms – Trust and reciprocity	Resources collectively pooled for a common aim

Authors' elaboration based on the authors cited in the table.

2.4.4 Discussion

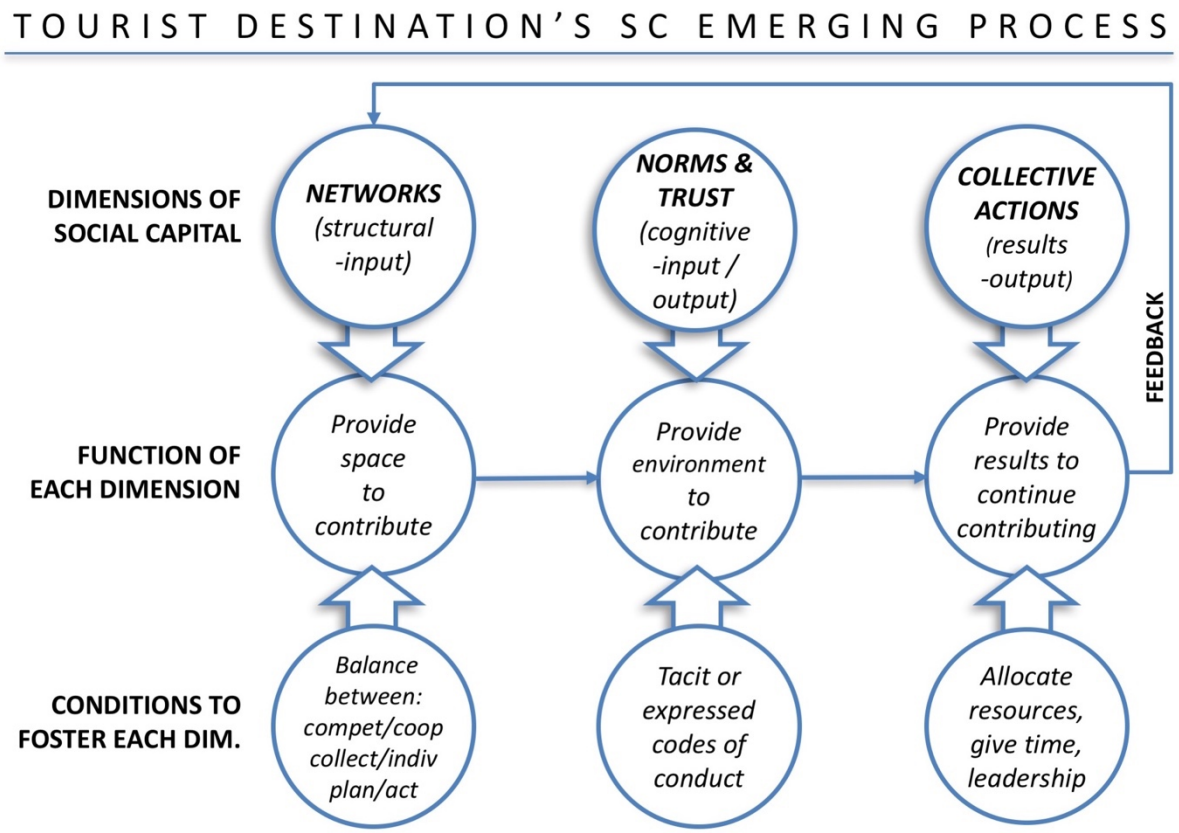
Based on the previous results, we elaborate on two focusing factors to ease the assessment of SC at the destination level: first factor, to focus on the identified SC's key dimensions seen as a dynamic process; and second factor, to focus on SC's levels of scope in the destination's structure.

First focusing factor: SC's key dimensions of an emerging process

Both, non-tourism as well as tourism related literature, highlight SC as a non-pre-existing resource that is not independently owned and one that emerges from a process of interactions. Nevertheless, to observe that process is not an easy task and the vast array of approaches from SC's literature makes it even more complex. Therefore, based on the results from the previous section, we propose to use the three identified key dimensions Networks, Norms & Trust and Collective Actions, as the building blocks for a framework to look at SC as a dynamic process (Figure 6). This is not a simple transference of SC's characteristics into tourism. Firstly, these key dimensions stem from the previously described analysis on tourism and non-tourism SC literature, spanning 29 years of research. Secondly, focusing on key dimensions, connecting

them in the form of a process (with their specific functions within the process) and identifying the conditions that foster them, provides a better visualisation of the dimensions' interdependences, and *a previously inexistent integrated dimensional structure to think about a destination's SC in more systemic way.* And thirdly, this structure presents a key approach for tourist destinations' SC by considering it as both, a process and an outcome that strengthens or weakens itself at different points and levels of interaction through the process.

Figure 6.



Authors' elaboration.

Networks, relates to the groups of a destination's actors, providing the *structure* for interactions and is the relatively most *tangible* dimension. Its function is to serve as the social 'space' where interactions towards common goals are *inputs* in the process. Key conditions to foster networks are to strive for a balance between cooperation and competition, collective and individual interests and planning and acting.

Norms & Trust, relates to principles and codes of conduct that form the *cognitive environment* to contribute with individual resources. This is the relatively most *intangible* dimension. Its

function is to provide a proper *environment* for decisions based on shared goals, beliefs and at least a minimum level of mutual confidence, acting as an *input* for, as well as an *output* from collective actions. Key conditions are to foster codes of conduct, reciprocity or mutual benefits, and sanction mechanisms for those who do not comply.

Collective Action, relates to the actual physical, intellectual, managerial, promotional or political work to generate the desired *output*, and demonstrates the capacity and benefits or damages of acting together. Here, SC transits from a potential into a realised resource. Its function is to evidence *results,* whose effects influence future initiatives. Key fostering conditions are to allocate resources (money, tools, skills, information), leadership, giving time, pursuing higher level goals and showing effective results.

We do not suggest that a destination's SC is limited to the three dimensions identified in Figure 6, but it does offer a solid and organised basis to facilitate analytical application for different tourism cases. SC starts as a potential resource residing in the actors' networks at different levels and once norms & trust facilitate purposive interactions, SC becomes manifest (either with positive or negative connotations) in the form of collective actions. The interactions of this process, and its results, influence the perceptions of the destination's actors, strengthening or weakening them as a collective along the way, denoting the nature of SC simultaneously as an emerging process and as an outcome that feedbacks its own process.

Second focusing factor: SC's levels of scope

Given that tourist destinations are formed by the aggregation of heterogeneous actors (governments, firms, residents) at various levels (local, regional, international), SC therefore, can be assessed at different levels of scope. Tourism and non-tourism literature agree on three levels identifiable within a destination's structure: *bonding, bridging and linking* (Dudwick et al., 2006; Grootaert et al., 2004; Jamieson, 2014; Macbeth et al., 2004; McGehee et al., 2010; Okazaki, 2008; C.-A. Ooi et al., 2015; Taylor, 2016; P. W. Williams & Elkhashab, 2012; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000). *Bonding* SC points to *the level of internal social ties* in a group; *bridging* SC points to *the level of horizontal social ties* with new actors or groups; *linking* SC points to *the level of vertical social* ties with actors or groups in power or in control of key resources. These different levels of social ties are where SC resides.

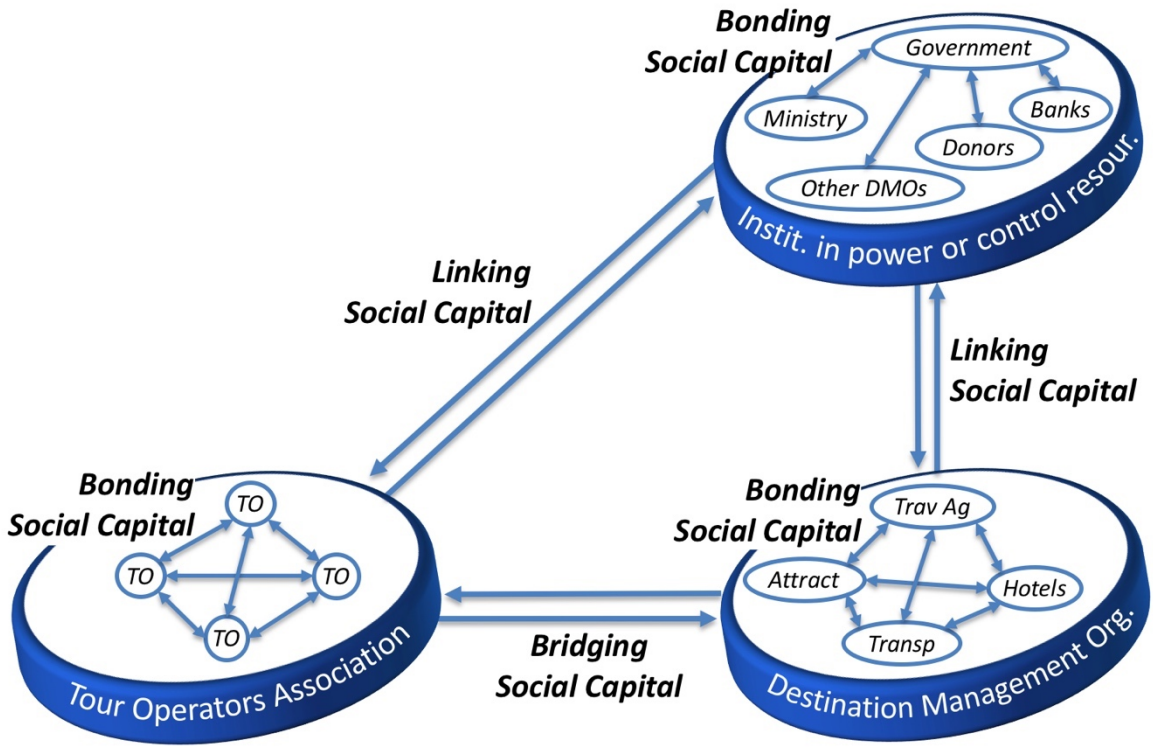
Figure 7 illustrates these interrelations at different levels of scope in an interconnected and

generalised form in the context of a tourist destination. Social ties and interactions, however, are dynamic and SC does not emerge in a uniform way. For instance, in the same example of Figure 7, tour operators may initially see each other as competitors. Nevertheless, they also share common challenges, such as barriers to access source markets or promoting favourable laws. Thus, bonding ties emerge, at least among those who can foresee an individual benefit from an alliance. Within their association, those operators strive for a balance between cooperation and competition, and perhaps some codes of conduct on sensitive issues within the group, such as minimum price policies, need to be put into practice. At this level, collective actions, like co-funded promotional campaigns, could already take place. However, operators may also require access to specialised skills or financing, reaching out for actors beyond their group, such as Destination Management Organisations (DMO). Bridging ties emerge. Nevertheless, among the operators, only some might foresee benefits from this between-groups relationship, putting some stress in their bonding ties and generating different individual participation through the new bridging ties. In a next level, the DMO may facilitate access to resources from players in power positions, such as the central government, aid agencies or banks, to support collective actions, such as the implementation of promotional and commercialisation platforms. Linking ties emerge. Access to those resources, however, may be subject to more formal rules, such as specific profiles or counterparts, which some operators may not comply with. This, potentially demotivates non-participants weakening previously generated bonding and bridging SC in the short-term. But this may also stimulate SC in the mid/long-term, as current non-participants may seem motivated to adapt and qualify for future opportunities.

This is one possible scenario of SC's dynamics at different levels of scope. Combinations, however, can be endless, confirming SC's non-linear and non-centrally controllable nature. And precisely for this, visualising different levels of scope is highly relevant for destinations to understand how relationships take place, and to identify the key actors that trigger or hinder those relationships, their motivations and intentions. This integrated, multi-level perspective, is fundamental to study how the destination can improve SC to self-determine its development path as a collective, because: '[s]tates, firms, and communities alone do not possess the resources needed to promote broad-based, sustainable development' (Woolcock & Narayan, 2000, p. 236).

Figure 7.

TOURIST DESTINATION'S SC **TYPES** AND THEIR LEVELS OF **SCOPE**



Authors' elaboration.

Combining dimensions and levels of scope in an assessment matrix

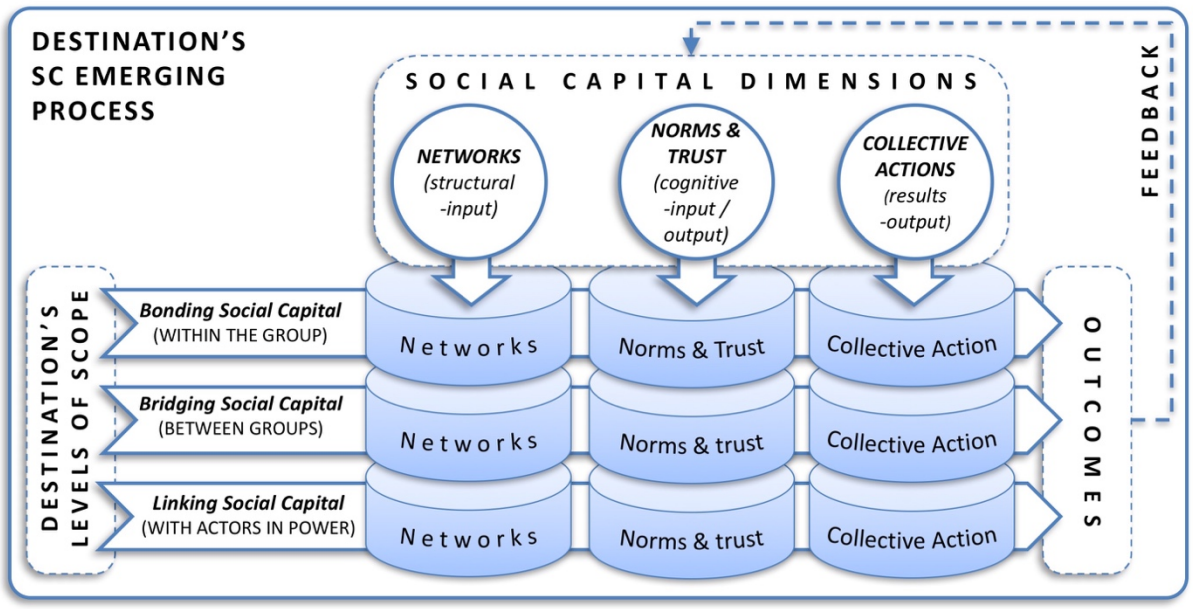
Figure 8 presents a standard relational matrix that combines both previously discussed focusing factors: destination's SC dimensions and levels of scope, to study a destination's SC in a more organised and interconnected way. Now, it is possible to focus on specific destinations' SC dimensions: structure (networks), cognitive (norms & trust) and outcomes (collective actions); and at specific levels of scope: within the group (bonding), between groups (bridging) or with actors in power (linking). In that way we can better identify the involved actors and the barriers and enhancers of their interrelations at different levels within the destination. This provides the basis to reflect on how to improve the destination's collective capacity.

This standard assessment matrix is a basis to guide analysis but does not imply that a destination is a homogenous collective or that interactions are linear. If a destination is composed by different groups, at different geographic and institutional scales, neither the groups, nor the collective formed by them, are homogenous. Multiple interactions happen simultaneously and continuously at different levels of scope within the destination. Further,

there could be individuals that belong to different groups. For example, a tour guide (as a person) or an attraction (as a firm), may also act as tour operation coordinators and participate as natural members of different groups, acting as potential bridging agents. Nevertheless, these multi-group individuals could also spread negative SC, for example, by resisting innovation or benefiting in detriment of their associates. Figure 8, therefore, is a guide to dive into the exploration of different contexts to reveal interactions and reflect on how to balance collective and individual interests.

Figure 8.

TOURIST DESTINATION'S SC ASSESSMENT MATRIX



Authors' elaboration.

Because of a destination's heterogeneity, existing methods of assessing SC at the individual, household, community or national levels are not totally transferable to tourism. Firstly, destinations need an integrated way of keeping the multi-scalar and the multi-sectoral nature of tourism under constant consideration. And secondly, current SC's theory presents too much variation in terminology and methods. The assessment matrix, therefore, is especially relevant for destinations because they are dynamic entities, requiring dynamic approaches to look at them at different moments. Thus, considering that in a tourist destination interactions are complex (different groups, at different levels and locations), the assessment matrix (which includes an outcomes dimension -Collective actions- as part of the process) presents a dynamic approach by considering SC as both, a process (going through the three key dimensions) and

simultaneously as an outcome (emerging at different points and levels within the destination), which is constantly influencing its own process, weakening or strengthening the collective's SC. This non-static nature of social interactions calls the attention on the need to constantly reconsider through time, why destinations' actors (mostly conformed by SMEs usually avid of quick positive results) continue or quit their participation.

Application of the assessment matrix: some approaches

A systematic study of a destination's SC (which was previously vaguely operationalised in tourist studies), can now be performed through the assessment matrix. Its structure facilitates the generation of a reflective, organised and interconnected knowledge from the case under study, as the basis to reflect upon the ultimate purpose: how to improve a destination's SC towards self-determination.

For that, the matrix identifies three destination's SC dimensions (horizontal axis Figure 8) and crosses them with three SC's levels of scope (vertical axis Figure 8), generating nine *cross-related focusing points*. By progressively analysing each one of those crossed focusing points, we can reflect upon: which actors are networking at what levels and between levels; what norms & (lack of) trust enhance or hinder actors' interactions at the different levels; and, how and why collective actions take (or do not) take place at different levels of scope within the destinations' structure.

A different way to apply the matrix to 'enter' the destination, is by using a *reverse approach*. The analyst starts by taking a destination's given outcome to understand how the collective and its SC behaved. For instance, the implementation of a tourism route where multiple actors participated. First, the analyst can look into the current state and implications (outcomes dimension) of that initiative, at the different levels of the destination's SC structure. Second, the analyst can describe the norms & (lack of) trust (cognitive dimension) that lead to those results. And third, the destination's actors and key roles (structural dimension) at the different SC's levels of scope can be identified.

Another way to apply the matrix is to take a *central actor* approach, such as a DMO, as the entry point to study the destination's SC dynamics. Here each one of the matrix's focusing point helps to reflect on the stakeholders directly and indirectly related to the central actor (structural dimension) at different levels of scope. Then the analysis will focus on the norms &

(lack of) trust (cognitive dimension) that allows or hinders the DMO's SC to achieve effective results. And finally, the analyst will reflect on the outcomes and the broader implications (results dimension) of the DMO's collective actions at the different levels of scope within the destination.

Although the previously suggested approaches are already used in tourism studies, the contribution of the assessment matrix is that now, those approaches can be placed within the context of a destination's SC and serve as different ways to study how to improve collective capacities for self-determination.

2.4.5 Conclusions

A destination can be seen as a collective of actors trying to act together, interacting at different levels, within a complex scenario of relationships. The definition of the tourist destination, thus, should go beyond politico-administrative boundaries, into the notion of a territory dynamically determined by the location of the involved actors as a collective. Nevertheless, if this collective wants to self-determine a common future through tourism, they need to share some goals and mobilise resources, which have varied ownership, availability, quality, quantity and influence to achieve those goals.

SC is the resource that allows mobilisation of other resources towards common goals, either with positive or negative effects. The fundamental challenge is, therefore, how to study destinations' SC to reflect on their capacity to self-determine their development path as a collective. SC theory offers the basis to tackle this question. Nevertheless, its application in tourism is dispersed and SC is not the research subject, but only a means to study other tourism related subjects.

This article, therefore, has contributed by presenting a standardised and integrated framework, and different approaches, to assess a tourist destination's SC as the basis to reflect on how to improve it. Based on tourism and on non-tourism related theory and methodologies, the paper has determined SC's three key dimensions, its emerging process, conditions to foster it and its three levels of scope within a tourist destination. These determinations are especially important to set SC within the context of tourist destinations as the tourism phenomenon is also multidimensional and has multiple levels of aggregation. Thus, this paper has also taken in

consideration the non-linear and non-centrally controllable nature of SC, which are also characteristics of tourist destinations. The discussion also highlighted the importance of seeing SC in tourism simultaneously, as a process and as an outcome that feedbacks its own emerging process, and in constant transformation. The assessment matrix, therefore, integrates those principals into a framework that allows a structured and organised way of analysis and reflection on tourist destinations' SC as the object of study.

Several conditions were also mentioned to foster each SC's key dimension specifically. But in a more general perspective, we argue that SC enhancement at the destination level depends on sustained processes, through its three dimensions and levels of scope, facilitated by brokering actors that have the technical, legal and political capacity to play that role. The assessment matrix, therefore, represents a comprehensive 'guide' to better understand how SC works in a specific case, and to reflect on how to improve outcomes. It is expected, thus, that by contributing to the understanding of SC at the destination level, actors further realise that the achievement of their development goals depends on their capacity to collectively conceive initiatives and commit resources in a way that fosters networks, trust and collective actions, more than on their capacity for isolated efforts.

Also, we expect that the framework contributes to further develop theory on destinations' SC enhancement as a key resource for collective actions and self-determination. For that, future work should draw on the application of the assessment matrix to diverse study cases in order to refine it, improve it and advance on the understanding of SC in tourist destinations. However, this call for empirical analysis may take different approaches. Some may attempt to validate the model by testing the links between the dimensions and levels of scope presented in Figure 8. This could be done, for example, through factorial analyses, structural equation models or surveys. Nevertheless, while such tests may somehow confirm the model itself, they may not explain what happens in reality within the tourist destination's SC. Thus, we call for scholars and researchers to keep in mind the purpose of the model. This is, to facilitate an organized analysis of complex social interactions within a tourist destination, which in turn, may provide insights for the improvement of its collective capacity and self-determination. We recommend, therefore, that research efforts consider the discussion in the subsection 'Application of the assessment matrix: some approaches' within their aims. Doing so may also provide valuable contributions for practice in the related study cases, further than only aiming for theoretical and academic contributions.

III. METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

The methodological approach of this research is to tackle the general research question, using my final case study, based on the introduction of a tourism-specific model that describes the dynamics for the emergence of the tourism phenomenon, and a methodology for analytical application of the mode-as-a-tool. In this context, Paper 3 represents the development of this tourism-specific methodology.

3.1 PAPER 3 AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL (iMODEL) FOR DECISION-MAKING IN TOURISM[7]

Abstract

This article contributes to the conceptual and methodological strengthening of the study of tourism as a complex phenomenon using systems thinking. It is aimed at supporting decision-making for tourist destinations' planning and management. Few authors provide a schematic model of how tourism works, and among them, even fewer expressly use a systemic approach. However, nobody presents a methodology for their models' analytical application to bridge theory and practice. The integrative model (iModel) fills this gap. It is developed through a review of previous models, research in Belgian, German and Ecuadorian cases, discussion in experts' panels and supported by a long experience in destination development in Ecuador. Main contributions are 1) the introduction of a model of tourism as a dynamic complex system based on the functions performed by the actors involved in the tourism experience; and 2) the presentation of a methodology to apply the model-as-a-tool for decision-making support.

Keywords: Analytical application; decision-making; methodology; iModel; systems thinking; tourism planning and management.

[7] This subchapter is the authors accepted manuscript of an article published on August 13, 2018, as the version of record in Tourism Planning & Development © Taylor & Francis, http://www.tandfonline.com, as: Rodriguez-Giron, S., Vanneste, D. & Ioannides D. (2018). An integrative model (iModel) for decision-making in tourism. Tourism Planning and Development, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/21568316.2018.1506818

3.1.1 Introduction

This paper develops an integrative model-as-a-tool (iModel) that can be used to analyse diverse aspects of interest in tourism destinations to support decision-making. As tourism implies interactions among different actors at different locations and levels (Judd, 2006; Nicolau, 2013; Pearce, 2008; Pearce et al., 2007; Smith, 1994), the iModel sees tourism as a phenomenon emerging from a dynamic complex system of interactions between various so-called facilitators (residents, organisations, firms, governments and attractions) and visitors (excursionists and tourists). Thus, it emphasises the integration of both, the destination-specific and the origin-specific sides, by pointing out the functions that the involved actors perform, leading to the emergence of tourism experiences.

Given the complex and dynamic nature of the tourism phenomenon, the iModel as such does not propose any standard answers, but a tool to explore and understand tourism's dynamics in different cases and contexts. The iModel was also developed to contribute to a more conceptual debate about how tourism functions, a topic that through the years has entered a recess (McKercher, 1999), being overtaken by industrial analogies with deterministic or commercial connotations, failing to depict the diverse nature of the tourism phenomenon.

The schematic part of the iModel represents the basis for a methodological tool. This development emerges from the main author's research on guidelines to tackle key tourism management challenges, such as a destination's capacity to attract the kind of visitors that match local development goals. His research has conceptually related the tourism phenomenon with Systems thinking, stemming from Complexity and Chaos theories (McKercher, 1999), as a framework to study tourist destinations' development. The research draws upon 14 years (2000 to 2014) of experience in tourism management and multi-stakeholder facilitation for decision-making in Ecuador, upon the exploration of three Destination Management Organisations (DMO) at the municipal, provincial and regional levels in Flanders, Belgium (2015), and upon research on the Cajas Massif Biosphere Reserve, in Southern Ecuador. This provides us with helps inputs from literature, empirical research and experience to conceive the iModel as a tool to support practitioners' need for continuous updated insights for decision-making. As well as to contribute to the wider literature that examines tourism as a complex system. We consider, therefore, that the iModel proposed in this paper is useful to connect theory and practice with applicability for instances beyond the aforementioned cases.

We begin by discussing the need for models and the link between theory and practice. Then we explain the methodology for the development of the iModel. We continue by reviewing some major existing models that describe the tourism phenomenon. Our paper proceeds to discuss the three conceptual pillars for the structuration of the iModel and describes it along with its methodology for application. Lastly, final remarks, limitations and recommendations for further work are stated.

3.1.2 The need for models

Experience shows that a fundamental conflict between academic research and tourism management is that scientific in-depth approaches regularly fall short of fulfilling the broad, holistic and pragmatic view that destination managers need. This is often the case of destination managers who occupy different middle-level positions and must inform final decision-makers (the top end), while simultaneously design strategies to improve everyday management and operation (the front end). To cope with that challenging task, managers operate within short periods of time and need to constantly acquire updated insights on their destinations' situation. Managers would greatly benefit, therefore, from a tool to perform their own continuous research, in iterative short periods of time, to support practical decisions in a scientifically underpinned way.

This is in line with some authors who call for greater connection between theory and practice stating that '…we wholeheartedly agree that after all this time we need to move on from mere theoretical discourse to a more action-oriented agenda', arguing in favour of '…a pragmatic and practical adoption of best practices to better understand the spatial dynamics of tourism behaviour and the tourism industry' (Ioannides & Debbage, 2014, p. 115). This coincides with other authors who comment that scholars in the area of tourism '…need to develop a distinctive niche by undertaking basic and applied research to address public and private sector problems' (Hall & Page, 2014, p. 31).

While established DMOs, such as those in Flanders, may have developed stronger and more complete processes to support their decision-making, other less structured entities are not able to grasp all the aspects of improving its destination development. Hence, tourism-specific decision-making tools can help managers who are squeezed between everyday concerns and

the need for research-based long-term management strategies, monitoring mechanisms and adaptive planning (Bramwell, 2011). To do so, a model that could be also used as an analytical tool, may help towards obtaining a synthetic view of the destination's circumstances to build practical guidelines.

Models can be conceived in different ways, although it all comes down to a simplified representation of reality structured by the essential features of the phenomena of interest (Lindsay et al., 2003; Pearce, 2008). This allows analysts to develop explanations by empirically testing the relationships among elements (Ostrom, Cox, & Schlager, 2014; Schlager, 2007). Several models describe the tourism phenomenon (see Section 4). We argue, however, that to depict the dynamic nature of tourism we need a more systemic and integrative theoretical approach, but more importantly, precise directions are needed on how to apply models as analytical tools to tackle destinations' practical issues, such as for example: how to overcome low capacity for collective action or lack of skills (Adiyia, Vanneste, & Van Rompaey, 2016); how to empower local communities' control over their own well-being through tourism (Scheyvens, 2011); how to improve the destination's position in the value chain (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2001); how to match the needs of different visitors' segments (Pearce, 2008); or, how to use and protect local assets through tourism (Sharpley, 2009). The starting point to achieve this more conceptually integrative and methodologically practical approach, is having a way to identify the key elements of the tourism phenomenon and describe the interactions between its actors. The proposed iModel and its methodology is one option to achieve this.

3.1.3 Methodology to build the iModel

It consisted of an intensive and iterative process of theoretical work, contrast with practice and consultation with experts. This allowed to progressively improve the model through different testing phases, until the final one presented in this article. As a conceptual basis to build the iModel, several elements of existing models were considered, while their limitations were also identified (see Section 4). For this, we selected models that expressly present a scheme, with clearly identified components to describe how tourism works. In this way we could review what has been discussed on tourism seen as a system, that is, as a set of interacting elements that collectively generate outcomes (Baggio, 2008; Dekkers, 2015; Mella, 2012). The complete iModel's development process took between August 2014 and May 2017. From the first

version based on literature review pertaining systems thinking and tourism (2014), we went through experience-based assessments with Belgian DMOs (2015), feedback from internal and international tourism research panels (2015, 2016, 2017) and input from extensive fieldwork with Ecuadorian DMOs and other Ecuadorian and German stakeholders (2015, 2016, 2017). The development of the iModel, therefore, is based on a mixed methodology with qualitative data gathering (interviews) as the main methodological format and critically debating and testing the applicability of the iModel's logic in several expert panels and case studies. This process of construction and deconstruction led to the final version of the iModel.

3.1.4 Reviewing existing models

In this longitudinal analysis, we start with the work of Leiper (1979, 1990b), who since early stages acknowledged the suitability of a systemic thinking to tackle the complexities of tourism. He isolates five component elements of the system: tourists, generating regions, transit routes, destination regions and a tourist industry. Leiper also contends that tourism is only partially industrialised (1990a), meaning that tourism is not one large industry but a phenomenon where industrial forms (like all-inclusive vacations) but also non-industrial-like forms of tourism (like visiting family) take place. Although this is one of the earliest and most complete contributions on systemic thinking, Leiper's approach orbits around the industrial paradigm as the discursive reference.

In 'The Tourism Product' (Smith, 1994), the author argues that for tourism to be considered an industry, a generic product and process must exist. He presents a model of the tourism production function with four elements: resources, facilities, services and experiences. Although Smith recognises that the outcome of tourism is an intangible experience, he takes an explicit industrial approach towards the generation of that experience, focusing on the economic aspect of tourism.

In 1997 Molina proposed a systemic approach for tourism, composed by a set of interacting subsystems to achieve a common goal: superstructure, demand, infrastructure, attractions, equipment and the hosting communities. However, the systems' structure, or how to elucidate the relations among its elements, are not clear.

Later on, McKercher (1999) criticises existing deterministic tourism models, arguing that they fail to explain complex relationships between and among the elements of a tourism system. He argues that tourism functions as a non-linear, non-deterministic system and uses chaos and complexity theories to propose a model with nine elements: the traveller, communication vectors, considerations, destination, external agencies, other tourism externalities, non-tourism externalities, outputs and rogues. McKercher fully embraces the principals of systems thinking in a compelling way. However, the author does not provide any indications on how to use his model for practical analytical purposes.

Later, in 2001, Beni presented a scheme of tourism as an open system influenced by and influencing on other systems. It is composed by three sets of elements: environmental relationships (cultural, social, ecological and economic), structural organisation (superstructure and infrastructure) and operational actions (the dynamic of the system including: supply, market, demand, production, distribution and consumption). The author represents the general relations among elements and conditioning circumstances, but the scheme still remains too general for detailed analytical applicability.

In (2006), Judd addressed tourism as a production process, describing three identifiable inputs: marketing and image, place infrastructure and service providers. Although the author recognises that the personal experience is the final outcome of tourism, he only concentrates on the commercial side of the tourism phenomenon.

Afterwards, Pearce (2008) presents 'A needs-functions model of tourism distribution'. He emphasises the needs of three tourist segments (independent, customised and packaged) and the four functions required to meet those needs: information provision, assortment, bundling and booking and purchase. In a more didactic way to guide practical analysis, Pearce provides a matrix linking the functions of suppliers in relation to the tourist segments. Nevertheless, the author focuses only on the phase of distribution of services and products within tourism.

Yet another contribution is 'The Tourism phenomenon' (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009), which organises tourism's complexity in a multi-ring scheme. The authors place aspects such as the processes, natural resources and built environment in the outer rings. The sectors of the tourism industry are placed in the middle interior rings. And in the central ring they place public and

private organisations along with the tourist at the core. This model, however, highlights the 'tourism industry' approach, neglecting non-industrial forms of tourism.

Finally, in 2017, Nicholls et al. tackle the power of Agent Base Modelling (ABM) for tourism. This is a computational method for scenarios-building to potentially support decision-making in subjects such as: policy, visitors' management, tourist behaviour, planning or marketing. However, '[t]o function effectively, ABM requires information (whether based on observation or theory) regarding agents' goals and interactions' (Nicholls et al. 2017, 12). Thus, ABM is not a model itself, but a tool for modelling possible outcomes. And precisely, the iModel attempts to help with the collection of that essential information in an organized and connective way.

Although this might not be an exhaustive list of existing models, it is very representative, as there are few authors providing a theoretic schematic of how tourism works and even fewer expressly using a systems thinking approach (Jafari & Xiao, 2016). A downside, however, in most of the models is that they are built around the notion of tourism as an industry or as a commercial activity. This is a valid approach in principle, but one that limits analytical possibilities on social or environmental factors within the dynamics of the tourism phenomenon, or analysis on non-commercial forms of tourism, falling short in depicting tourism's diverse nature (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004). But more importantly, although all the models have the potential to ease analysis on the complexity of tourism, none of them expressly present a methodology for analytical application (Nicholls et al. 2017), leaving the reader with the uneasy task to figure out how to use those valuable schemes for practical purposes. This gap exists, even though one of the key expected contributions from systemic approaches is to help study and solve real-world complex problems and support decision-making (Dekkers, 2015; Jafari & Xiao, 2016), bridging theory with practice, as pleaded by several tourism academics (Hall & Page, 2014; Ioannides & Debbage, 2014). And the lack of this linkage is precisely the root of criticism on the application of systems thinking-based models, arguing that they offer general explanations but cannot deepen knowledge for a comprehensive understanding, leaving unanswered questions such as: what is the logic among the components of a specific system? How can the characteristics and outputs of a system be qualitatively analysed? Or, how can the tourism system be delimited? (Lohmann & Netto, 2017).

To answer those questions is not an easy task. A model is intended to be as simplified as possible encompassing the essential elements (Curtis, Kellner, & Over, 1992; Lindsay et al., 2003). Nevertheless, the complexity of tourism means that its variability and the unpredictable manner in which it may behave, make it almost impossible to model tourism holistically (Lindsay et al., 2003). Therefore, the iModel presented in this paper does not intend to fit or explain all possible tourism forms. Rather it attempts to contribute for a broader and practical modelling approach to what has so far existed, allowing the analysis of different dynamics within diverse environments, as required for the study of open systems such as tourism. This can contribute to '… bring about a paradigmatic shift in tourism thinking which embraces multiple worldviews and cultural differences' (Bianchi, 2012, p. 46).

3.1.5 Building the iModel on three pillars

Based on the previous discussion, in this section we develop the three conceptual pillars that sustain the iModel: 1) to address the tourism phenomenon as a dynamic complex system; 2) to integrate the visitors' and the facilitators' perspectives to provide a more diverse view on the nature of tourism; and 3) to present a methodology for the application of the model-as-a-tool to support decision-making.

3.1.5.1 First pillar: tourism as a dynamic complex system

This pillar aims at addressing *tourism as a phenomenon emerging from a dynamic system of interactions* that produces different forms of experiences (d'Hauteserre, 2006; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). We do not refer to the notion of *system,* however, in a mechanistic or reductionist way, that is, as a structure with full autonomy, clear limits to its environment and functional closure (Darbellay & Stock, 2012), nor as a structure generating results in a deterministic way. On the contrary, we refer to tourism as a *dynamic complex system* in the sense that systems thinking and complexity sciences do: that is, a system as a set of diverse elements with different functions, closely interacting among themselves and collectively generating diverse outcomes. The system as a whole presents characteristics that the elements do not have independently; it cannot necessarily be centrally controlled and it simultaneously influences and is influenced by multiple conditions of its environment (Baggio, 2008; Dekkers, 2015; Mella, 2012).

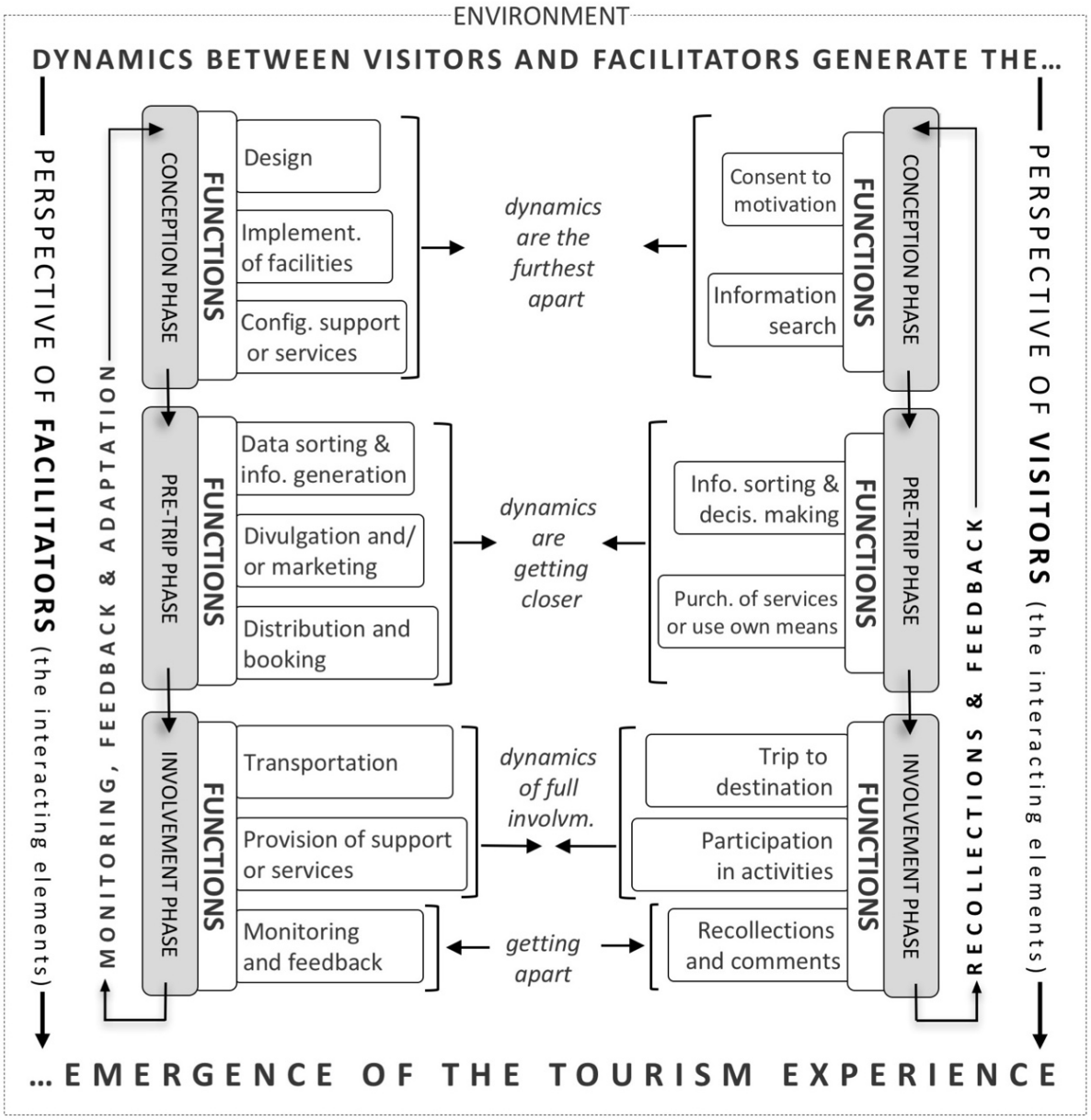
The tourism phenomenon, hence, presents the profile of a dynamic complex system. Diverse actors, who are the basic interacting elements, perform different functions. There are actors at the destinations and in route supporting all sorts of tourism experiences, constantly interacting among them. Their already complex dynamics are influenced by the visitors in varied forms, depending on their age, culture, budget, time or gender (McKercher, 2008; McKercher & Zoltan, 2014; Sharpley, 2009; Smith, 1994). Simultaneously, the final tourism experience is influenced by diverse social, natural, political, economic, cultural and legal factors from the environment. This makes it virtually impossible to centrally coordinate the full range of interactions or totally predetermine the final outcomes. Destinations therefore, need to better understand how this complexity functions and given that the tourism experience is determined by subjective perceptions of quality, it may be more appropriate to use a soft systems approach (Jafari & Xiao, 2016). A systems thinking approach, thus, contributes by tackling tourism as a dynamic *phenomenon* with multiple implications (Ioannides & Debbage, 1998), calling for an interdisciplinary view (Leiper, 1979), beyond commercial or industrial perspectives (Hall & Page, 2012; UNWTO, 2014).

The iModel's functional approach scheme, based on the first pillar

Systems are better described by the function they perform than by describing its constituent parts. In the same way that a car is better described as a transportation means (the function it performs) than as a set of tires, motor and seats (its parts); the way that tourism works as a system can be better understood by the functions that the tourism actors (tourism's key elements: visitors and facilitators) perform, than by describing the actors themselves or the material or intangible means they use. This view corresponds to a basic principal of systems thinking, which calls to understand phenomenon by looking at the overall functioning of the elements rather than by describing the elements independently. A functional approach also provides dynamic adaptability to the iModel, because while the required functions for tourism to emerge remain essentially the same and go through similar phases (Figure 9), the involved actors, the trajectory of interactions and their motivations vary depending on the case under observation (Figure 10). For example, in the case of a tour operator and its customers, interactions happen in a commercial context and the actors are different than those in the case of a person receiving a friend in his house, where interactions happen in a context of friendship and in a different sequence. Nevertheless, in both cases actors perform certain functions that

go through phases of: conceiving ideas, preparations before the trip and final involvement in activities which, in turn, feedback future decisions.

Figure 9. **The iModel's schematic structure**



Authors' elaboration

Hence, instead of naming actors or objects to describe how tourism works, the iModel's schematic structure points out essential functions required for the tourism experience to emerge, which may be more or the less present in different tourism forms. In this way, the iModel is suitable for the study of tourism as a dynamic phenomenon, as there are no prefixed interconnections between the functions. This provides a dynamic starting point for analysis,

where, by identifying which functions are performed in the case under investigation, also the actors and the involved resources can be better identified, which in turn, helps to differentiate between the system (formed by the actors directly involved) and its environment (all other actors and conditions). Based on the concepts provided by systems thinking, the iModel is schematically structured (Figure 9) by the *functions* (Dekkers, 2015; Hoff, 1992) performed from the perspectives of the visitors and the facilitators (the interacting *elements*). Their interactions generate *dynamics* (Dekkers, 2015; Ghosh, 2015; Mella, 2012) that evolve through different *phases* into a progressive encounter of full involvement, allowing the *emergence* (Hartman, 2016a) of the tourism experience. Further, all of these internal dynamics are influenced by its *environment* (Dekkers, 2015; Hartman, 2016a; Mella, 2012), as an open system, meaning that the outcomes of the tourism system also influence its environment.

The *functions* are the basic building blocks in the iModel. They represent an action with a purpose or a performed role that led to the system's outcomes (Chen et al., 2013; Hoff, 1992; Mahner & Bunge, 2001). This is when visitors or facilitators take resources such as: time, data, skills, land, raw materials or money; and through their actions they transform those resources into other means required for the tourism experience to emerge, such as: a development plan, an itinerary, a visiting or an accommodation facility, a tangible product or a service. Functions, therefore, are actions performed by the tourism actors who take tangible or intangible resources and transform or exchange them for something required for the tourism experience to happen.

3.1.5.2 Second pillar: integration of the visitors' and facilitators' perspectives

By *visitors* we refer either to excursionists or tourists (UNWTO, 2014) and by *facilitators'* we refer to residents, organisations, firms, governments or attractions. They are the basic elements of the system because they perform the functions and interactions that generate the dynamics for the emergence of the tourism phenomenon. Here, we will use the term *facilitators* instead of 'suppliers' as a more integrative way of referring to the range of actors from that side. We propose this term because 'suppliers' is typically used to denote commercial firms, resembling the so-called 'industry' analogy with tourism. But they are not the only ones responsible for the generation of tourism (Brouder & Fullerton, 2015). Instead, within the term 'facilitators' we deliberately include all actors that may participate in the emergence of the tourism experience, and who may not only be located at the destination, but also all those 'middle men' or in-route actors that participate. Lastly, an integrative model should also give the possibility

to consider all other actors not directly participating in the observed outcomes but who also influence results. In a systems thinking perspective, they all are considered in the system's environment.

Interactions between visitors and facilitators is especially relevant in tourism (Urry & Larsen, 2011) because, contrary to what the widespread use of the term 'tourism industry' (Clancy, 1998; Ford et al., 2012; Judd, 2006; Milne & Ateljevic, 2001; Mosedale, 2006; Papatheodorou, 2004; Romero & Tejada, 2011; Smith, 1994; Thomas et al., 2011) may suggest, the 'product' of that so-called industry is not a tangible one. The final outcomes of tourism are *intangible personal experiences* as 'Tourism is something that people do, not something businesses produce' (Smith, 2004, p. 29). Tourism experiences are facilitated by several means and emerge in different forms, some of which, may resemble industrial processes, while others forms of tourism do not (United Nations & UNWTO, 2010; UNWTO, 2007). The experience progressively emerges as visitors move to the places of interest (Cresswell, 2008) and get involved, thereby co-creating that experience (Vargo & Lusch, 2008) through interactions with all sorts of facilitators (Judd, 2006; Leiper, 1979; Nicolau, 2013; Pearce, 2008; Sánchez, Callarisa, Rodríguez, & Moliner, 2006; Smith, 1994), including service providers, authorities, friends and family, residents, intermediaries and/or other actors.

An integrative approach is therefore fundamental, because the tourism phenomenon emerges from the actors' interactions. The tangible means of tourism (e.g., accommodation, infrastructure, transportation), as well as the intangible means of tourism (e.g., information, the right to access an attraction, a performance or event) are not the touristic product. They are *merely the means* that support the emergence of the product, that is, the experience. Regardless of the tourism case, the final tourism experience will always involve interactions between visitors and facilitators. Thus, by integrating both perspectives in the iModel, the interactions between both sides will always be under scrutiny. In other words '… focus is shifting from the thing exchanged to one on the process of exchange…' (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, p. 15), in other words, from the idea of 'delivering a product' to the idea of *the tourism experience as the product*.

The iModel's integrative approach, based on the second pillar

Models of how tourism works usually show visitors and facilitators moving towards each other from opposite ends of an scheme (Leiper, 1979; Pearce, 2008; Song et al., 2013). The iModel (Fig. 9), on the other hand, displays visitors' and facilitators' perspectives in a parallel progressive process of increasing interactions that create the tourism experience.

During the ***Conception Phase*** facilitators set up the service or support they will provide and reflect on how to maximise benefits (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003; Kaplinsky & Morris, 2001; Okazaki, 2008; Smith, 1994). Visitors, in the other hand, realise their needs, consent to the motivation of travelling and look for information (Buhalis & O'Connor, 2005; Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003; Hall & Page, 2014). Both sides are the 'furthest apart', not necessarily in physical terms, but in the sense of interactions. The tourism experience is still only potential and it may arise with non-commercial connotations (e.g., visiting family using one's own car) (UNWTO, 2014), as well as with commercial connotations (e.g., purchasing a tour package).

During the ***Pre-Trip Phase*** take place the visitors' decisions and the facilitators' commitment to provide the required means. While facilitators try to reach visitors with the right information at the right moment (Gereffi, 2001; Jensen, 2009; Mosedale, 2006; Pearce, 2008), visitors take decisions based on the available information (Larsen, 2014; Nicolau, 2013; Perkins & Thorns, 2001; Smith, 1994; Stern & El-Ansary, 1992; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Agreements are set either informally (e.g. notifying a friend of one's arrival date) or through formal contracts (e.g., making a hotel reservation) (Pearce, 2008; Stern & El-Ansary, 1992; Vanhove, 2011). The experience has started to a certain extent as pre-trip interactions are also part of the final experience (Sánchez et al., 2006).

During the ***Involvement Phase*** visitors and facilitators come the closest together (Urry & Larsen, 2011). The tourism experience starts when visitors leave their usual environment (UNWTO, 2014), implying: trip(s) to the destination(s), personal contact with places and activities, return to the place of origin (Hall & Page, 2014) and recollections (d'Hauteserre, 2006; Leiper, 1979; Sánchez et al., 2006; United Nations & UNWTO, 2010). The tourism 'phenomenon' (UNWTO, 2014, p. 1) emerges and expectations turn into experiences (Nicolau, 2013; Perkins & Thorns, 2001; Smith, 1994; Urry & Larsen, 2011). 'Getting apart' also happens here, when visitors return to their usual environment, but the involvement continues,

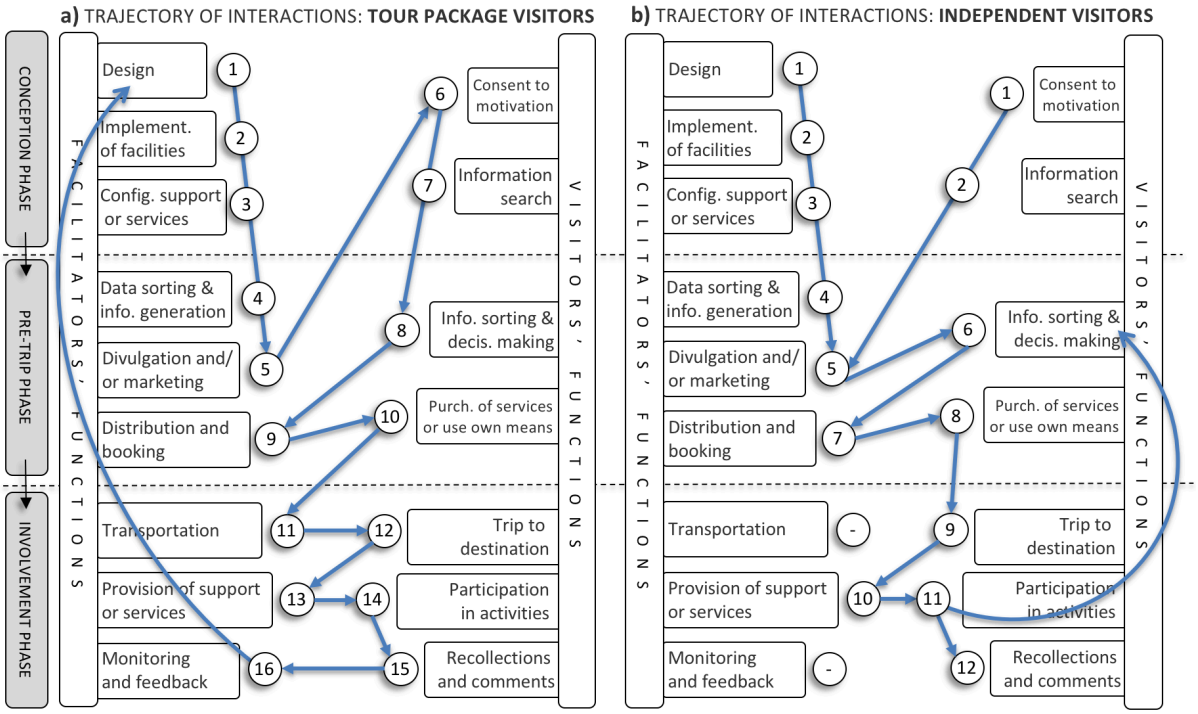
as actors remain attached to the experience through memories and impressions that will influence future decisions (McKercher, 2005; Mura & Tavakoli, 2014; Pine II & Gilmore, 1998).

The integration of the visitors' and the facilitators' perspectives as presented in the iModel, provides a flexible arrangement to describe the trajectory of interactions for different tourism forms and contexts. This avoids a deterministic description of how tourism works and gives the possibility to reconsider changing dynamics through time. Thus, as such, the iModel does not provide standard answers, but helps to explore different cases and to reflect on possible interventions to guide tourism development.

In the iModel, therefore, there are no arrows connecting any pair of functions in a fixed way, meaning that different dynamics are possible in the emerging process of the tourism phenomenon. This represents that tourism can take diverse forms, as dynamics within and between the functions, and the sequence in which they are performed, may vary depending on the case. There are vertical arrows, however, connecting the phases, and horizontal arrows signalling a progression of dynamics from 'furthest apart' to 'full involvement', depicting a general order at a broader level in the emerging process of tourism. The functions (actions), however, at a more detailed level, could be performed in different sequences. Moreover, functions could be performed simultaneously from both perspectives – visitors' or facilitators' –, interactions could go back and forth between both sides or could describe loops between functions within the same perspective. Additionally, it must be kept in mind that a certain function could be collectively performed, and thus, depending on the level of analytical detail, each function can be considered a system itself, that is, a subsystem of the case under investigation. For example, in the design function, a DMO interacting with several service providers to structure the destination's offer, constitutes a subsystem. Further, any function or set of functions, could also be performed by actors at different levels. For instance, in the design of a new route a group of service providers coordinate at the local level, while supported by a government at the regional level, with funding from the national level and with advice from actors in the generating markets abroad. The schematic arrangement of the functions in the iModel, therefore, provides an initial guide for the analyst to reflect on the dynamics and connections of his/her own case.

It is the diverse interactions that take place between visitors and facilitators, what defines how the tourism experience will work. While an overall movement occurs through different phases, also back and forth interactions, with varied trajectories, happen between and within the functions. Figure 10 exemplifies the trajectory of interactions of two totally different cases: a) tour package visitors, and b), independent visitors using their own transportation means. While the iModel's general structure remains the same, trajectories differ. In case a), the facilitator (a tour operator) is the more proactive side stimulating interactions, and although unexpected changes may occur, the visit happens based on a pre-defined itinerary. In case b) it is the visitor the one driving the flow of interactions, and while visitors may get informed beforehand on services and attractions, they may also take final decisions on places to visit once at the destination or look for or change the next visiting point on the go. In case b), some functions from the facilitators' side are not performed, such as 'Transportation to the destination' as visitors use their own means, nor 'Monitoring and feedback' of the overall visitors' experience, as facilitators provide support in a disintegrated way and not predefined by them as in case a).

Figure 10. **Examples of the trajectory of interactions**



Authors' elaboration based on Figure 9

The examples of Figure 10 are just two out of an unlimited number of possible cases whose interactions' trajectories will vary depending on their specific circumstances and context.

Visualising the visitors' and the facilitators' perspectives in an integrated way is highly useful as this allows to trace a map of system's behaviour, its actors' needs, motivations and interrelationships, providing a better understanding of changes over time. Furthermore, the iModel can work as a simulator to provide more than linear cause and effect conclusions. It can be used to visualise the possible behaviour of a certain reality for decision-makers to obtain more insights on the possible effects of their decisions. There are many factors that can be identified to reflect upon in relation to certain policy measures regarding the social, environmental or economic aspects of tourism, illustrating the need for a systems thinking approach to assess strategies and policies for tourism development (Jafari & Xiao, 2016).

3.1.5.3 Third pillar: methodology for analytical application

It is important to have a flexible methodology that allows analysis of different aspects of interest to use the model-as-a-tool and support decision-making. The methodology must also allow focus beyond mainstream characteristics, such as pleasure or profit oriented activities, that unfortunately have been pointed out as key descriptors of tourism (Ioannides & Debbage, 1998). Influential publications describing the tourism phenomenon sometimes from the tourist's view (Urry & Larsen, 2011), other times from the supplier's view (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2003) have reinforced the labelling of tourism as an 'industry' that provides trips for 'entertainment and relaxation'. That perspective does not fit with cases such as studying abroad, visiting friends and family or business trips, that can only tangentially be associated with leisure activities. The 'industry' stigma confuses decision-makers, leading to situations such as public budget unfairly distributed in favour of more traditional sectors (Leiper, 2008) such as hotels or tour agencies, when visitors really used other means and were motivated by other purposes to visit the destination. Malleability in the application of the iModel is, therefore, necessary to cope with analysis despite the changing nature of tourism (d'Hauteserre, 2006; Perkins & Thorns, 2001; United Nations & UNWTO, 2010). Systems thinking analytical approaches have the potential to develop precise and deep information on the case under investigation, identifying relationships among its actors and their feedback dynamics, generating an autonomous body of practical knowledge (Jafari & Xiao, 2016).

The iModel's methodological approach, based on the third pillar

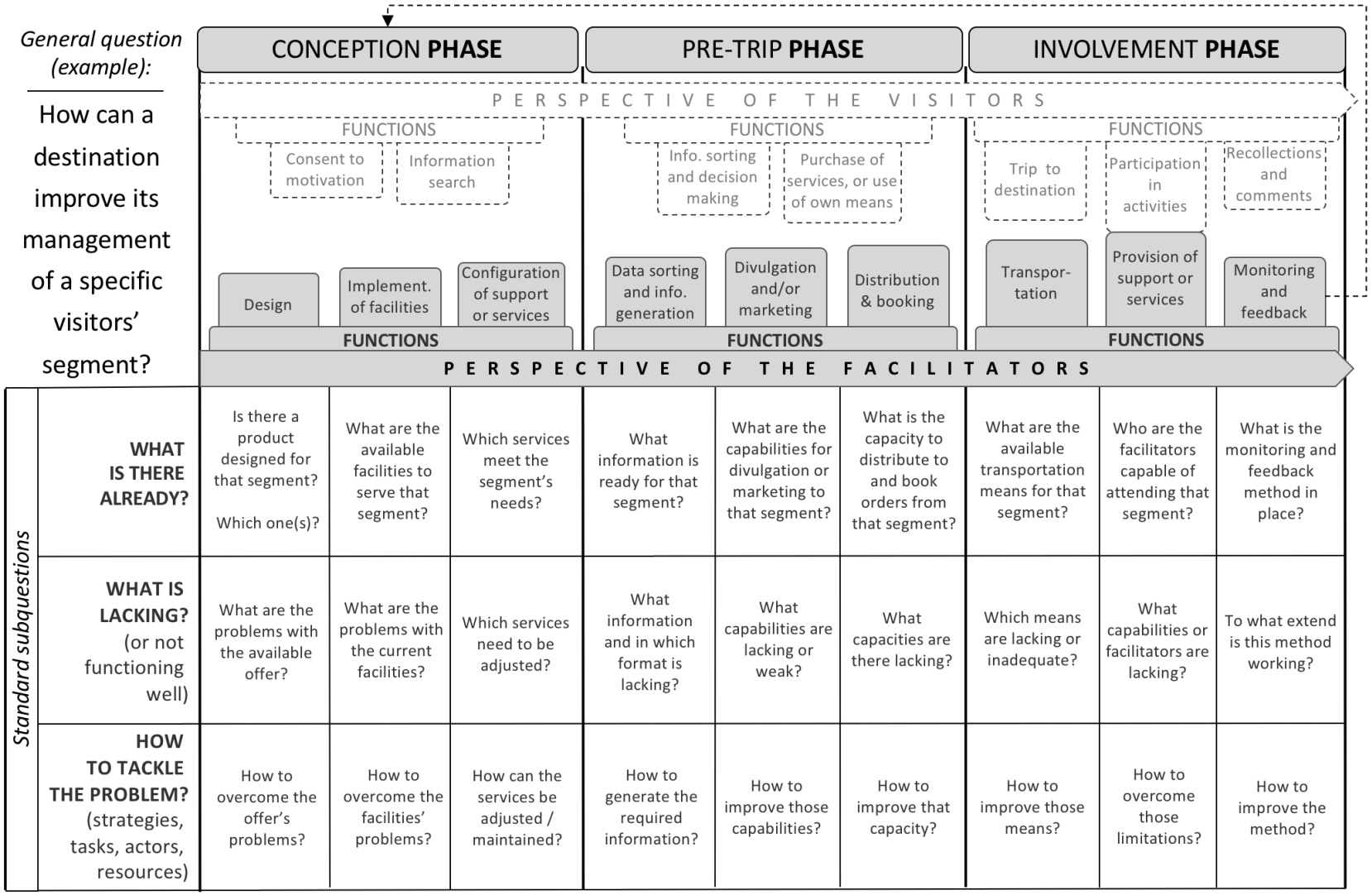
Just as in open systems, the analytical entry point to the iModel may vary depending on the aspect of interest to be analysed. For instance, if the interest is on the improvement of the management at the destination, the entry point should be from the facilitators' perspective. But, if the interest is to study the behaviour of a specific type of traveller, perhaps the entry should be from the visitors' perspective. From there, the analysis could go through all the phases and functions, or the focus may be placed on only one of the functions, depending on the analytical needs. In any case, the iModel's scheme prevents the analyst from losing track of connections and interactions. Thus, based on systems thinking principals, the iModel provides the ability to analyse the full process of the case under investigation or to zoom into specific parts, but maintaining the relation with the whole.

Thus, to set up the iModel for practical application the first step is to state our *'aspect of interest'* (Figure 11). Aspects of interest could relate to, for example: improve management per types of visitors, overcome barriers for collective actions, strengthen governance, assess environmental management or detect opportunities in the value chain. The aspect of interest could be stated in the form of a *general question* by adding interrogative words such as how, who, what, where or why. For instance: How can a destination improve the management of a specific visitors' segment?

Next, the methodology proposes three *standard subquestions* to guide the analytical process: 1) What is there already? (current situation), 2) What is lacking? (identify problems) and 3) How to tackle it? (reflect on solutions). The aspect of interest (in the form of a general question) and the three standard subquestion are then displayed in the vertical axis as shown in Fig. 3, while the phases and functions of the iModel are displayed in the horizontal axis. This matrix layout facilitates a systematic process of inquiry on the study case by crossing each standard subquestion (vertical axis) with each function of the model (horizontal axis). Thus, each one the matrix's boxes in Fig. 3 generates a specific question to reflect upon during the analysis. In our example, we take an analytical approach from the facilitator's perspective, for instance, form a DMO's perspective. Nevertheless, the matrix layout allows us to maintain into consideration the interactions with the functions from the visitors' perspective, displayed in the upper part.

Figure 11

MATRIX LAYOUT OF THE INTEGRATIVE MODEL FOR DECISION-MAKING IN TOURISM



Authors' elaboration based on Figure 9

The set of questions generated in the boxes of Figure 11 call the attention to specific aspects and information needed to understand the case. This provides a path for the analyst to identify what information is available (e.g. reports, laws, statistics, statements) and what is required to be gathered (e.g. via interviews, surveys, workshops) for the analytical purposes. In any case, going through the analytical process will provide a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of the aspect of interest within the case's tourism system. This provides, in turn, a stronger basis for decision-making.

Lastly, if the depth of analysis requires it, more precise criteria may be added to further *refine the focus* of the standard subquestions (the vertical axis). For example, if the aspect of interest is to overcoming barriers for *collective actions*, the general question could be stated as: How to enhance the social capital of the destination? In this case, social capital literature may assist in identifying *key dimensions* that allow collectives to act towards common goals, namely: networks, norms and trust and collective action itself (Bourdieu, 1986; Grootaert et al., 2004; C.-A. Ooi et al., 2015; Putnam, 1995b; P. W. Williams & Elkhashab, 2012). These key dimensions of social capital can then be applied under the guidance of each standard subquestion of the iModel (the vertical axis): What is there already in terms of networks, norms or collective actions? What is lacking in terms of networks, norms or collective actions? and How to tackle it in terms of networks, norms or collective actions? Hence, an even deeper analysis can be conducted in relation to each function (the horizontal axis). The same methodology can be applied to analyse, for instance, *governance,* using the key dimensions of: who takes the decisions, who implements them and who rewards or punishes (Adiyia, Stoffelen, Jennes, Vanneste, & Ahebwa, 2015a; Kaplinsky & Morris, 2001; Song et al., 2013). If the case were to analyse the *value chain* of a destination, then the key dimensions for refinement of the focus could be to look into: the governance of the chain, the barriers to entering or avoiding others entering the chain and the opportunities to improve the destination's position in the chain (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2001; van Dijk & Trienekens, 2012). As a final example, if the analytical concerns were related to *environmental management,* the key dimensions for refining the focus of the standard subquestions could be: the applicable regulations, the impacts and remediation measures (Hall, 2014; Ruiz-Molina, Gil-Saura, & Moliner-Velázquez, 2010).

3.1.6 Final remarks

Tourism represents the largest phenomenon of human mobility motivated for a wide range of reasons. This confronts destinations with increasingly greater challenges related to diverse forms of tourism. Managers and practitioners, therefore, require tools that allow them to perform their own research-based decision-making process in a dynamic and adaptive way. This context requires an approach beyond the simplistic view of tourism as a leisure industry fully controllable through deterministic planning.

This papers' main contributions are: 1) the introduction of a systems thinking-based integrative model (iModel), structured by the interrelated functions of visitors and facilitators, that describes the emergence of the tourism phenomenon, and; 2) the development of a methodology to use the model-as-a-tool to support decision-making by focusing on specific aspects of practical interest. The iModel allows to: reflect on the dynamics of a tourist destination; zoom in from the general to specific parts and go back to the general again, maintaining the relation between the details and the whole; visualise the relations between different structural levels of the system; and bridge the gap between theory and application in daily management situations by inquiring in an organised way what is there already, what are the problems and how to solve them. In this way, the iModel helps to reflect upon the best policies for development, changing the paradigm from planning to control (deterministic approach) into *planning to guide tendencies* (systemic approach).

One potential shortcoming still to be tested is that, although the iModel is configurable to tackle different aspects of interest, reality is more complex than what can be modelled. The iModel, therefore, should be applied to analyse different aspects of interest, as the ones suggested in the methodological section, to further test its empirical usefulness. Another question is the extent of the iModel's applicability taking the visitors' perspective as the analytical entry point. Its wider application and testing, however, depends on destination managers, practitioners, researchers and students adopting the tool. Finally, there may be cases for which the iModel does not fulfil the analytical needs, requiring adaptation for its broader applicability.

In any case, what we have proposed in the current paper is a contribution to stimulate a more theoretic debate on how tourism functions, but additionally, connecting theory with practical ways to support decision-making.

IV. EMPIRICAL DEVELOPMENT

The empirical parts of this research focus on the case study of Ecuador, with a special focus on the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (CMBA) as the destination component, in relation to international markets, with a special focus on Germany as the target market component. In this stage I explore: the determinants for international market access in a broader sense (Paper 4), and how to enhance the CMBA's capacity to attract German organised groups, in a more specific sense (in Paper 5). Papers 4 and 5 represent the final components of the research project.

As was illustrated in Figure 1, 'Relationships between Research Stages – Questions – Papers', and explained in the Methodology chapter, the five research papers included in this thesis are interconnected building blocks within the general research process. In that sense, the tourism systems thinking (Paper 1) based iModel (Paper 3) is used to analyse the social capital of a destination (Paper 2) and its influence on the determinants of access to international markets (Paper 4), as a way to reflect on Enhancing a Destination's Market Access (Paper 5). In other words, social capital dimensions are applied in the iModel as the guiding criteria to analyse how the destination can tackle the determinants for market access. Therefore, in the current chapter, while Paper 4 contributes with the last piece of the research process (a list of determinants for tourist destinations to access international tourism markets), Paper 5 uses all the pieces for analysis of the case study. Paper 5 discusses how the destination's collective capacity relates to different market access determinants and examines how the destination could improve its capacity to access the target market. Here, it is important to mention that if Paper 5 (or any of the other four papers) is read separately, it stands on its own as an independent article. Nevertheless, the terms and notions used in 'Results and Discussion' section of Paper 5 referring to key determinants for market access are not selected by chance. They are the determinants introduced in Paper 4. However, as the five papers of this thesis have been submitted for publication as independent articles in different specialised journals, and as the readers of those journals do not have the connective overview of the general structure of this thesis, no reference is made in Paper 5 to the list of determinants from Paper 4, because the latter was still under peer review when Paper 5 was accepted for publication. Nevertheless, as stated, Paper 5 draws upon the inputs form all four previous papers.

4.1 PAPER 4 DETERMINANTS FOR TOURIST DESTINATIONS ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL MARKETS: the case of Southern Ecuador and Germany[8]

Abstract

Many destinations aim at accessing international markets to generate income from abroad, stimulate innovation and develop new skills. This paper examines the determinants – conditions that may represent barriers or enhancers – for tourist destination's international markets access. We contrast 5 sets of determinants from: 1) tourism literature on internationalisation, 2) two extensive studies from the exports sector covering 48 years of data, and 3) empirical work through 30 interviews at the destination (Ecuador) and the source market (Germany). We found that tourism literature focuses only on specific aspects, like distance or macroeconomic indicators; while exports' literature offers a more complete range of concepts to explain determinants. We conclude that determinants such as collective initiatives, defined target markets or efficient processes play a priority role in tourist destinations; and that although exports' literature is useful, it is not totally transferable to tourism. Therefore, adding input from the empirical cases, we triangulate the data to consolidate a list of 46 determinants specific for tourist destinations, which provides a comprehensive overview on the key aspects for international market access. This work has implications for decision makers, firms, governments and educators.

Key words: determinants, categories, tourist destination, international market access, tourism internationalisation.

4.1.1 introduction

Destination's internationalisation is important because contact with foreign markets offers: new paths for development of information and knowledge; foreign income for the country's

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economy; a competitive environment for innovation, technology and best practices; cooperation with more skilled organisations or individuals; the improvement of the destination's reputation; the reduction of dependency on domestic source markets; and to attract long haul visitors who spend more than short haul ones (Agndal & Elbe, 2007; Leonidou, 2004; McKercher, 2008; OECD, 2008; Pillmayer & Scherle, 2014; Romão et al., 2015) .

To understand and effectively tackle the determinants for international market access is important because: firms get advice to improve their performance; policy makers can identify where the destination requires support; universities and trainers can adjust their programs to the destination's need; and, researchers can deepen knowledge of specific value for the destination (Leonidou, 2004; Önder et al., 2009; Squalli et al., 2010) .

To improve a tourist destination's access to international markets is a challenging task, especially if it is intended to support local development goals. Access depends on multiple determinants, subject to local and international factors that are context dependant. Therefore, identifying a comprehensive set of determinants that influence destination's access would help to better cope with this challenge.

This paper is based on two key notions. Firstly, the destination is considered as a collective entity (Hartman, 2016b; Pavlovich, 2003; Viken, 2014), defined more by the participant actors than by geographical boundaries. In other words, in this paper a tourist destination is considered as a group of actors trying to act together, with different degrees of internal coordination and mostly composed by Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) (Pearce, 2008; Song et al., 2013; Thomas et al., 2011; Vanneste & Ryckaert, 2011, 2012). Secondly, we use the term 'determinants', as in tourism literature (Culiuc, 2014; Eilat & Einav, 2004; Tavares & Leitão, 2017) , to express a certain condition that, depending on the case, could act as either a barrier or an enhancer to access international markets. This approach allows to identify whether a destination can perform a certain action or has a certain capacity – *enhancer –,* for international market access, or cannot perform that action or has not that capacity – *barrier –*.

In international market access studies, exports' literature refers mostly to 'barriers', and some authors even include tourism as an export industry (OECD, 2008). However, although there are similarities between the fields of exports and tourism, there are also fundamental

differences. Regarding similarities, exports and tourism aim at foreign markets and at generating foreign income for the national economy. Also, both need to design an offer and require abroad distribution channels (Pearce, 2008, 2009). Regarding differences: while exporters deliver finished products to be consumed in a foreign market, tourism is a co-created experience requiring the visitor's involvement at the destination (Agndal & Elbe, 2007; Nicolau, 2013; Smith, 1994); thus, while exporters focus on outwards logistics, destinations focus on inwards logistics (A. M. Williams & Shaw, 2011); and, while exporters promote products, whose quality depend mostly on the producer's individual performance, destinations promote experiences, whose quality depend on collectives of actors, often spread throughout vast territories.

Therefore, although exports' literature offers a strong basis regarding international market access, determinants for tourism must be identified (Pillmayer & Scherle, 2014) and specified (Eilat & Einav, 2004). There are no studies summarising a consolidated list of determinants for tourist destinations to access to international markets, nor exploring it simultaneously from the perspective of actors at the destination and at the source markets. Additionally, there is the call to enrich the study of barriers for internationalization by adding findings from the perspective of developing countries and regional specific contexts (Leonidou, 2004; Pillmayer & Scherle, 2014). This paper attempts to contribute to filling those gaps.

We start with a literature review on tourism internationalisation and on exports. Then we explain the methodology used, with five different sources, through four stages. Afterwards, we present the results in relation to each stage. Following, we discuss the resulting consolidated list of determinants in order of priority. Lastly, we add some final remarks on the general findings, give suggestions based on the study cases, and comment on the limitations of the work.

4.1.2 Literature on international markets access

Tourism authors point out determinants in a neutral way, referring to them not just in the form of constraints, but also as conditions that, if present, act as enhancers for market access. However, tourism literature tackles the topic in a very disaggregated way. Several publications take a macroeconomic point of view, using, for instance, GDP, income level or exchange rates to explain determinants (Culiuc, 2014; Dogru et al., 2017; Eilat & Einav, 2004; Martins et al.,

2017; Tavares & Leitão, 2017) . Among them, Önder et al. (2009) argue that governments are key influencers to encourage alternatives for international appeal, a logical conclusion when considering determinants from a macroeconomic perspective. In contrast, Williams and Shaw (2011) focus on more internal capabilities and highlight the importance of firms' innovation and the need for acquiring 'superior knowledge' during the internationalisation process, as the key determinants for market access. Other authors stress the importance of factors like distance (Mckercher, 1998; McKercher, 2008; Tavares & Leitão, 2017) , or UNESCO's World Heritage Site recognitions (Cellini, 2011; Huang, Tsaur, & Yang, 2012; Su & Lin, 2014) as important determinants for market access. In these cases, authors deal with the difficulties of tourists to visit a destination because of the distance, suggesting that international reputation can justify the effort required to visit more distant destinations, or that distance can play sometimes a positive appealing effect if the destination is perceived as an exotic and pristine place. In their turn, Woodside & Dubelaar (2002) approach determinants for market access from a consumers' behaviour perspective, proposing a 'Tourism Consumption System' useful to increase effectiveness of marketing. In relation to determinants, their research focuses on the promotional aspects of reaching international markets, related mostly to an external phase when the destination tries to appeal visitors. While in the other hand, Pillmayer and Scherle (2014), approach determinants from a production perspective, a more internal phase, focusing on the challenges that SMEs deal with in regions of ongoing conflicts. Here, the key determinants are represented as the apparently negative social conditions for international tourism that local actors have to deal with. Agndal & Elbe (2007) explore the internationalisation process of SMEs in tourism, pointing at different determinants along the way, such as proactivity, physical and cultural distance, intermediation or collaboration, offering a more diverse perspective on the set of determinants that influence market access in tourism.

On the other hand, literature from the exports' sector refers to 'barriers' for market access, conceptually stressing the negative form of a determinant. These are the cases in the summarising work of Leonidou and in the extensive study of the OECD, who coincide in defining barriers for market access as '…all those constraints that hinder a firm's ability to initiate, to develop, or to sustain business operations in overseas markets' (Leonidou, 2004, p. 281; OECD, 2008, p. 194). These publications present detailed lists of barriers, grouped in different categories, using this 'constraint' or 'lack of' approach. However, one main difference between those studies is that: while Leonidou offers a comprehensive and insightful analysis

of all barriers hindering small business export development, based on an integrative review of 32 empirical studies conducted during the period 1960–2000, as the source to identify 39 barriers; OECD presents its results based on an extensive survey to 978 SMEs in 44 countries, as the source to identify 47 barriers. This survey included the tourism sector, but without differentiating its specific results from the other 10 exports sectors considered in the survey. Another important difference is that while the former study basically classifies barriers, by: internal (informational, functional and marketing) and external (procedural, governmental, task and environmental), and by impact ranking; the later study presents more forms of classifying its 47 exports' barriers, by: internal or external, clusters, type, importance for government or importance for firms, allowing to reflect on the diverse barriers from different perspectives and their interrelations. In any case, the OECD's study – as a more recent work – takes in consideration and draws upon Leonidou's initial results, confirming and extending them. More recently, Squalli et al. (2010) refer to international market access pointing out that it is determined by broader conditions than only the regulatory environment, usually invoked as the barrier to trade. Instead, they focus on three sets of determinant characteristics: the regulatory environment, public institutions and network industries. Their study uses the World Economic Forum's annual survey as a unique and valuable source of a world-wide sample of the global business community's opinion, and they produce a measure of market access for a sample of 113 countries. The authors find that the regulatory environment – trade policy and formal barriers – is the least significant set of determinants, meaning that liberal policies do not guarantee enhancement of market accessibility, challenging, to some extent, the use of trade policy instruments as the key. Instead, they conclude that greater market access will be achieved via better network industries and public institutions, rather than via a more liberal trade policy regime. In other words, their research suggests that the defining factors for market access reside more in the so-called internal barriers than on external ones. These studies together cover 50 years of combined and in-depth data generated from literature and surveys performed around the world, showing that the exports sector counts with a solid base of knowledge on identifying detailed and comprehensive sets of barriers for internationalisation.

In contrast, we argue that tourism literature still lacks a more comprehensive and structured set of determinants that incorporates, connects and extends the fragmented available literature on the topic, to better understand how to enhance a tourist destinations' international market access.

4.1.3 Methodology

To obtain a consolidated set of determinants for international market access in tourism, we progressively contrasted determinants from different sources, along four stages: 1) tourism literature, 2) exports literature, 3) empirical work and 4) consolidation.

In stage 1, we explored tourism literature. The criteria to select the works useful for our study was whether they directly referred to internationalisation in tourism and its related barriers or enhancers. 19 works, spanning between 1998 and 2017, were deemed relevant. These publications were contrasted checking frequencies of findings to track tendencies (Agndal & Elbe, 2007). As a result of this stage, we generated a first set of determinants, in this case, specific for tourism. *In stage 2,* we analysed and contrasted the lists of SMEs' exports barriers created by the extensive works of Leonidou (2004) and OECD (2008), discussed in the Literature review. The case of the exports' sector was deemed as a valid contrasting reference to explore determinants, because of its similarities with the field of tourism, as discussed in the Introduction. Further, we deemed those works as unique and valuable sources because, combined, they represent 48 years of data, from 44 countries, and because those studies on the topic are prior, broader and more interrelated than those in the tourism field. As a result of this stage, we generated a new integrated set of determinants from the exports sector. *In stage 3,* we conducted empirical research through interviews at both ends, the destination (Ecuador) and the target market (Germany), obtaining different perspectives to contrast with theory. The selected interviewees were tour operators or tourism governmental institutions, because they play special coordination roles that facilitate a destination's market access (Ioannides, 1998; van der Zee & Vanneste, 2015). The work consisted of desk research to identify the interviewees and conduction of open-ended interviews. Fieldwork took place in Ecuador from December 2015 to March 2016, and in Germany in March 2017 during the ITB Berlin Trade Fare. We conducted 30 interviews: 16 in Ecuador; and 14 in Germany (5 Ecuadorian actors and 9 German actors). As a result of this stage, we generated three additional sets of determinants, from the perspectives of: actors at the destination, Ecuadorian actors at the market and German actors at the market. *In stage 4,* we contrasted the 5 sets and systematically grouped similar notions under the same related determinant to consolidate a final set. While some sources mentioned, for instance, 'unstained processes' as a barrier, others cited 'sustained processes' as an enhancer. Thus, similar notions from the different sets, based on the data from the study cases and literature, where progressively grouped under the same label, finally

expressed as a determinant, for instance: 'Implement and sustain efficient processes'. This resulted in a final consolidated set of 46 determinants for tourist destinations' international market access. The ranking of priority was stablished based on frequency of mention of each determinant in the different sets.

4.1.4 The context of the empirical stage

As mentioned in stage 3 of the Methodology, 30 interviews served as the empirical basis for this paper. They all play a role between Ecuador, and more specifically the Southern Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (CMBA) as the destination, and Germany as the source market.

CMBA is a large region of 9.742 km^2, 833.372 inhabitants, including the territories of 15 municipalities, with Cuenca as its main city and touristic core (Rodríguez Girón et al., 2015). Here, 4 UNESCO's recognitions coincide: Cuenca's city centre as Cultural Heritage Site; a section of the multinational Royal Andean Trial – Qhapaq Ñan –; the intangible Heritage of the Straw Weaving Hat; and the Biosphere Reserve. The CMBA has no international airport or borders being sort of a 'continental island', depending on other regions in terms of international connectivity, which makes international market access specially challenging.

On the other side, Germany has the world's highest density of travel agencies (DER Touristik, 2015), and is traditionally leading world's ranks of outbound travellers and per capita expenditure (UNWTO, 2016), which makes it especially important as source market. Consequently, by 2015 Germany was the third top source market arriving to Ecuador (MTE, 2017a), and among the main nationalities arriving to the city of Cuenca (GIER, 2016; Proaño, 2014), the touristic core of the CMBA .

This presents, therefore, an interesting context to explore determinants from the perspective of local actors at the destination, local actors at the market and German actors.

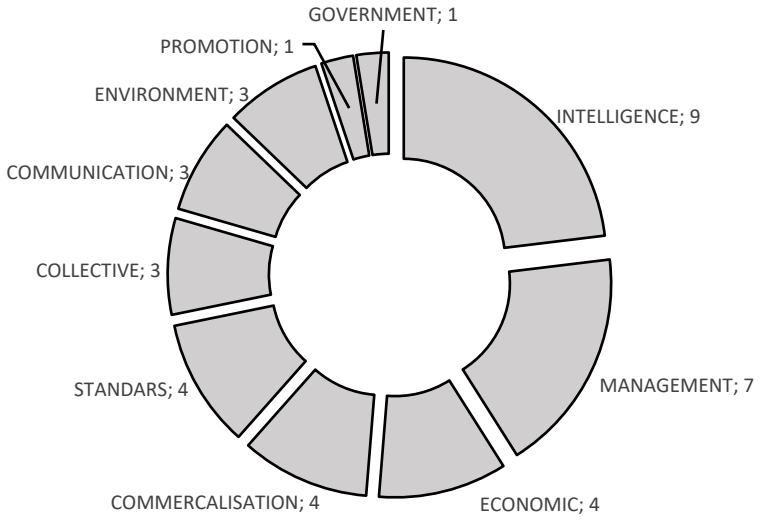
4.1.5 Results

As illustrated in Figure 15, we consolidated a list of 46 determinants for tourist destination's international market access. As a result of the analytical process discussed in the Methodology, the determinants are classified in 10 categories: Collective, Intelligence, Management,

Promotion, Government, Communication, Environment, Economic, Commercialisation and Standards. These are the same categories we use to present the results in the following paragraphs.

Stage 1 resulted in a list of 39 determinants from tourism literature. Originally, 20 were expressed in the form of barriers and 19 in the form of enhancers. When grouped, the categories of Intelligence and Management have the largest number of determinants, while Promotion and Government where the least populated categories (Figure 12). When looked from the perspective of priority, the top barrier refers to physical distance (management), while the top enhancer refers to clearly profile the target market (intelligence). In general terms, Tourism literature mostly focuses, in a fragmented way, on conditions such as distance, reputation, new technologies and macroeconomic indicators to explain determinants for international market access.

Figure 12. **Determinants from Tourism literature (by category)**

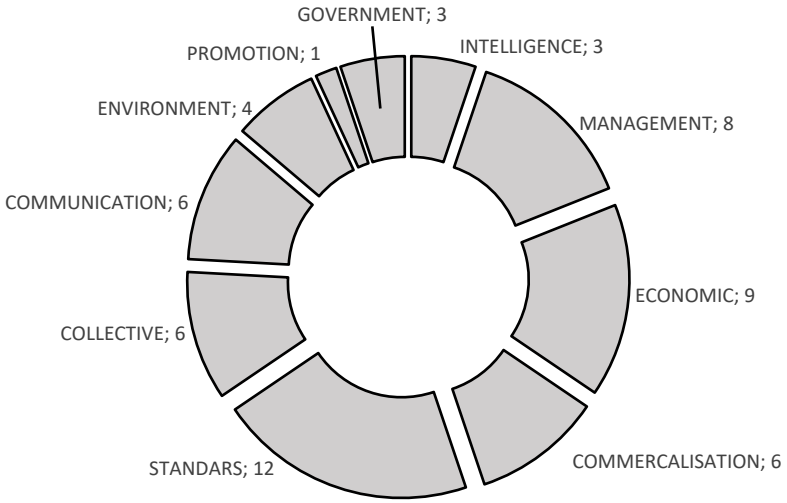


Authors' elaboration

Stage 2 resulted in a list of 58 determinants, drawing upon the sources from the exports sector discussed in the Literature review. Here, the categories of Standards and Economic contain the largest number of determinants (Figure 13). This suggests that, as the exports sector offers tangible products, this sector requires to pay attention to more aspects for standards compliance. Further, the category of Intelligence appears as one of the least populated, in contrast with tourism literature, suggesting that, as the tourism sector offers an intangible

experience as the 'product', this sector requires to pay attention to more diverse aspects of information and analytical capacities to attract visitors from abroad. In the other hand, the categories of Promotion and Government coincide in both fields (exports and tourism), as the least populated ones. This confirms that there is a larger set of determinants to deal with for internationalisation, other than marketing and governmental interventions, factors that are typically cited by the private sector in the initial stages of research, but that after deeper analysis, represent only a part of a broader set of determinants to look after. Nevertheless, when looking into the priority assigned by exports literature to each determinant individually, the top ones are: information to analyse markets and identification of business opportunities, precisely in the Intelligence category, confirming the importance of these determinants for both fields, although the number of determinants vary. These results helped to identify relevant notions for our research not considered in tourism literature (Figure 12), as well as to identify irrelevant determinants for the case of tourism, such as: meeting export packaging requirements or accessing warehousing abroad. As a result, we obtained a stronger theoretical basis to contrast with the empirical sources.

Figure 13. **Determinants from Exports literature (by category)**

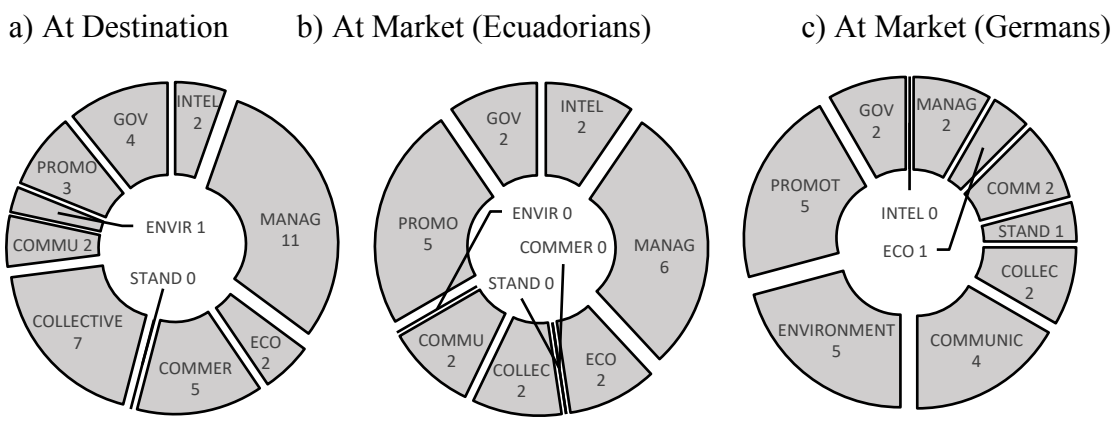


Authors' elaboration

Stage 3, the empirical work, produced three sets of determinants, from the perspectives of: a) Tourism actors at the Destination, 37 determinants; b) Tourism Ecuadorian actors with presence at the Market, 21 determinants; and c) Tourism German actors at the Market, 24

determinants (Figure 14). It is interesting to notice that for groups a) and b) the highest number of determinants mentioned by them relate to the Management category, while group c) did not identify many determinants in that category. This is because, although actors from group b) have already a physical presence in the market, they still consider that Ecuadorian actors in general need to improve in aspects like sustaining processes or specialised skills. In the other hand, it is also interesting to notice that while group a) mentions several determinants related to the Collective category, groups b) and c) each one only mentions two determinants in that category. This may be explained by the fact that b) and c) already have more or less stablished networks and access to the German market, thus, they have already tackled some aspects of developing collective capacities. In contrast, groups b) and c) mention more determinants related to the category of Promotion, precisely because as they have already built connections and partnerships abroad, they have more clearly defined customers to promote to. Nevertheless, the top priority determinant mentioned by each group were: group a) agreements, alliances and facilitation; group b) collective initiatives – both in the Collective category –; and group c) trustable long-term local partners at the destination – in the Commercialisation category –. Although the last top determinant conceptually belongs to a different category than the former two, the three of them relate to the capacity of working with other actors.

Figure 14. **Determinants by category (empirical cases)**



Authors' elaboration

This suggests that for all the actors, independently of their level of market access or location, the different aspects of developing collective capacities are the highest priority for internationalisation.

Stage 4 produced a consolidated final set of 46 determinants (Figure 15) for tourist destination's access to international markets, by systematically contrasting the previous sets of determinants and grouping them under similar concepts. Within each category of the list, determinants are order by priority, in relation to the full list. As mentioned, priority was assigned according to the number of sources referring to each determinant, along each one of the analytical stages. It is, interesting to notice that there were more coincidences on determinants between exports literature and the empirical tourism cases (21 coincidences), than between the latter and tourism literature (17 coincidences). This confirms that exports literature is a valuable source to enrich tourism studies in several aspects of international market access, although the fundamental differences between both fields. These differences are represented in the 17 determinants from exports' literature that did not have any match with tourism literature or the empirical cases, or any relevance for the field, such as 'Supply inventory abroad', and therefore, were excluded from the final list. There are also 8 new determinants identified from the empirical tourism cases, such as 'Implement and sustain efficient processes'.

Figure 15. **Determinants for tourist destinations access to international markets**
(if a destination CAN / HAS determinant 'X' = Enhancer,
if a destination CAN NOT / HAS NOT determinant '*X*' = Barrier)

COLLECTIVE DETERMINANTS	Priority
Perform collective initiatives	1
Regular face to face encounters with foreign partners	15
Private - private initiatives	22
Public - private initiatives	26
INTELLIGENCE DETERMINANTS	**Priority**
Defined target markets	2
Identify the appropriate income segment for the destination	24
Reliable international market data	31
Information to locate/analyse markets	38
Identify foreign business opportunities	44
MANAGEMENT DETERMINANTS	**Priority**
Implement and sustain efficient processes	3
Innovate for and adapt to target market	4
Enough quantity and qualified personnel for internationalisation	5
An offer that justifies the travel distance	6
Appropriate organisation/institutional structures	7
Internationalisation experience	35
Dedicate managerial time to deal with internationalisation	37
Cope with international competition	43
PROMOTION DETERMINANTS	**Priority**
Customers' awareness of the destination	8
International reputation	10
Official promotion of the destination	20
Individual promotional activities adjusted to target markets	39
GOVERNMENT DETERMINANTS	**Priority**
Government's support programs for internationalisation	9
Political leadership	12
Authorities' control and regulation at destination	30
Transparent and efficient bureaucratic processes	41
Coherent policy to make official statements	45
COMMUNICATION DETERMINANTS	**Priority**
International flight connections	11
Use proper language	18
Communicate with and support overseas customers	29
ENVIRONMENT DETERMINANTS	**Priority**
Deal with conditions of safety and risk	13
Deal with political conditions	23
Deal with cultural differences	36
Deal with risk of natural disasters	42
ECONOMIC DETERMINANTS	**Priority**
Match competitors' price	14
Public budget for internationalisation	25
Deal with currency exchange rates	27
Private investment for internationalisation	28
COMERCIALISATION DETERMINANTS	**Priority**
Reliable foreign representation	16
Deal with internet (social networks-ecommerce) in efficient ways	17
Access international distribution channels	19
Control over foreign intermediaries	21
Efficient follow up and sales closing	32
Contact potential overseas customers	40
STANDARDS DETERMINANTS	**Priority**
Meet international quality/standards/specifications	33
Deal with foreign rules, regulations or procedures	34
Deal with home rules, regulations or procedures	46

Authors' elaboration based on: sources described in the methodology.

4.1.6 Discussion

Discussion will proceed per category, regarding the relations among each category's determinants and their relationships with other categories, when relevant. The empirical cases from Ecuador and Germany will serve to illustrate and contextualise findings. The numbers indicated between parenthesis, e.g. '(15)', refer to the priority of each cited determinant.

Collective category

This category includes the highest priority determinant, whether destinations can *'Perform collective initiatives'* (1). This is the capacity of identifying common interests among sectors at the destination and cooperate with resources. This is closely related to the other determinants in this category: '*Regular face to face encounters'* (15), *'Private – private initiatives'* (22) and *'Public – private initiatives'* (26), denoting the need for different forms of collective initiatives. The inability of Ecuadorian actors for collective initiatives, nevertheless, was identified as some of the biggest barriers. An institutional officer mentioned: '…we also experience in the country, and in the tourist sector very markedly, a low level of associativity, there is a lot of jealousy, business zeal…'. Accordingly, the need for agreements, alliances and facilitation was identified as the biggest enhancer. One of the Ecuadorian operators expressed: '…funding, leadership, that is logically important, but I think that first we must aim, really, is to facilitators or people that really achieve to generate confidence…'. This confirms that destinations, mostly formed by SMEs (Song et al., 2013; Thomas et al., 2011; Vanneste & Ryckaert, 2012), feel the need to enhance their collective capacities to thrive. McKercher (2008) found that even a world renowned destination like Hong Kong, represents only the 10% of the total trip duration of long haul visitors, largely depending on other associated destinations to remain attractive. The determinant 'perform collective initiatives' was mostly highlighted by Ecuadorian cases, and although its importance was confirmed by literature, German cases did not expressly mention it. Arguably because as they already operate in South America, with Ecuador only as a portion of that, they have already covered their needs for cooperation at an international scale. Nevertheless, 'reliable foreign representation', in the Commercialisation category, was the top determinant for most German actors. This suggests that destination's actors must position themselves within that international context and think in collective initiatives along with other destinations in the country and at the supra-regional level (e.g. Ecuador – Peru), to enhance their appeal to international organised groups.

Intelligence category

Its top determinant is whether a destination has *'Defined target markets'* (2). Although a basic first step, it is often overlooked because governments and firms tend to prioritise action over planning, taking random opportunities emerged by chance, becoming a reactive destination (Agndal & Elbe, 2007). To define markets, it is necessary to agree among destinations' actors, so determinants from the 'Collective' category also play a role. This is key for destinations' development as they must reflect upon the type of desired visitors they want to attract (McGehee et al., 2010; Zhao et al., 2011). To have 'Defined target markets' is closely related to the other determinants in the 'Intelligence' category, because for that, it is necessary that the destination has *'Reliable international market data'* (31) and *'Information to locate/analyse markets'* (38), so that the destination can *'Identify the appropriate income segment for the destination'* (24) and *'Identify foreign business opportunities'* (44). This might imply more knowledge than expected at first sight, and may explain why destinations often only have a reactive capacity. None of the Ecuadorian actors could mention a defined target market for the CMBA. One of the biggest Ecuadorian tour operator mentioned: '…no, because we [the destination as a collective] are opening doors, right? saying "let them come"…' In this way, the destination's efforts are inconsistent, hindering its capacity to attract the specific types of visitors. Instead, a proactive approach, would imply to have the required leadership, personnel and time to define: the desired type of tourism, the correspondent type of visitors and where they are. As stated in tourism literature: '[u]nderstanding their [the visitors'] needs and behaviours will be a cornerstone of marketing success' (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 890), because '[f]inding groups of consumers with strong, homogeneous bonds is the 'Holy Grail' of marketing' (Schewe & Meredith, 2004, p. 51). Only then, results on attracting the best segment of visitors according to the destination's development goals can be reachable and demonstrable.

Management category

Its top determinant is whether a destination can *'Implement and sustain efficient processes'* (3), in the sense of maintaining consistent efforts in the long-term. Its importance is illustrated in a simple statement by an Ecuadorian operator: '…continuity generates ability, right? ...'. This aspect is widely mentioned by public and private Ecuadorian actors. However, it is not explicitly mentioned or highlighted in the tourism or exports' literature. Nevertheless, sustained processes are required to reach markets in a proactive way. Contrary to the case of goods, at the destination, nothing is pre-produced, and the tourism experience (Andersson,

2007; Nicolau, 2013; Smith, 1994) might incorporate several firms and governments (Haugland et al., 2011; Scott et al., 2008)(Haugland et al., 2011; Scott, Cooper, & Baggio, 2008), spread in wide regions, who might want to use tourism as a lever for poor and, often, unskilled local inhabitants. In the CMBA and its surroundings, the main natural areas and cultural sites are under the administration of different local or national authorities. This makes processes for coordination indispensable. However, a typical situation of a destination's lack of processes is highlighted by a planning facilitator in Ecuador: '…if I make a plan just for obligation, but at the end I keep doing all of what I have been traditionally doing, based on the institutional culture, without sticking to what the plan establishes, I am wasting money by doing the plan…'. Thus, (efficient) implementation is key to the other determinants in the 'Management' category, because with *'enough quantity and qualified personnel for internationalisation'* (5), within '*appropriate organisation/institutional structures'* (7), the destination can *'dedicate managerial time to deal with internationalisation'* (37). In this way, the destination can accumulate *'internationalisation experience'* (35) to *'innovate for and adapt to the target market'* (4), allowing it to *'cope with international competition'* (44). Only then, the destination can have *'an offer that justifies the travel distance'* (6). Lack of sustained processes at the destination is deeply regretted by actors, but difficult to overcome, because it requires provision of resources first to improve professionalisation, giving preference to long term initiatives, although with clear and logical short and mid-term step stones on the way.

Promotion category

Its top determinant is whether there is *'Customers' awareness of the destination'* (8). This determinant was mostly cited by German and Ecuadorian cases at the market, while it was not explicitly mentioned in the literature. Outbound operators at the market argue that it is hard to sell a destination that is not in peoples' minds. This creates a paradox: German agencies offer what customers demand, but customers demand is influenced by what German agencies offer them in the first place, making it hard for a new destination's offer to enter the portfolio. The dynamic of an increment in offer only after an increment in demand, is confirmed by Culiuc (2014), who found that new direct flights are added only the year after bilateral tourism see a large increase. To influence this determinant, destinations can play the role of a third force between customers and agencies at the market, trying to increase people's awareness via promotion and divulgation. This leads us to the other three determinants in the 'Promotion' category. First determinant, to have *'International reputation'* (10), via, for instance, inscriptions in the World Heritage Sites (WHS) list by UNESCO as a customers' awareness

leverage (Culiuc, 2014; Su & Lin, 2014). Second determinant, to have *'Official promotion of the destination'* (20) as an 'umbrella' platform to generate awareness in the markets, and for firms to leverage their specific offers under that umbrella. Nevertheless, a German operator mentioned: '…you [the customer] cannot know everything, that's the reason why we're here, but the lack of marketing budget from the [Ecuadorian] government, that is a big issue for the German tour operator'. In his opinion, the government is not putting enough effort as that third force to influence customers' awareness and demand for the destination, becoming hard for tour operators to sell it. And the third determinant, to have *'Individual promotional activities adjusted to target markets'* (39), by the private sector, building upon the destination's official promotional efforts to harvest better results. For instance, via internet marketing messages for specific targets (Woodside & Dubelaar, 2002) or, as an inbound Ecuadorian agent shared, '…we make trainings, I particularly trained 400 travel agents last year in different parts of America…'. Thus, if destinations want to increase customers' awareness, several determinants must be considered. The CMBA has potential to influence the 'international reputation' determinant, as four different UNESCO's recognitions coincide here and, as tested by Su & Lin (2014), the higher the number of WHS recognitions, the higher international attractiveness is consolidated. This should be stressed through governmental, private and collective promotional activities.

Government category

Its top determinant is whether a destination has *'Government's support programs for internationalisation'* (9). This determinant was mostly highlighted by literature, but is highly related to the determinant *'Political leadership'* (12), which emerged from the study cases. Tourism literature mentions that governments' institutional improvement, willingness for new types of alliances and support for innovation, are key to access international markets (Hjalager, 2007; Önder et al., 2009; Squalli et al., 2010) . While from the empirical side, on political leadership, an Ecuadorian agent at Germany, mentioned: '…if there is no political decision along with the resources, the people able to organise this kind of events, it would be impossible for the [Ecuadorian] tourist industry to participate [at ITB] …'. Other determinants in this category, which also emerged mostly from the empirical side, are whether the destination has *'Authorities' control and regulation at destination'* (30), *'Transparent and efficient bureaucratic processes'* (42) and a *'Coherent policy to make official statements'* (30). This confirms that tourism actors expect the government to foster certain general conditions, that go beyond the business arena, but that will improve the overall destination's performance. At the

CMBA, most local and provincial governments have a tourism department, and few, under diverse models, have constituted a DMO. Nevertheless, these initiatives are not yet well articulated, being still in an adaptation process to play a more influential role, which currently, as Pike and Page (2014) observe, are mostly related to marketing and limited in terms of power for management decisions. Cuenca's DMO mentioned: '...we are working on the possibility to work under the figure of a public enterprise, which would be, which would give us more freedom of action. From that point, we can work more closely with the private sector…'. According to OECD (2008), government's support programs and leadership for internationalisation suppose the allocation of resources and decision to improve: financial alternatives, business environment, agents' capabilities and accessibility to markets. In other words, the challenges of transforming determinants from barriers into enhancers, create opportunities for government's support to strive for a stable general environment and look for cooperation with higher level and/or international governments to cope with the local lack of resources or skills.

Communication category

Its top determinant is whether a destination has *'International flight connections'* (11). This is pointed as key by literature (Culiuc, 2014; Squalli et al., 2010) and it is especially challenging for the CMBA case, as this territory has no international airports, or borders. Thus, determinants from other categories are crucial, such as: 'perform collective initiatives' (1) to get included into existing tours to broader nearby regions; or, 'innovate for and adapt to target market' (4) to develop 'an offer that justifies the travel distance (6). The other determinants in the 'Communication' category are whether the destination can *'Use proper language'* (18) and can *'Communicate with and support overseas customers'* (29). 'Language, as always, becomes an instrument of power' (A. M. Williams & Shaw, 2011, p. 44) and international market access requires 'language capital' (Dustmann, 1999, p. 297). Even when the market shares the mother tongue, knowledge on non-verbal language, region-specific terminology or other communication practices, will enhance the destination. This will help not only in contacting but also in supporting overseas customers and foster stronger ties. Interestingly, for some agents the lack of German speaking guides was not a barrier for the operation, either because customers speak good English as those clients '…often try to learn Spanish before they go to South America', or even because '…they even go to South America without Spanish and they manage it somehow'. However, for the phases before operation, when tourism actors are just getting in touch and building partnerships, it is fundamental to master at least English, while

German would really make a difference in relation to our study case. As stated by a German outbound agency, one of the most important aspects '…when I'm deciding on taking a destination in [the agency's offer], is having a good German speaking agency on site'. Nevertheless, destinations must bear in mind the different communication determinants discussed here, to enhance their access to international markets.

Environment category

Its top determinant is whether a destination can *'Deal with conditions of safety and risk'* (13), which is in turn closely related to whether the destination can *'Deal with political conditions'* (23) or *'Deal with risk of natural disasters'* (46), in the sense that governments play a fundamental role in these determinants. Of course, to foster a positive environment is also in the hands of the private sector and residents, which is related to the last determinant in this category, that is whether the destination can *'Deal with cultural differences'* (36), referring to foreign markets and visitors' behaviour. These determinants point at the general situation at the destination and how it handles factors that heavily influence markets' perceptions. Literature and tour operators, especially from the German side, coincide here. Culiuc (2014) argues that visitors avoid countries where they are aware of ongoing conflicts. While a German operator exemplified how the German government also influences the perception of safety and risk, through its Foreign 'Auswärtiges Amt' (Foreign Affairs Ministry): '… they give information to [about] countries all over the world, [this] means security, means how to enter the country, what are the current, like health information what do you need for aaah, to travel to that country'. Paradoxically, German operators mention that risk of natural disasters, does not represent necessarily a barrier as '…you cannot avoid it, when a volcano is working like in Costa Rica, Ecuador, it happens; it can happen every day; when a tsunami is coming, it happens; it's, it's out of our influence'. Apparently, risk perception has more to do with feeling prepared to know how to react, than with the risk itself. This shows a big relation with the already mentioned determinants of having a 'coherent policy to make official statements' (45), to tame negative perceptions and avoid harming 'international reputation' (10).

Economic category

Its top determinant is whether a destination can *'Match competitors' price'* (14). Actors at the destination and Germany considered Ecuador has a disadvantage because a strong currency as the US dollar (Ecuador's currency), makes it more expensive (Culiuc, 2014; Martins et al., 2017) in relation to neighbours with weaker currencies (Eilat & Einav, 2004). This is related

to the determinant whether the destination can *'Deal with currency exchange rates'* (27) and avoid reduction of visitors and length of stay (Culiuc, 2014). An Ecuadorian DMO mentioned that '…many people consider that Quito's [the capital] airport is one of the most expensive, at least in the region'. While from the German side, an agency that started new operations in 28 countries, indicated that Ecuador was not included because '[y]eah, price is deciding!'. Nevertheless, in accordance with Culiuc (2014), operators mentioned that in some cases uniqueness compensates for higher prices: '…the Galapagos Islands, is pretty unique in south America, so we are doing well in Ecuador'. Unfortunately for the CMBA, the uniqueness of other regions in the country is not automatically transferable. An Ecuadorian operator explained '[i]f I want to sell Cuenca [in the CMBA], that means I have to send them [the visitors] on a flight to Cuenca and that is not the problem, the problem is the price, that gets higher'. This confirms the importance of proactivity to work on determinants, for example, from the 'Management' category, such as developing an 'offer that justifies the travel distance' (6) or to 'innovate and adapt to target markets' (4). Returning to the 'Economic' category, Ecuadorian actors typically complain about the lack of '*Public budget for internationalisation'* (25) as a key determinant. Nevertheless, a detailed analysis with public and private destination's actors reveals that the issue is not so much related to low budgets, but to a lack of efficiency in using them or to create new funding streams. This, again, points to fundamental determinants from the 'Management' category, such as 'enough quantity and qualified personnel for internationalisation' (5), or to have the 'appropriate organisation/institutional structures' (7). The final determinant in the 'Economic' category, which reveals an aspect overlooked by the private sector, is whether the destination counts with *'Private investment for internationalisation'* (28). Exports' literature that also considered the tourism sector, found that '…SMEs without experience of exporting tend to overstate barriers associated with finance and access to markets whilst underestimating the need for highly developed internal capabilities…' (OECD, 2008, p. 53). This is confirmed by the empirical cases, where we found that those operators who made sustained investments to develop overseas relations, are the ones with alternatives to access markets of organised groups; while those operators that did not, are competing among them on the lowest price to capture individual random visitors at the destination. Thus, while matching competitor's prices is a determinant, analysis suggests that, for the destination enhancement, it is even more determinant to develop first its actors' internal capabilities (OECD, 2008). In summary, to enhance the offer, to foster trustable distribution channels and to stimulate qualified services allow the destination not to depend only on price for competition (Tavares & Leitão, 2017) .

Commercialisation category

Its top determinant is whether a destination has *'reliable foreign representation'* (16). The need for trustable long-term local partners was highlighted mostly by the German side and supported by literature. Having foreign representation is especially important for young initiatives (Agndal & Elbe, 2007), because in this way another determinant is tackled, which is whether a destination can *'contact potential overseas customers'* (40). Since the tour needs to be sold in another country, before consuming it and without the chance to test it beforehand (Nicolau, 2013), customers will more easily be contacted by and have trust on a local than on a foreign seller (Agndal & Elbe, 2007). Foreign representation is also one of the options to tackle the determinant of whether the destination can *'access international distribution channels'* (19). Nevertheless, some operators at the destination reported the risk of being kicked out the supply chain. At least in an initial stage, the foreign partner relies on the local firm's knowledge (A. M. Williams & Shaw, 2011), but after acquiring enough experience in the destination, seeking to reduce costs and increment control, the foreign partner opens its own local Destination Management Company. In this case the roles of local employees are typically limited to administration and operation, while the greater economic benefits leak abroad, where the decision making and top managerial positions are located (Lansing & Vries, 2006). Thus, a determinant identified as another option for 'Commercialisation' is whether a destination can *'deal with internet (social networks – ecommerce) in efficient ways'* (17). Over decades, internet has promised, and still does, to ease direct international market access. Nevertheless, some argue that disintermediation has been overrated (Kaewkitipong, 2010; Rosenbloom, 2007) as there is a myriad of on-line services and intermediaries to choose from (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Kracht & Wang, 2010). Thus, to use internet as a direct access channel, a thorough understanding is required on how technology works and how it shapes behaviour (Cohen et al., 2014). As a result, firms use internet mostly to provide general information, but not in an strategic way to achieve direct sales (Agndal & Elbe, 2007). Either, via representation or via a more direct approach, the other two determinants in this category point to: the level of the destination's *'control over foreign intermediaries'* (21), such as partner travel agents at the market or online distribution channels; and whether the destination can do an *'efficient follow up and sales close'* (32) after initial contacts where established with potential distribution channels. In this regard, the examined Ecuadorian cases that have market access confirm that it is more important aiming at nurturing ties of trust with foreign intermediaries, or at using personalised marketing, than aiming at generic publicity to the broader public. These are key considerations for destinations to tackle the determinants in the 'Promotion' category.

Standards category

Its top determinant is whether a destination can *'meet international / quality / standards / specifications'* (33). This is related to the other two determinants of the category, which are near to the lowest ranks, being whether the destination can *'deal with foreign rules, regulations or procedures'* (34) or can *'deal with home rules, regulations and procedures'* (46). This low ranking coincides with theory, which finds that among factors like: public institutions, network industries and the regulatory environment, the latter is the least influential for market access (Squalli et al., 2010). This must not be confused, however, with the idea that complying with standards and regulations is not determinant. Especially because, mainly in most wealthy countries, there is an increasing interest for offers that support social or environmental sustainable processes (Cohen et al., 2014; Valéry Bezençon & Sam Blili, 2010) . Additionally, we must consider that quality has been implicitly tackled in other determinants. For example, international quality levels, standards or specifications must be observed for a destination to 'develop an offer that justifies the travel distance' (6), 'access international distribution channels' (19), or 'use proper language' (18). While home and foreign regulations must be observed to 'perform collective initiatives' (1), have the appropriate organisation/institutional structures (7), or have 'authorities' control and regulation at destination' (30). Therefore, we argue that when discussing determinants, actors did not explicitly stress quality and regulation aspects because 1) they have not found this determinants to be some of the biggest barriers, which coincides with findings from the exports' literature (Leonidou, 2004; OECD, 2008; Squalli et al., 2010) and 2) implicitly they all assume these are not optional conditions but they have to be accomplished anyway. In all circumstances, destinations must not overlook the enhancement on the capacities and knowledge required to tackle determinants of the 'Standards' category.

4.1.7 Final remarks

In this article, we have analysed the determinants for a destination to access international markets. We have contrasted tourism literature, exports literature empirical results on 30 cases related to CMBA in Southern Ecuador, as the destination, and German organised groups, as the target market. As a result, we have built a prioritised set of 46 determinants, useful for destinations to assess their situation and to contribute to the tourism literature on international market access.

While destinations aiming for internationalisation are conformed by collectives of actors trying to attract foreign markets, determinants represent certain conditions that hinder or enable those collectives to achieve their goals. Therefore, in this article we have discussed determinants from the perspective of collectives trying to tackle them. These determinants, however, can also be applied to a considerable extent to individual agents.

One main remark is that, although we have ranked determinants based on frequency of citation in the different sources, there is no one central determinant to tackle, but they are interdependent. We argue, therefore, that determinants should be observed as a set of different aspects, with specific levels of influence, according to the context. Also, within a destination, the effect of determinants is not the same for all actors. It is important that the destination's facilitators identify the level of preparedness of each actor to make it participate accordingly. Additionally, determinants, are not static but dynamic circumstances. In other words, today's barriers could be tomorrow's enhancers, or vice versa. This depends on how destinations tackle the determinants that condition their international market access.

In relation to the analysed empirical cases, one key determinant is the fact that the CMBA does not have international air or land connectivity. For them key determinants are those listed in the categories: 'Intelligence', to accurately define target markets so they can concentrate scare resources on achievable goals; 'Collective', to improve internal associativity and connect with other international touristic routes already stablished; 'Management', to improve professionalization and innovate for an offer attractive enough to justify distance, something that requires the appropriate institutional structures; and 'Government', to have the political leadership for the required institutional changes to cope with the highly dynamic and competitive market of international organised groups. One option is to think of a platform that leads regional tourism development with public funding, but with enough administrative independence to generate its own income sources, that offer support programs on market intelligence, sustained professionalisation, technology enhancement and international commercialisation.

Finally, in the CMBA – German organised groups relation, it is advisable to think of new approaches. This is a market seeking for more experiential, live journeys, and to deepen into the local culture. Modalities like Spanish study programs based on the 4 UNESCO recognitions coinciding in the region, live activities around worldwide positioned concepts such as the straw

weaving hat, fine organic cacao and banana produced by family-based organisations, practical workshop lessons with ceramics and jewellery artisans or gastronomic routes tasting food from the Pacific coast, to the Andean region and the Amazon basin, can be some of the differentiation options. This new approach should strategically position Cuenca – the touristic core of the CMBA – as the main destination, from where groups depart for shorter journeys around the region. However, as discussed, the interrelated determinants for this case need to be strategically and collectively tackled.

Beyond the cases we have analysed in this paper, we expect to contribute to a more integral perspective of the different determinants that influence international market access. We think that the consolidated list is widely applicable beyond the examples in this paper. Further work should focus on testing the validity of the proposed list in a range of other cases and discuss how to refine it.

4.2 PAPER 5 ENHANCING DESTINATIONS SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL TOURISM MARKETS: the case of the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area[9]

Abstract

Enhancing a destination to attract the desired international visitors and ensuring that those enhancements align with local development goals is a major aim for host communities. Thus, it is necessary that actors from diverse sectors and at different locations work towards common goals. Our aims are: to explore how to enhance a destination's Social Capital (SC) to access international markets; to test a Systems Thinking (ST) based Integrative Model (iModel); and, to discuss the relationship between ST, tourism and SC. The Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (CMBA), in southern Ecuador, is the destination case study. The source market is Germany. Market access is more determined by internal collective capacities than by external conditions. These capacities can be fueled by enhancing SC. A facilitating actor is key for such enhancement.

Key words: tourist destination, social capital, systems thinking, international market access, iModel.

4.2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is three-fold. First, we explore the practical aspects of a destination's Social Capital (SC) enhancement to attract international markets. Second, we empirically test a Systems Thinking (ST) based Integrative Model (iModel), which was developed as part of a broader research project, to support decision-making. And third, we discuss, in theoretical terms, the relationship between ST and SC at the tourist destination level, assessed through the application of the iModel.

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Academics often refer to tourism as an opportunity for development which, in turn, generates expectations among local actors because of its potential to bring economic benefits and enhance quality of life (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2017). Nevertheless, despite the support of tourism as a means of development and cultivation of local actors' commitments, there is a challenging gap between intentions and implementation (Bohlin et al., 2016; Sinclair, 1998; Stoffelen & Vanneste, 2016, 2017).

Overcoming this gap to realise desired goals would imply that a destination has achieved self-determination in its development path (Macbeth et al., 2004; Sharpley, 2009; Taylor, 2016). However, self-determination is easy to say, but not so easy to achieve. Self-determination requires the capacity to identify, deploy, and maintain control of core competencies or unique attributes that allow the destination to play an influential role (Ford et al., 2012) and generate the desired results (Kaplinsky & Morris, 2001). Those competencies can take different forms, such as quality relationships, organizational or technological capabilities, policy implementation, specific skills, certain strategies, and access to resources, among others (Adiyia, Stoffelen, Jennes, Vanneste, & Ahebwa, 2015b; Jensen, 2009; Judd, 2006; Pearce et al., 2007). Nevertheless, it is especially challenging to develop these attributes at the level of tourist destinations, because different types of actors in (often) vast territories participate.

Because of this multi-actor nature of tourism, we focus our interest in social capital at the destination level. We define social capital as the norms and networks that allow a collective to act together towards common goals (Bourdieu, 1986; R. Burt, 1993; Häuberer, 2011; Lin, 2001b; Okazaki, 2008; Putnam, 1995b). Thus, we explore the following question: How can local actors enhance the social capital of a tourist destination in order to access international markets in a way that attracts *(steers)* the desired type and quantity *(be selective)* of tourism flows?

The question focuses on international markets as a potentially important source of stimulation for development. Exposure to international environments in tourism can provide new paths for developing information and knowledge, stimulating innovation, and reducing market dependency. This will provide more opportunities to find the type of visitors that match the destination's vision and to develop an alternative source of foreign income that is based on value added to the location as opposed to primary resources exports (Agndal & Elbe, 2007;

Leonidou, 2004; McKercher, 2008; OECD, 2008; Pillmayer & Scherle, 2014; Romão et al., 2015).

International market access is influenced by several managerial, information, collective, commercial, and other types of determinants (Culiuc, 2014; Eilat & Einav, 2004; Tavares & Leitão, 2017). Determinants are dynamic conditions that, depending on their existence or absence in the specific case, may either impede or enhance market access. For instance, a determinant such as having *the appropriate institutional structure for internationalisation* (Hjalager, 2007; Tavares & Leitão, 2017; A. M. Williams & Shaw, 2011) may act as an enhancer, while the lack of such structure may represent a barrier for market access. The literature suggests that priority barriers are more often associated with the actors' internal capacities, than with the international environment (OECD, 2008). Social capital theory, therefore, offers key concepts for exploring a destination's collective capacities and understanding how to turn barriers into enhancers.

Given that a system is a set of elements that closely interact to generate different outcomes in interdependence with its environment (Baggio, 2008; Dekkers, 2015; Mella, 2012; Speakman, 2016), we have chosen a Systems Thinking approach to study social capital dynamics within tourism. Social capital and tourism can both be seen as complex systems; they both emerge with new characteristics that result from interactions between several actors. This makes them suited for analysis using a systemic approach.

For that purpose, we use the 'iModel' (Rodriguez-Giron, Vanneste, & Ioannides, 2018), which helps to manage analysis of complexity and supports decision-making in a destination. A systemic analysis is important for the destination's actors, as it can help them visualise their position in the system and their relation to others. A systemic analysis can also inform planning and policy and provide needed perspective on a destination's tourism model, e.g. how to improve its negotiation position or how to increase benefits for local actors. The theoretical importance resides in testing an innovative tourism-specific analytical framework in which social capital can be integrated and in exploring the relationship between systems thinking and social capital theories in the context of tourism.

We first present the conceptual framework built upon tourist destinations, social capital and systems thinking as the interrelated concepts in our study. Then, we introduce the case study,

its context, and its challenges. Next, we describe the methodology, introducing the iModel and how it was used to explore social capital in relation to the determinants for international market access. We then discuss the results from the following perspectives: social capital enhancement; the iModel and its methodological capacity to integrate social capital; and the relationship between systems thinking and social capital in tourism. Finally, we offer some remarks for the case study and for systems thinking and social capital theories within the context of tourism.

4.2.2 Conceptual framework

We review the three main concepts of this article: tourist destinations, social capital and systems thinking. These are the main pillars of our approach and we discuss some theoretical linkages.

Even if people subjectively perceive a destination as one entity, the destination might be formed, in fact, by a combination of territorial administrations (Saarinen, 2014), facilitated by a sum of diverse actors (Haugland et al., 2011). Tourist destinations are formed primarily by small and medium enterprises (Pearce, 2008; Song et al., 2013; Thomas et al., 2011; Vanneste & Ryckaert, 2011, 2012), which interact with governments and residents (Viken, 2014) to provide a tourism experience (Haugland et al., 2011; Pearce, 2008). These interactions within a geographical setting, may create the perception of the tourist destination (Halkier et al., 2014; Viken, 2014) as a unified entity. But destinations are hardly unified organisations. Coordinated participation, for example, might not be the case; as tourism actors might see each other as competitors (Von Friedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006). Further, residents may not be in favour of tourism or play a role in it (Dudwick et al., 2006; Macbeth et al., 2004; Nyhan Jones & Woolcock, 2009; Taylor, 2016). In this complex scenario, if benefits are expected from tourism for the collective of local actors, the coordinating role of a brokering actor, such as a DMO, becomes a key factor (Beritelli, 2011; McGehee et al., 2010; Williams & Elkhashab, 2012). In this context, we approach the ‘tourist destination’ as a collective of actors trying to act together to use tourism as a means to improve their quality of life and as a location with geographical limits in constant flux according to the places incorporated in the final visitor’s experience.

On the other hand, as Häuberer comments, '[s]ocial capital emerges in the structure of relations or networks among individuals or collectives' (2011, p. 148) as a *functional resource* (Coleman, 1990), that brings together other individual resources for purposive actions (R. Burt, 1993). Therefore, social capital may be a fundamental resource for achieving collective purposes in tourist destinations. But social capital is not an individual property in the hands of an actor, nor a fully pre-exiting resource; social capital is a potential or latent resource (R. Burt, 1993; Coleman, 1990; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), a semi-realised resource embedded in existing social relations. It is fully realised only through actual interactions with a common aim (Häuberer, 2011). Social capital is simultaneously composed by a process of interactions and the outcomes of those interactions in a feedback loop that can strengthen or weaken social capital. It is the resource that allows actors to mobilise other independently owned resources – money, knowledge, tools, properties – for a common purpose. Social capital, however, has two faces (Portes, 1998). It can be positive and facilitate access to funding, business possibilities, and skilled human resources (McGehee et al., 2010). But social capital can also be negative, like when actors in power use their social relations to hinder innovation, to keep their dominant position, or to take advantage and profit at the expense of less influential fellow actors (Levien, 2015).

Social capital is not a positive or negative thing, per se, but a theoretical construct that helps one to study how collective action emerges in a given context. Social capital can also be seen at different levels of aggregation. While Bourdieu (1986), the father of social capital, approaches it at the level of the individual, Putnam (1995b) applies the concept at the community level, and Grootaert et al. (2004) discuss social capital assessment at the household and organisational levels. In tourism, rather than being the object of interest, social capital is mostly used as a framework to explore other specific issues, such as rural tourism (Park et al., 2012), entrepreneurship (Zhao et al., 2011), sports events (Jamieson, 2014; P. W. Williams & Elkhashab, 2012) or community based tourism (D.-B. Park et al., 2012). In any case, the literature points mainly to three key social capital dimensions. First, the most 'tangible' dimension of social capital, called *Networks* (Bourdieu, 1986; C.-A. Ooi et al., 2015; Putnam, 1995b; Von Friedrichs Grängsjö & Gummesson, 2006), is represented by the actors themselves and their connections. Second, the most 'intangible' aspect of social capital, called *Norms & Trust* (Coleman, 1990; Häuberer, 2011; D.-B. Park et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2011), is represented by the behavioural and psychological aspects of the involved actors. And third, the aspect that represents the 'output' of social capital, called *Collective actions* (Dudwick et al.,

2006; Grootaert et al., 2004; Nyhan Jones & Woolcock, 2009), is facilitated by the two previous dimensions and influences them as well. Social capital thus, behaves as a complex system which emerges from non-centrally controllable interactions, but is still influenced by specific goals (Park et al., 2012; Zhao et al., 2011). In tourism, these interactions connect vast territories from the local to the international levels.

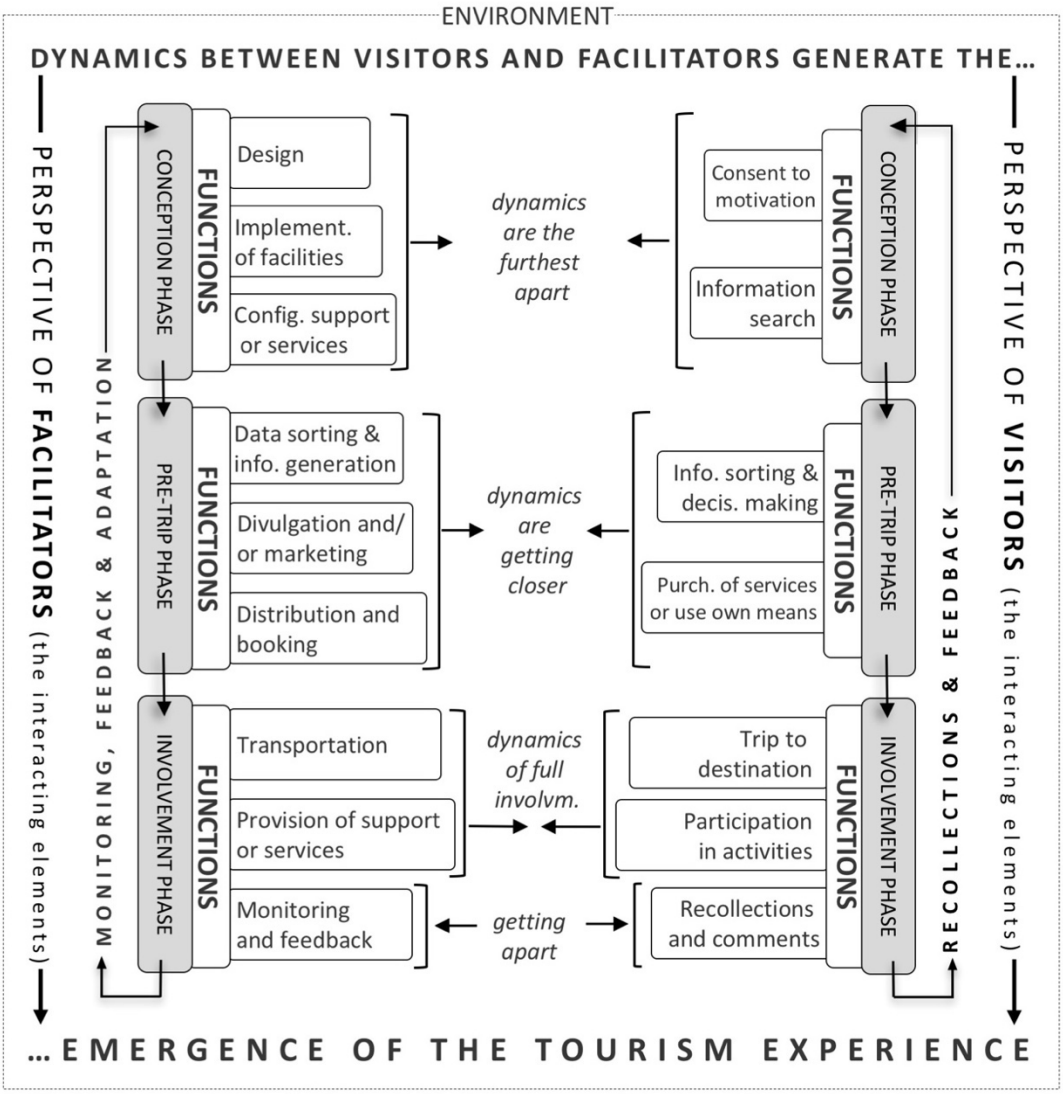
In that context, systems thinking provides a theory for approaching destinations and social capital as complex systems. Systems thinking conceives a system as a dynamic entity composed of diverse interacting elements, without necessarily clear limits to its environment, which is influenced by the system and constantly influences the system (Ghosh, 2015; Mai & Smith, 2015). Some of systems thinking's key concepts that describe tourism's characteristics are: *elements* (Dekkers, 2015) or the interacting actors like visitors, firms, governments or residents; *functions* (Hoff, 1992) or the roles that actors play in the (tourism) experience; *dynamics* (Mella, 2012) or the interactions among (tourism) actors; *emergence* (McDonald, 2009) or the new capacity of the collective to create a (tourism) experience not possible for any actor alone; *self-organisation*(Meekes et al., 2016) (Farrell & Twining-Ward, 2004) or dynamics that are not fully centrally controllable and depend on specific and variable interactions; *nonlinearity* (Speakman, 2016) or results that are disproportional to the inputted efforts; and *environment* (Hartman, 2016b) or the system's (destination's) changing context and their mutual influences. These concepts also allow exploration of social capital as a resource emerging from a system of interactions among a destination's actors. Thus, in contrast to thinking about tourism as a centrally controlled production process, as in an assembly plant, systems thinking's concepts allow us to explore how collective actions emerge from local interactions and how to improve social capital to support a tourist destination's development goals.

Systems thinking translated into a model (iModel)

The iModel (Figure 16) is a systems thinking-based integrative model which supports decision-making (Rodriguez-Giron et al., 2018) and which considers tourism to be a phenomenon emerging from a dynamic system of interactions (Judd, 2006; Nicolau, 2013; Pearce, 2008; Pearce et al., 2007; Smith, 1994). It is conceptually based on the principles of systems thinking and schematically illustrated by the interactions between various so-called facilitators – firms,

governments, residents and attractions – and visitors. In that sense, Figure 16 can be read as follows: the *functions* (Dekkers, 2015; Hoff, 1992), performed from the perspective of the interacting elements (i.e. the visitors and the facilitators), generate certain *dynamics* (Dekkers, 2015; Ghosh, 2015; Mella, 2012). These dynamics evolve through different *phases* (Conception – Pre-Trip – Involvement), from 'furthest apart' into 'full involvement' and to 'getting apart' again, allowing the *emergence* (Hartman, 2016a) of the tourism experience. Finally, the tourism experience is influenced by its *environment* (Dekkers, 2015; Hartman, 2016a; Mella, 2012) as an open system, meaning that tourism's outcomes also influence its environment.

Figure 16. **iModel - The Integrative Model for Decision-Making in Tourism**



Source: Rodriguez-Giron et al. (2018)

In principal, the iModel allows description of the trajectory of interactions between, for instance, facilitators and independent visitors or facilitators and organised groups. In this way, actors can be mapped, and the system's elements can be identified. For deeper analytical purposes (such as studying social capital in relation to each of the model's functions to enhance access to international markets), the iModel introduces a methodology to use the model-as-an-analytical-tool. This is further explained in the Methodology section and demonstrated in the Results and Discussion section.

4.2.3 Methodology: Using the iModel to bring social capital to the front

The iModel was developed through an intensive iterative process consisting of constant literature review (Aug 2014 – Jun 2017), experience-based assessment (Feb 2015 – Dec 2016), three preliminary study case tests (Mar – Apr 2015), feedback from internal and international academic seminars (May 2015 – Aug 2017), input from extensive fieldwork (Dec 2015 – Mar 2016) and experts' feedback at national and international conferences (Nov 2015, Apr 2017).

First, the methodology to use the iModel-as-a-tool for analysis asks the 'why'. As stated in the *general question* (in the Introduction), we conducted this analysis to understand how to enhance the social capital of a tourist destination to access international markets in a way that attracts the desired visitors. Second, three *standard sub-questions* are proposed to guide the analytical process: 1) What is there already? (antecedents - current situation); 2) What is lacking? (diagnosis - identify problems); and 3) How to tackle it? (reflect on solutions - action plan). And third, because we are interested in analysing social capital as a key resource to improve market access, we need to refine the focus of the standard sub-questions. This is done by using *social capital's key dimensions* already discussed in the conceptual framework, namely: Networks ('who' are acting and 'where'), Norms & Trust ('how' are they acting), and Collective Actions ('what' are actors doing and 'when').

As shown in Figure 17, the standard sub-questions and social capital's key dimensions are displayed in the vertical axis of the *iModel's Matrix Layout*. This helps to guide analysis with the following logic (using sub-question 1 as an example): What is there already in terms of each social capital dimension (in the vertical axis) in relation to each function of the iModel performed by the facilitators (in the horizontal axis)? In this way, we can systematically pose

the analytical questions in an ordered manner. Disaggregated social capital facts from the study case progressively fill the cells of the matrix, each one containing a *key phrase* that summarises the findings of each step during the analysis. As a result, Figure 17 presents a matrix layout that provides a general vision of the study case 'at a glance'. The key phrases are based on the information collected in the *iModel's Extended Report*. Due to its extension, however, this report cannot be displayed in this article. This report is where the detailed basic data are inputted. Its structure presents the same organization in its vertical axis (social capital dimensions), while the horizontal axis shows the detailed analytical outcome of only one of the iModel's functions at a time. In other words, the extended report 'zooms in' on the data of each social capital dimension analysed in relation to each iModel's functions.

Because we are interested in analysing a tourist destination's social capital, the iModel was applied from the perspective of the facilitators' functions, using, as it will be explained in the Study Case section, a central actor approach as the entry point for exploring the destinations' dynamics. Our information sources were: a) three fieldworks (Dec 2015 – Mar 2016 in Ecuador, March 2017 in Germany, and April 2017 in Ecuador), where eighty open-ended interviews were conducted, plus field visits and participation in workshops; b) four sessions with the central actor's Projects Manager (December 2016, February 2017, August 2017 and January 2018) to introduce, apply, and evaluate the iModel's validity; c) collection of plans, reports and other documents from the related actors; and, d) fourteen years (2000 – 2014) of the main author's experience in tourist destination management in the case study area. Based on these data, we systematically analysed how social capital works and could be enhanced to tackle diverse international market access determinants described in the literature (Agndal & Elbe, 2007; Cellini, 2011; Culiuc, 2014; Dogru et al., 2017; Eilat & Einav, 2004; Huang et al., 2012; Leonidou, 2004; Martins et al., 2017; McKercher, 1998, 2008; OECD, 2008; Önder et al., 2009; Pillmayer & Scherle, 2014; Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2018; Squalli et al., 2010; Su & Lin, 2014; Tavares & Leitão, 2017; A. M. Williams & Shaw, 2011; Woodside & Dubelaar, 2002).

4.2.4 The case study: Its context and challenges

The Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (CMBA) is a large region in southern Ecuador that covers 9,766 km^2, has 838,816 inhabitants, and includes the territories of 15 municipalities (Rodríguez Girón et al., 2015). Cuenca is its main city and touristic core. For an in-depth and visual

description of the CMBA access: www.biosferacajas.org/documentos/biosfera_en.pdf. Four UNESCO recognised sites coincide here: Cuenca's city centre as Cultural Heritage Site (1999); the intangible Heritage of the Straw Weaving Hat (2012); the Biosphere Reserve (2013); and a section of the multinational Royal Andean Trial – Qhapaq Ñan – (2014). However, only 198.994 foreigners visited Cuenca during 2016 (GIER, 2017b), which is a low percentage (14%) when compared to the 1,418,159 international visitors to Ecuador (MTE, 2017b). This is partly because the CMBA has no international airport or borders, making it a sort of 'continental island' in terms of international connectivity.

Only recently the city of Cuenca is learning through a trimestral report (GIER, 2016a) about the profile of its arriving visitors. This process is due to efforts by the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation (MF), an entity created for promotional activities, but which acts as a coordinator for regional tourism development as well. This is the central actor in our study case. The MF facilitated the participatory update of Cuenca's tourism development plan 2016 – 2021 (TurisConsulting et al., 2016) envisioning an experiential and creative form of tourism development. Nevertheless, while the plan aims for a focused and targeted approach, the destination's collective capacity to influence on the international market areas of origin of its visitors is still almost non-existent.

As was agreed upon with the MF, the target market in our study case is the segment of German organised groups. There are several reasons for this. First, among the holiday trips Germans prefer, in order of importance, and in relation to CMBA's potential, are: nature, family trip, adventure, sightseeing, culture and study (Sonntag, 2015). Second, Germans are already third among the countries of origin currently visiting Cuenca (GIER, 2017a); however, considering that United States citizens (1st) and Colombians (2nd) also come to visit relatives, study or conduct business, Germans are the ones who come primarily for vacation. Third, Germany has the world's highest density of travel agencies, with holidays trip sales that are still dominated by physical travel agencies (DER Touristik, 2015). This makes it especially important as a market for organised groups. Fourth, Germany traditionally leads the world in per capita expenditure abroad (UNWTO, 2016).

In the context of our study case, the general question is now expressed in the following form: How can the MF enhance the social capital of the CMBA to attract German organised groups?

4.2.5 Results and discussion

According to the purposes cited in the Introduction, in this section we discuss: 1) the iModel's capacity as an analytical tool to focus on social capital in relation to market access; 2) the implications of the analytical results for our study case to enhance social capital; and, 3) the theoretical relationship between systems thinking and social capital in the context of tourism. As explained in the Methodology section, Figure 17 demonstrates the iModel's application and displays a summarised view of the results discussed here.

1) The iModel and its capacity to highlight the role of social capital

Given the number of actors and interactions, understanding the dynamics within a destination can be challenging. However, after configuring the iModel for our general question, the iModel guided us through a detailed dissection of that complexity. The methodology allowed us to reflect on each social capital dimension in relation to each function (e.g. Design or Distribution & Booking), piece by piece, while keeping the relation with the context. In this way, the iModel provided a framework and a method for conducting a systematic questioning of the CMBA's collective capacity to access international markets. The methodology also allowed us reflecting upon the destination's lack of social capital, its underuse, its negative effects and how to enhance it. We used the MF as the entry point to analyse social capital interactions within the CMBA's system and used German organised groups as the focus of those interactions.

The iModel's methodology proved helpful in revealing how social capital's dimensions (e.g. Networks) relate to each of the iModel's functions (e.g. Design) performed by the destination as a collective. Within each function, the iModel showed how social capital's dimensions interact with different determinants for market access (e.g. proper institutional structures), and whether a determinant acts as a barrier (weakening) or as an enhancer (strengthening). And, the iModel helped to identify which actors relate to the MF and within which function.

The iModel's methodology allowed us to collect and connect a diversity of information that is usually dispersed among the actors and is hard to display in a structured way. This enable destination's actors to share knowledge, to understand where the collective is now in relation to their aims, to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to project the next steps. According to

the MF interviewees, the matrix layout is like a ‘control panel’ to quickly monitor the situation, while the extended report is like a repository of more detailed insights.

Figure 17. **iModel's Matrix Layout**

General question: How can the MF enhance the social capital of the CMBA to attract German organised groups?

		CONCEPTION PHASE			PRE-TRIP PHASE			INVOLVEMENT PHASE		
SUB-QUESTIONS	SOCIAL CAPITAL DIMENSIONS	**DESIGN** (De)	**IMPLEMENTATION OF FACILITIES** (IoF)	**CONFIGURAT. OF SUPPORT/SERVICES** (CoS)	**DATA SORTING & INFO. GENERATION** (D&I)	**DIVULGATION & MARKETING** (D&M)	**DISTRIBUTION & BOOKING** (D&B)	**TRANSPORTATION** (Tr)	**PROVISION OF SUPPORT/SERVICES** (PoS)	**MONITORING & FEEDBACK** (M&F)
WHAT IS THERE NOW? (ANTECE-DENTS)	**NETWORKS** WHO & WHERE?	NO PARTNERSHIPS IN PLACE	MF HAS ACCESS TO ACTORS THAT SUPPORT IMPLEM.	MF HAS CONVENING POWER TO STIMULATE IMPROV.	NO COOPERATION FOR D&I	MF PERFORMS GENERIC MARKETING	MF IS AWARE OF CHANNELS BUT LACKS EXPERIENCE	MF HAS LOW INFLUENCE ON Tr AUTHORITIES	MF HAS NO COMPETENCES TO REGULATE PoS	COOPERATION WITH UNIVERSITY FOR VISITORS STATISTICS
	NORMS & TRUST HOW?	COLLECTIVE VISION OF DESIRED TOURISM IN PLACE	NO INCENTIVES FOR TOURISM FACILITIES	MF HAS LEADERSHIP BUT NO AUTHORITY	SCARCE COLLECTIVE D&I INITIATIVES	MARKETING IS MF'S MAIN COMPETENCE	MF IS A POTENTIAL HUB BUT LACKS COMPETENCES	NO TOURISM ACTOR HAS Tr COMPETENCES	WEAK NORMATIVE FOR REGULATION OF PoS	FORMAL AGREEMENT FOR VISITORS STATISTICS
	COLLECTIVE ACTIONS WHAT & WHEN?	NO INITIATIVES FOR OFFER DESIGN	NO EXPERIENCE TO ADVISE ON FACILITIES	SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION CERTIFICATION	GENERATION OF GENERIC INFORMATION	LIMITATION FOR D&M PARTNERSHIPS	NO COLLECTIVE INITIATIVES ON D&B	DISCUSSION TABLE WITH Tr AUTHORIT. IN PLACE	LIMITED SUPPORT AND WEAK COORD./REGULAT.	ONLY ONE CASE (COOPERATION WITH UNIVERSITY)
WHAT IS LACKING? (DIAGNOSIS)	**NETWORKS** WHO & WHERE?	LACK KNOWLEDGE OF POTENTIAL PARTNERS	LACK KNOWLEDGE OF IoF CURRENT STATE	LACK KNOWLEDGE OF CoS CURRENT STATE	SCARCE PARTNERSHIPS, LACK SPECIALISTS	LOW/NON COOPERATION WITH PUBLIC OR PRIVATE	LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF D&B CHANNELS	LACK KNOWLEDGE OF Tr PROVIDRES AND MODES	WEAK TOURISM AUTHORITY LEADERSHIP	NO CONNECTION WITH OTHER INFO SOURCES
	NORMS & TRUST HOW?	LACK STRUCTURES FOR COLLECTIVE OFFER DESIGN	LACK COMPETENCES TO ADVICE ON IoF	SKEPTICISM ON ADVISORY SKILLS FOR CoS	NO COOPERATION AGREEMENTS FOR D&I	CURRENT NORMS LIMIT MF ON D&M COOPERATION	LACK MODELS AND PROCESSES FOR D&B	NO TOURISM ACTOR HAS AUTHORITY ON Tr	NO CLEAR STANDARDS OR REGUL. PROCESSES	PROCEDURES NOT YET FULLY ADOPTED BY ACTORS
	COLLECTIVE ACTIONS WHAT & WHEN?	NO TARGET MARKET PROFILE TO GUIDE DESIGN	NO FUNDING PROGRAMS FOR FACILITIES	NO SUPPORT FOR CoS, LOW INNOVATION	INCAPACITY FOR COLLECTIVE D&I	LIMITED OR GENERIC D&M INITIATIVES	NO INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE D&B	LACK OF Tr POLICY FOR THE TARGET MARKET	NO FOLLOW UP TO COMPLY WITH PoS REGULATIONS	NO COOPERATION TO COLLECT OTHER DATA
HOW TO TACKLE THE PROBLEM? (ACTION PLAN)	**NETWORKS** WHO & WHERE?	PARTNERSHIPS WITH DMOs & INBOUND TOUR OPERATORS	IDENTIFY IoF STATUS AND FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES	IDENTIFIY CoS STATUS AND ADVIS. PARTNERS	IDENTIFY D&I SOURCES AND LANG. PARTNERS	IDENTIFY TARGET MARKET D&M PARTNERS	DESIGN COLLECTIVE D&B PLATFORM	PROPOSE Tr MODALITIES AND IDENTIFY PARTNERS	DEFINE MECHANISMS FOR PoS FOLLOW UP	AGREEMENTS WITH OTHER DATA COLLECTORS
	NORMS & TRUST HOW?	FORMALISE PARTERNSHIPS FOR COLL. OFFER DESIGN	ORDINANCE APPROVAL FOR IoF REGULATION	ORDINANCE APPROVAL FOR CoS REGULATION	FORMALISE D&I PROGRAM	UPDATE NORMS TO FOSTER PARTNERSHIPS	GAIN COMPETENCES FOR D&B	GAIN COMPETEN. ON TOURISM Tr ISSUES	ORDINANCE APPROVAL FOR PoS REGULAT. COMPET.	CREATE PLATFORM FOR EASY ACCESS TO DATA
	COLLECTIVE ACTIONS WHAT & WHEN?	PROFILE TARGET MARKET & DESIGN OFFER	IMPLEMENT IoF SUPPORT PROGRAM	IMPLEMENT CoS SUPPORT PROGRAM	IMPLEMENT D&I SOURCES NETWORK	PARTNERED / COFINANCED D&M CAMPAIGNS	IDENTIFY KEY ACTORS TO IMPLEM. PLATFORM	CREATR TOURISM Tr ADVISORY COMMITTEE	IMPLEMENT PoS FOLLOW UP PROGRAM	IMPLEMENT M&F PROGRAM AND DATA PUBLICATION

Note: the shadowed cells represent critical issues to be tackled.

Authors' own elaboration based on: Rodriguez-Giron et al. (2018)

We used social capital as the conceptual guide to refine the focus of analysis of our study case. Other destinations may use the same focus, or they may use other theories or concepts to focus the iModel towards their subject of interest.

In relation to social capital, a risk of using the iModel-as-a-tool, as demonstrated in this article, is the temptation for other cases to see it as a 'fixed recipe' where solutions to improve collective action are given. Although results and conclusions can be generalizable to some extent, the intention of the iModel and its methodology are to help actors understand their own situation. The iModel does not pretend to provide preconfigured universal answers, but rather provides a flexible framework for a continuous questioning about dynamic phenomena such as social capital and tourism. In that context, however, there is also the risk that the iModel's application ends up as a mere technocratic act which only imposes preconceived, top-down, politically-motivated decisions, using a 'social capital discourse' to pretend that there was collective participation. Stakeholders need to discern whether decisions based on the iModel's application have real fundaments or not and should avoid damaging trust among the destination's actors, which is precisely one of the most sensitive dimensions of social capital.

Finally, it is important to reflect on the extent to which iModel-as-a-tool might have influenced our conclusions regarding the role of social capital in a tourist destination. While the iModel orients the analysis of social capital's dimensions in tourist terms (e.g. when talking about Networks, it is always about the tourist destination's actors), social capital maintains the analysis of the tourism phenomenon in collective terms (e.g. when talking about a function such as Design, it is always about the capacity of the destination's actors to perform it collectively). Thus, there is no doubt that our reflection on social capital is influenced by the iModel's framework. However, we argue that this exchange of theoretical influences, which connects theoretical bodies such as systems thinking, social capital, and tourism to each other and to applicable purposes, is precisely the value the methodology has to offer.

2) Social capital enhancement for international market access

Shadowed cells in Figure 17 represent critical positive or negative issues affecting the CMBA's collective capacity to attract German organised groups. Note that in Figure 17, sub-question 'What is lacking' - at social capital's dimension 'Norms & Trust', shadowed cells cross the

matrix from left to right. They point at the lack of structures, processes, competencies, or skills that harm the trust of networks on their own collective capacity to pass from agreements into actual actions. This lack of trust prevents actors from effectively committing their resources (e.g. money, time, human resources) into the execution of previously agreed intentions. In other words, lack of Norms & Trust represents the gap between Networks' potential and effective Collective Actions. These factors, expressed in the form of barriers, can be represented by the determinant of not having the appropriate organization/institutional structures (Hjalager, 2007; Tavares & Leitão, 2017; A. M. Williams & Shaw, 2011). Currently, the MF is conceived to perform only one, out of the nine functions analysed through the iModel, that is, Divulgation and/or Marketing (D&M). As argued by Pike & Page (2014), this is a common downside, represented in the misleading 'M' in 'DMO', which, initially intended to indicate 'Management', in practice stands for merely 'Marketing' organisations. Moreover, within its D&M function, the MF is restricted to performing jointly-funded activities, especially with actors from the private sector. This institutional context strongly hinders positive social capital development. Nevertheless, local and regional actors see the MF with the potential to play (and within its limitations, it has been attempting to play) a broader coordinating role in the CMBA. To tackle this downside, a new municipal ordinance is being promoted, which will provide the MF the status of a public enterprise, with competencies in tourism at the canton level. This will also allow the MF to project itself as a more influential player in tourism development, through formal cooperation agreements with surrounding municipalities, which are part of the experience when visiting the CMBA. Evidently, political will to provide the MF with real management power is a determinant in obtaining approval of this crucial ordinance. As it was pointed by a public sector's interviewee, 'on top of not having money, they [regional level tourism public entities] do not have decision power, right? … the financial factor is a limitation, but sometimes the management factor could open other, other paths, isn't it?'. Thus, to transform political will into a real enhancer, the MF has strategically used its social capital – in the sense of using its prestige and networks – to cultivate a favourable opinion about the ordinance among the local tourism sector and to indirectly convince the city council of the urgent need for it. Under this new law, the MF will be able to tackle market access determinants, such as promoting collective actions (Agndal & Elbe, 2007; OECD, 2008) or counting with enough quantity and qualified personnel for internationalisation (Leonidou, 2004).

Regarding the 'design function' in the iModel, the destination has collectively envisioned that it seeks to develop an experiential and creative type of tourism, something that is a potential catalyser of positive social capital. The 2016 – 2021 Cuenca's tourism development plan (TurisConsulting et al., 2016), aims at a type of tourism that: respects the lifestyle of the local population, stimulates tourism as a planned activity, and builds a destination with a unique, innovative and dynamic style. However, another key determinant related to the Design function of a destination, which in our case is lacking, is to have a clearly-defined target market (Cohen et al., 2014; S. Y. Park & Jei, 2010) that matches the local development vision. Lacking this, the CMBA will not be able to orient its network's efforts with measurable goals, leading to generic promotional activities without objectively demonstrable results. This, in turn, weakens trust in future collective actions. This is the case with Germans, who are already a relevant visitors' segment for the CMBA. Nevertheless, German visitors arrive mostly in an independent (GIER, 2017a) and spontaneous fashion, facilitated by the available information, connectivity and services at the destination, but without major influence from the local actors on the type of arriving visitors or the activities they perform. Moreover, no interviewed actor could point out a collective action from the destination towards any German market segment. Without a clearly-defined target market some determinants are impossible to tackle thereby becoming barriers. That is the case of determinants such as identify the type of information to locate / analyse the market (A. M. Williams & Shaw, 2011) to identify foreign business opportunities (OECD, 2008), or innovate for and adapt to the target market (Pillmayer & Scherle, 2014). A clear target market definition would help to enhance social capital locally and regionally, as the CMBA could strategically select partner destinations to design routes with a more international appeal. This, in turn, would address the determinant of having an offer that justifies the travel distance (McKercher, 1998), and would counterbalance the lack of international flight connections (Culiuc, 2014), which is another key determinant. Nevertheless, current networks' indifference and low trust due to previous poor results from collective initiatives can mobilize social capital in a negative form, thereby creating barriers for market access determinants such as public – private joint initiatives (Hjalager, 2007) or for required private investments (A. M. Williams & Shaw, 2011). Not surprisingly, this would hinder collective actions.

Another critical effort regarding social capital enhancement refers to the MF's initiative to obtain a Sustainable Destination certification for Cuenca's historic city centre, which is already

a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. In September 2017, Cuenca became the first Latin American destination to obtain the certification issued by the German certifier TourCert. This initiative relates to the Configuration of Services function (Figure 17) – sub-question 'What is there now' – at the level of social capital's dimension 'Collective Actions'. On the one hand, this is potentially a social capital enhancing process as it implied the voluntary and individual compliance of service providers with certain norms to collectively qualify the historic district as a sustainable destination. On the other hand, the certification can also potentially enhance collective access to the target market because the issuer is a German entity, which simultaneously represents a trusted divulgation channel towards the market, as well as a first-hand information source for the destination. Paradoxically, in this way, the German certifier is more involved in the destination's social capital enhancement for market access than many local service providers that opted not to participate in the process. This initiative allows the collective to tackle several determinants for internationalisation, such as the need for government support programs (Önder et al., 2009), the need to meet international standards (Cohen et al., 2014), the ability to identify the appropriate income segment for the destination (Martins et al., 2017), the need for reliable foreign representation (Agndal & Elbe, 2007), and an improved international reputation (Dogru et al., 2017). All of these result in potential enhancement of international trust and networks, which results, in turn, in social capital enhancement at the international level. However, it is one thing to get certified and another one is to deal with the determinant of implementing and sustaining efficient – collective – processes through time. This concern is simply and clearly summarised in a comment by a tour operator: '…I have sometimes the impression that they [tourism public institutions] start something, and then, they just stop'. Thus, to enhance sustained processes at the local level, the MF needs the competence and resources to offer long-term support and regulation programs to the local providers' network. This is another reason why approval of the previously discussed ordinance is required.

Another key determinant that the CMBA's actors currently identify as a barrier is the inability for efficient follow up and sales closing. This was identified within the 'Distribution and Booking' (D&B) function as negative social capital in the destination's network. While the MF coordinates collective promotional efforts and tackles the determinant of contacting potential overseas customers (Williams & Shaw, 2011), local tour operators are unable to close deals with the German companies initially contacted: '…once we return [the MF from trade fairs] we provide the contacts' database to the local tour operators, but as they never met, then the

process cools down and dies'. This is because local actors are mostly small and medium enterprises that do not have the aptitude to deal with determinants such as experience in successful internationalisation (Agndal & Elbe, 2007), cannot dedicate managerial time for internationalisation (OECD, 2008), or cannot communicate with and support overseas customers to reduce uncertainty (Quintal, Lee, & Soutar, 2010). This gap between efforts and outcomes produces poor results in commercialisation, which undermines trust in future collective initiatives. One option to enhance the CMBA's social capital, as identified in the D&B function – sub-question 'How to tackle the problem' – at the level of social capital's dimension 'Networks' (Figure 17), is to design a collective D&B Platform. Under formalised norms, the MF can create enough trust to play a brokering role, connecting local actors' offer with the target market. This would not only leverage the limited available resources but would free local service providers from complex D&B processes and would allow them to concentrate on the functions within the iModel's 'Involvement phase'. From the market's perspective, the MF's D&B platform would project confidence on a destination with processes and predictable behaviour in place, thereby reducing uncertainty (Pearce, 2008). This initiative can potentially tackle other determinants, such as collectively coping with competition for access to long haul international markets (Tavares & Leitão, 2017) and can generate income for the limited public budget for tourism. The biggest challenge will be to deal with negative social capital in the form of scepticism on new forms of cooperation and innovation, which could be counterbalanced by inviting local or foreign newcomers, who may be more open to change, into the network.

3) The relation between systems thinking and social capital in the context of tourism

The systems thinking based iModel proved to be an interesting approach for exploring social capital complexities in a destination, especially because of the parallelism between social capital and tourism as emerging phenomena. Both social capital and tourism emerge from the dynamics among multiple actors located at different geographic and political levels, and both present the characteristics of complex systems. Social capital and tourism require several interacting destinations' actors (such as governments, firms or residents) to mobilise individually-owned resources (such as knowledge, funding or facilities) towards a common goal (such as tourism development, jobs, income or conservation). These dynamics can generate or hinder the emergence of social capital, passing from a potential into a realized state

through concrete collective actions. The resulting social capital and the tourism experience, both have *emergent* characteristics (a key feature of complex systems) that do not reside in any of their individual elements separately. For instance, a hotel alone cannot perform a collective action, nor can it represent the complete tourism experience. The systems thinking driven iModel thus allowed us to progressively analyse the aggregated levels of social capital and tourism complexity to observe their essential dynamics, acting simultaneously as processes and as outcomes that feedback upon themselves. It also allowed us to discover elements absent in the CMBA's social capital and to find ways in which social capital can be fuelled.

One particular systems thinking's notion that helps us to understand social capital complexity in tourism is that of non-linearity. It refers to results that are not proportional to the inputted efforts; that is, small changes at one point can cause big changes in another part of the system. CMBA's actors, for instance, have many assets: multiple UNESCO recognitions, a varied offer of services from high-end to low budget, diverse cultural and natural attractions, university-level tourism careers, political support and a promotional organisation contacting international distribution channels. These assets should have given the CMBA actors greater access to international markets. However, as was evidenced in the iModel, the CMBA does not have the collective capacity to steer or even decide on managing international visitors in a proactive way. Thus, in their case, 'small changes that may cause big effects' refers to improving internal collective capacities before putting more effort into externally perceived characteristics, such as titles, facilities or attractions. The MF is the agent with the potential to stimulate these changes with efforts such as: identifying collective opportunities, focusing the use of available resources, mediating actors to share common goals, and advising on how to sustain the changes over time. While non-linearity is hardly avoidable, learning to adapt as a collective to changing circumstances is an acquirable skill when assisted by a clear, shared purpose.

The non-linear nature of complex systems, such as social capital, is also intimately related to the systems thinking's notion of non-centrality. This is especially the case in tourist destinations, which are entities with dynamic geographic boundaries. Depending on the type of visitor, the places visited, and the facilitators involved, the territory of the experienced destination will vary. For instance, German organised groups visiting the CMBA often have itineraries that include other national and international destinations. In this tourist context, the non-centrally controlled dynamics of social capital is highly evident. This is because although there is a tour operator carefully coordinating the different parts of the itinerary, this does not

mean that all variables can be controlled. Many local and international dynamics influence the final tourist experience, which is ultimately generated in a collective way by the participating actors. The most challenging aspect of non-centrally controllable dynamics in tourism systems is to mediate between destinations', tour operators', and visitors' expectations. Unlike corporations, destinations are not top-down structures. They comprise groups of actors in a set of often widespread territories. Although the final experience cannot be fully controlled centrally, it can be influenced. In that perspective, social capital (through the mediating role of an agent interested in developing more than only the commercial side of tourism) is the resource that can channel collective efforts in an iterative process of trial and error, to progressively approach the destination's development vision. Such a facilitating actor should not strive for centralised control, but should stimulate a cooperative environment which enhances actors' skills and provides a long-term vision achievable with short-term, practical steps. In our case study, the systems thinking based iModel, allowed us to identify who the involved actors are, their location and their roles, providing a systematic understanding of the destination's social capital dynamics as well as insight into how to the MF could improve its role as facilitator.

4.2.6 Final Remarks

A destination's proactive access to international markets depends more on the internal capacity to preliminarily discuss and collectively decide on the type of desired tourism and envision expected results rather than on immediate external action. Positive social capital is thus required for this type of decision and to act in accordance with it.

However, there is usually an underestimation of the importance of internal reflection before taking external actions. This leads to unstructured initiatives with poor results. Social capital is a critical resource, but is often latent, underused and underdeveloped. Therefore, a facilitating actor with formalised competencies is key to enhancing social capital and collective capacities. Such an actor should have three main characteristics: political support, the appropriate institutional structure and the technical capacity to facilitate operationalisation of agreements.

In the CMBA's case, there are three critical issues the MF must make as priority: the ordinance approval by the city council, the consolidation of the processes to maintain the sustainable destination certification, and the implementation of capacities for collective product design along with a commercialisation platform. These priorities are not new nor unique for the CMBA's case, but the insight that they can be fuelled by ensuring long-term social capital enhancement capacities, is.

It is also key to maintaining the notion of the 'tourist destination' as a territorially dynamic entity whose boundaries are determined by the actors involved in the tourism experience rather than by geographic limits. And consider that in the context of international markets, the term 'local actor' might refer more to the degree of participation in relation to the destination's goals than to physical proximity.

Through the iModel, a systems thinking approach proved useful for exploring the relationship between social capital and access to markets by a destination as a collective and for guiding the analysis of this relationship until a level in which actions and strategies could be defined. This is due to the fact that social capital and tourism both emerge from complex systems of interactions, which makes them suitable to be studied through the lens systems thinking theory.

In terms of policy formulation, the iModel, based on systems thinking, has relevant implications because its methodology allows to analyse the destination in detail. This, in turn, facilitates an orderly structuring of knowledge from antecedents to diagnosis and planning of actions throughout the different phases of the emerging process of tourism. As a result, policymakers can gain a solid insight into how different dimensions of social capital influence the determinants of access to international markets and the relationships between these determinants and actors. This provides a detailed understanding and, simultaneously, a comprehensive view of the dynamics of the collective. If implemented critically, the iModel can play a valuable role for policymakers in the need for in-depth insights but with time constrains. This is often the case in destination management, which requires the development of policies that support practical solutions within a constantly changing environment. However, if the iModel is used as a mere technocratic exercise, disconnected from the objectives of the destination, and without follow-up to constantly update knowledge about the dynamics of the collective, then policy formulation will hardly benefit from the potential contribution of the iModel.

Finally, while the applicability of the iModel in exploring other aspects of tourism destinations has not yet been tested with concerns other than those of social capital, its broader applicability reveals interest for academics and practitioners at the theoretical and practical levels, respectively.

V. DISCUSSION AND MAIN CONTRIBUTIONS

In this section I discuss how each of the five previously presented papers (Figure 1) tackles a specific research question and problem. I also elaborate on the main contribution of each paper for solving these questions and for tourism studies in general.

5.1 SYSTEMS THINKING, THE TOURISM PHENOMENON AND COMPLEXITY

This discussion relates to Paper 1, in Chapter II, which tackled the specific question number 1: *What is the relationship between systems thinking and the tourism phenomenon, and its usefulness as a theory to study the complexities of tourism in a more holistic way?* The translation of systems thinking notions into the context of the tourism phenomenon proved useful for addressing the complexity embedded in the very nature of tourism. Tourism, as a multi-faceted phenomenon with diverse meanings and manifestations, is arguably more than just an economic activity, and resists easy classification within a single discipline or one-dimensional view. By *referring to* tourism with a systemic terminology, the phenomenon remains open to be considered from multiple perspectives and disciplines. Several systems thinking-based approaches such as Complex Adaptive Tourism Systems or Causal Loop Diagrams have, prior to my study, proved useful for applying certain systems thinking concepts with a tourism perspective, and for addressing the complexities of tourism. However, I argued that tourism studies would benefit from a more integrated 'tourism systems thinking' terminology, to overcome the perception that systems-based approaches are just a mix of fancy terminology. I intended, thus, to provide such an interrelated set of concepts by discussing the relationships between systems thinking's theoretical principles and the tourism phenomenon as a complex system. This allowed me to relate systems thinking to tourism from its most basic components (the *elements*) to the highest level of aggregation and complexity of a system (the *environment*), within the context of the tourism phenomenon. This systemic approach facilitated the maintenance of a view of tourism operating at multiple levels and to referring to it as a system. Furthermore, a systemic approach also offers a common ground for the interdisciplinary study of tourism. This is important to overcome the use of the limiting 'business', 'industrial' or 'leisure' terms as generalised descriptors for tourism. The current state of our globalised world presents new collective challenges, requiring more integrative paradigms and forms of referring to rapidly growing global scale phenomena such as tourism,

which has consequences on different aspects of host societies worldwide. Otherwise, the broader public will continue to be prevented from understanding that tourism may take diverse forms and from realising the different implications that the tourism phenomenon has at local and global scales, and on different groups of stakeholders. There is, however, the risk that this 'systemic' approach remains too theoretical, with limited utility for tourism researchers, but especially, for tourism practitioners. How to operationalise, therefore, tourism systems thinking for the practical study of tourism? For that purpose, Paper 1 includes an example of analytical application based on the proposed 'Integrated Tourism Systems Thinking Conceptual Framework' that poses several guiding questions. However, the applicability challenges of the conceptual framework are further tackled to a larger extent in the Methodological Stage or chapter III of this thesis. There, the introduced 'iModel' represents in itself an exercise of *abstraction and hierarchy* to operationalise the integrated terminology proposed in the tourism systems thinking conceptual framework. The iModel proposes an initial arrangement of the tourism's essential structure and offers the flexibility to describe different types of touristic dynamics. The iModel applies the basic concept of *element* as representative of the actors in the tourism system, and its methodology helps to progressively reveal which actors are inside or outside the system of the case study under consideration. This progressive actor mapping helps, in turn, to identify the system's boundaries and its *environment*. In this way, the proposed tourism systems thinking terminology not only relates tourism and systems thinking at a conceptual level, but it also provides the basis for further application of the concepts in a practical way and in different case studies through the iModel.

Main contribution from Paper 1

Paper 1 introduces a systems thinking-based tourism-contextualised vocabulary to approach and study tourism as a system. It offers a more diverse and integrative way of thinking and talking about the tourism phenomenon. This contributes to overcoming the limiting scope of business and industrial terminology as referential descriptors for tourism, or to consider tourism only as a leisure-related activity and mostly from the economic perspective. Additionally, a systems thinking-based terminology offers a common ground for interdisciplinary approaches to tourism, because it has the potential to allow the description of different social, environmental and economic dynamics within tourism. This

systemic view of tourism contributes to the formation of the so-called—in Paper 1—'tourismologist', and strengthens tourism as a discipline itself but with an interdisciplinary nature, rather than reducing tourism to the terminology, and therefore to the perspective, of one specific discipline. This is important not only to advancing academic understanding, but also to facilitating the general public's understanding of the diverse implications that the tourism phenomenon has in our societies.

5.2 SOCIAL CAPITAL, THE TOURIST DESTINATION AND COLLECTIVE ACTIONS

This discussion relates to Paper 2, in Chapter II, which tackled the specific question number 2: *Which are the most suitable dimensions to assess social capital at the level of the tourist destination considered as a collective of actors?* Throughout my research, the approach of seeing tourist destinations as collectives of actors trying to act together, is constantly stressed. From a governance perspective, destinations are usually multi-layered structures that facilitate or complicate tourist experiences. The complex relationships between governments, firms and host societies at different institutional levels, influence on how stakeholders participate, and ultimately benefit, either financially (from a tourism firm perspective) or socially (from a host-guest relationship perspective). Territorially speaking, destinations are dynamic structures, ranging from a specific attraction to a combination of places in multiple countries, depending on the visitors' interests. These dynamics involve actors from different sectors that interact at different territorial levels, which suggests that the notion of 'destination' needs to go beyond a set of territorial-administrative and spatial boundaries. The notion of 'destination' needs a dynamic dimension, in the sense that it changes its boundaries according to the location of the participating actors in the tourism experience to satisfy the visitors' as well as the facilitators' expectations. All of these governance, territorial and dynamic perspectives of a destination form complex scenarios of interactions from which social capital emerges, either with positive or negative outcomes. Non-tourism and tourism related literature coincided in highlighting the nature of social capital as a non-pre-existing resource that emerges from a process of interactions only when two or more stakeholders interact. The nature of social

capital as a phenomenon emerging from interactions among its elements (the tourism actors) points back to the same characteristic in the relation between systems thinking and tourism, discussed in Paper 1. Although social capital was not expressly discussed from a systems thinking perspective in Paper 2, it is evident that the characteristics of complex systems are also present in social capital. The complexity of social capital is further evidenced when considering that if destinations want to achieve collective goals, their actors need to mobilise resources that have varied ownership, availability, quality, quantity and location. In this regard, the results from the empirical stage of my research, in Papers 4 and 5, confirmed that if host societies expect to self-determine their development path and obtain benefits through tourism, coordinated participation of actors at different locations and from different sectors is needed. I argue, thus, that positive social capital *is the key resource to be enhanced* for achieving common development goals. And within social capital, *trust* (its intangible aspect) is the key dimension that connects networks (its tangible aspect) with collective actions (its outputs). Thus, approaching social capital as the object of interest was fundamental for the purpose of my research. The assessment matrix at the level of the tourist destination, introduced in Paper 2, facilitated a comprehensive way of approaching social capital in my final case study. It allowed me to look into the relationships between the key dimensions of social capital (networks, norms & trust, collective actions), the emerging process of social capital, the conditions that foster the emergence of social capital, and the levels of scope of social capital (bonding, bridging, linking). The insights from Paper 2, also helped me to consider social capital simultaneously from a double perspective. That is, to consider social capital as a process and to consider social capital as an outcome that feedbacks its own process. This already suggests that successful collective action might be more determined by internal capacities of the group, than by external conditions. Although I argue that social capital is key for effective collective actions, social capital theory is not presented as a solution, but only as a heuristic device to assist with looking into, and learning about, the interactions of a destination seen as a collective. In fact, social capital can manifest in forms that actually hinder the achievement of collective goals. Thus, the assessment matrix from Paper 2 does not presuppose social capital as positive or negative per se. It only offers a simplified, though insightful, way consider the interactions that may lead to the actual outcomes of a collective. When plotted into the iModel (from Paper 3) using the suggested key or central actor approach, the social capital assessment matrix proved useful for conceptual guidance for research on my case study. The social capital matrix dimensions and levels of scope helped to reflect in detail and confirm (in Paper 5), that the achievement of a destination goals *depends on its actors' internal collective capacity* to

agree on visions and to mobilise resources for implementation. Those internal collective capacities are more determinative than external individual capacity for marketing or for building facilities, or the conditions of the international markets' environment.

Main contribution from Paper 2

Paper 2 presents a conceptual framework to assess the key dimensions of social capital at the level of a tourist destination, seen as a collective, and to explore social capital at different levels of scope within that destination. The article presents a simplified, yet insightful, way to look at social capital as a multidimensional and multilevel emerging process. Social capital has been studied in other fields at the individual, household, community and even national levels. In tourism, however, social capital theory has mostly been used as a framework or as a means to study other specific issues, rather than being discussed as the object of study. Therefore, there was a gap in how to approach the study of social capital itself at the level of the tourist destination seen as a collective of actors trying to act together. Nevertheless, social capital is a key theory to consider because it refers to the resource that allows collectives to mobilise other resources (i.e. other capitals, e.g., money, skills, knowledge) to act together. Thus, a more structured way to understand social capital itself within tourist destinations, rather than only using it as a framework to observe other subjects, provides insights to reflect on how to enhance collective action in tourism. Furthermore, Paper 2 offers a comprehensive guide for researchers and decision makers to better understand how social capital works in their case of interest, which might in turn help them to reflect on how to improve outcomes.

5.3 HANDLING THE STUDY OF TOURISM'S COMPLEXITIES

This discussion relates to Paper 3, in Chapter III, which tackled the specific question number 3: *How can different aspects of the tourism phenomenon, such as social capital, be studied with a systemic approach that allows for tackling complexity in an organised way?* One of the

challenges of my research approach was to focus on my subjects of interest (social capital and market access), while maintaining the broader meaning of the tourism phenomenon and without describing it only in terms of those subjects. This challenge was identified when searching for a tourism-specific conceptual and/or methodological framework as the basis of my own research, which offers a perspective on tourism broader than economic or leisure related aspects. That search led me to the awareness that most tourism literature describing and presenting graphic models or schemes of how tourism works was either too focused on the author's field of expertise (e.g. geography, marketing, business); or presented models that, in my opinion and based on a wide range of tourism literature arguing for the need to broaden the perspectives on the study of tourism (see Paper 3), were too entangled by the limiting analogies of tourism as an 'industry' or as a—commercial—'product'. This finding, coincided with the ongoing debate in the literature about the theoretical weakness of tourism studies as a discipline by itself, constantly 'borrowing' other fields' knowledge and preconceptions to study partial aspects of the broader tourism phenomenon, such as the commercial aspect. It could be argued, however, that using systems thinking implies also 'borrowing' another field's knowledge. Nevertheless, it is important to point out that systems thinking does not provide a prescription of how things work in a specific field. On the contrary, systems thinking provides a set of general concepts to tackle the complexity of describing how the world works. Therefore, systems thinking can be applied to and can connect many different fields for the study of the tourism phenomenon. Thus, drawing upon the tourism systems thinking terminology introduced in Paper 1, I endeavoured to develop a systems thinking-based conceptual and graphic model. As a result, the so called 'iModel' (Integrative Model) describes the emergence of the tourism experience from a dynamic system of interactions. The iModel is structured by the functions that visitors and facilitators perform and helps to describe the trajectory of interactions within different possible tourism forms such as independent, customised or packaged trips. Furthermore, the iModel also introduced something that no other tourism model did. It proposed a methodology to configure the conceptual general model into a 'model-as-a-tool' to analyse particular aspects of interest of any given case study. The configurable methodology facilitated a systematic analysis through the complex nature of tourism, as demonstrated in Paper 5, with the possibility to go from the general to the specifics of the case and backwards. Furthermore, as a management tool, the iModel also demonstrated its utility as it was validated as one of the positive aspects of Cuenca's Historic District (the touristic core of the Cajas Massif) by being the first in Latin America to obtain the 'Sustainable Destination Certification' by the German certifier Tourcert, in November 2017. Although the model was

initially motivated and finally tested with my general research question in mind (regarding social capital and market access), it was primarily conceived as a configurable tool for application in any case study, through the methodology detailed in Paper 3. Therefore, it is expected that the iModel is also useful for other researchers and for destination managers to support decision-making by guiding their own research-based analytical processes. If useful, this would contribute to bridge the gap between academic theoretical constructs, such as conceptual models, and their contribution for practical application. However, the iModel's analytical utility in relation to other (than social capital) aspects of interest in a destination, such as more commercially or environmentally oriented issues, is still to be tested. Another aspect still to be tested is whether the iModel also proves useful to study tourism from the visitors' perspective rather than the managers' or the policy makers' perspective. So far, when the iModel was tested for social capital from the facilitators' perspective, its utility to conduct detail analysis was very convincing.

Main contribution from Paper 3

Paper 3 develops a tourism-specific systems thinking-based conceptual and schematic model. Its main contributions are: to present a model of tourism as a dynamic system that can describe the emergence of different forms of tourism; and to introduce a methodology to apply the model as an analytical tool for decision-making support. The so-called 'iModel' facilitates a systematic and focused analysis in a guided manner through the complex nature of tourism, easing the acquisition of insights and revealing the dynamics between the actors of a specific study case. The iModel allows visualisation of the relationships between different aggregation levels in the destination's system, and understanding of the connection between the parts and the whole. The iModel also contributes by bridging the gap between theoretical constructs and practical application to analyse key issues of a destination. As a methodological tool, the iModel helps to organise and connect the available information, to diagnose the situation and to reflect on how to overcome problems. For tourism practitioners, the paper provides an innovative tool to support decision-making. For tourism studies, in general terms, the paper contributes with a novel conceptual model to

study tourism in a more integrative way than only from the economic aspect but without neglecting it.

5.4 DETERMINANTS FOR INTERNATIONAL TOURISM MARKET ACCESS

This discussion relates to Paper 4, in Chapter IV, which tackled the specific question number 4: *What are the determinants that hinder or facilitate access of tourist destinations as collectives to international tourism markets?* In the research, I found that exports literature offered a well-structured and integrated knowledge base on determinants of international market access. As for tourism-specific literature on internationalisation, I also found that it tackles the subject in a more disaggregated form, focusing on varied unstructured determinants. Based on those initial findings and supported by empirical data from tourism actors in Ecuador and Germany, I presented a consolidated list of 46 determinants of the access of tourist destinations to international tourism markets (Paper 4). The consolidated list can be classified either by priority or by categories. As my general research question refers to *enhancing* destinations' access to markets, and although exports literature refers to 'barriers', I deemed it more useful to refer to 'determinants' in a neutral form coinciding with the tourism literature. This does not implicitly consider a 'determinant' to be a positive (enhancer) or a negative (barrier) condition per se. It is the context of the specific case study under investigation, and its actors' (in)capacity to deal with a given determinant, which defines whether each specific determinant represents an enhancer or a barrier for international market access in that specific case. Such approach also coincides with that on social capital in Paper 2, in the sense that these conceptual constructs are not prescriptions for success. They are frameworks or heuristic tools to understand the positive or negative aspects of a situation. Expressing determinants in a neutral form is necessary for them to serve as guiding criterion to reflect upon the specific case study of interest. This conceptual neutrality was shown to be useful in Paper 5, where I explored how the destination's social capital relates to the determinants for international market access. By adopting that perspective, one can recognise different determinants acting as enhancers or barriers for the specific case, allowing for reflection on how and why determinants become one or the other and how to counterbalance their effects through collective action.

Although the consolidated list of determinants presents a generalised priority ranking, drawing upon empirical cases and literature, the proposed ranking should be considered just a starting point, as priorities may vary from case to case. Nevertheless, given that Paper 4 was developed based on empirical work relating to the case study conducted for this research project, I can conclude that for the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area this priority ranking accurately reflects the situation. However, in this or any other case study determinants act as interdependent dynamic conditions. There will be, thus, not only one but several central determinants to tackle which, in turn, will relate to other determinants in varied forms. Therefore, a destination's effort to tackle one determinant will have direct and indirect effects on some of the other determinants, influencing different actors in different ways. This interdependence of factors and effects also refers to the principles of systems thinking and social capital, where the collective interactions of a group of actors (the elements of the system) will allow or hinder the emergence of new collective capacities. Translated into the case study, this means that the dynamics among the destination's actors will influence the emergence (or not) of an enhanced collective capacity to access international markets. And in turn, their collective (in)capacity to influence market access determinants refers to social capital, where the role of a capable facilitator is key to identify the level of preparedness of the different actors to participate in effective ways within the tourist destination's system. Additionally, determinants are also dynamic circumstances because destinations are dynamic entities. Thus, today's barriers could represent tomorrow's enhancers, or vice versa. In the context of Ecuadorian actors and German markets, some of the priority determinants related to: getting the political support for urgently required institutional changes of key actors, improving professionalisation, innovating for an offer that justifies the travel distance, accurately defining target markets for an efficient use of scarce resources, and improving internal and regional associativity to connect with internationally positioned touristic routes. These findings confirm what the export sector literature also pointed out: internal capacities are far more determinant of market access than external conditions. However, there is a fundamental difference between the export sector and tourism. In the export sector, internal capacities relate to building a replicable product and taking it to the customer, while in the tourism sector internal capacities relate to adding quality to the destination on site and bring visitors need to the destination for their involvement in a subjective non-replicable individual experience. Internal collective capacities, therefore, become especially critical for market access in tourism because no product is manufactured and delivered, but people need to be transported and involved for the tourism experience to emerge. Finally, the proposed

consolidated list of determinants for international tourism market access proved useful for analysing, through the iModel's (from Paper 3) systemic approach, how the social capital of the final case study (in paper 5) influences those market determinants in a positive or negative way, and for reflecting on how to improve the collective action of the destination.

Main contribution from Paper 4

Paper 4 consolidates a categorised and prioritised list of 46 determinants for international tourism market access. Drawing on past and current research, the paper's main contribution is identifying the key conditions that may hinder or enable destinations to access international markets. Although the determinants are mostly discussed in terms of destinations as collectives of actors, they can also be applied for individual agents. Another relevant contribution from this paper is to highlight that in no case is there unique determinant to tackle. Determinants act as sets of interdependent dynamic conditions, whose priority must be identified within the context of each case study. The paper also highlights that determinants do not have the same effect for all actors in a destination. Thus, it is important to identify the level of preparedness of each actor participating in collective initiatives towards international markets, in order to understand how to help them tackle specific determinants. Finally, the paper calls attention to the fact that determinants are not static but dynamic circumstances, and their influence as enhancers or barriers for international market access may change according to the destination's preparedness and evolution.

5.5 ENHANCING INTERNATIONAL MARKET ACCESS, THE CASE OF THE CAJAS MASSIF BIOSPHERE AREA

This discussion relates to Paper 5, in Chapter IV, which tackled the specific question number 5: Considering the previous specific questions together, *what conditions, actors or strategies can enhance the social capital of a destination to* address the determinants of access to international market access *and attract the type of visitors desired*? Having set forth a theoretical framework in Papers 1 and 2, a tourism-specific methodology in Paper 3, and

empirically-based determinants of international market access in Paper 4, I had all the elements to conduct a detailed analysis of this specific question. The initial overarching lesson from the analytical application exercise in Paper 5, is that market access does not depend on marketing or commercial power as much as on the destination's internal capacity to collectively decide, in preliminary stages, on the desired type of tourism and on its collective capacity to act accordingly, in the latter stages. To facilitate these collective processes, key players acting as catalysers of effective collective actions are fundamental.

In the case study of Paper 5, the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation (MF) was identified by many stakeholders as the actor with the potential, and the will, to play that catalysing role. However, the facts of being conceived only as a marketing organisation, and not having the appropriate structure to formally perform other functions, strongly hinders its potential to enhance the destination. Here, the role of political actors is critical to change the norms that would allow the MF to play a more effective role in the destination's enhancement as a collective. Nevertheless, the MF has been able to collectively and formally craft a vision among the destination's actors on the desired type of tourism. But this vision does not mean much if this key player cannot incorporate more specialised professionals to perform new functions, such as a suitable design of the destination's offer which implies the capacity to clearly define target markets that match the destination's vision. Having a clearly defined target market is an elemental step when talking about access to markets, but the literature and experience show that this is an issue repeatedly overlooked in several cases. This leads to generic promotion and a lack of demonstrable results, which in turn undermines trust in collective initiatives. In other words, poor results undermine positive social capital. Although the segment of German organised groups was selected by the MF and also identified through available data as a priority market for the case study of Paper 5, none of the interviewed actors could clearly point at one example of a proactive collective action towards that specific market. Having a clear vision of the type of desired tourism but lacking the definition of where to bring those visitors from leads to random and ineffective initiatives, usually motivated by chance opportunities.

The lack of a clear target market also impedes the identification of the most valuable potential partners at a regional level to develop or connect with internationally more attractive touristic routes. This is especially critical for the Cajas Massif which does not have international flights or borders. New strategies, such as the collective certification as sustainable destination

obtained from a German tourism certifier, is a step forward towards the reinforcement in the minds of the collective of the target market that matches the local development vision. The involvement of this German certifier in the collective enhancement of the destination's capacities, which is deeper than the involvement of some local actors that opted not to participate in the certification process, also calls attention to the fact that 'local actor' might refer more to a degree of involvement than to a physical proximity. Once the certification was obtained in November 2017, however, the most challenging aspect relates to collectively sustaining the processes that might in fact lead to enhanced access to German markets. Such processes or functions imply the need for technical support programs and regulation of services by the local authorities. They also imply processes or functions often taken for granted at a collective level, such as to efficiently follow up on international contacts after promotion and the ability to close sales. Poor follow up and sales closing, usually expected to be individually handled by small local enterprises with low experience in international commercialisation, create a gap between efforts and results. Innovative and challenging strategies to tackle this gap were identified, such as developing a professional regional distribution platform that helps to connects the local actors' offers to the target market's distribution channels. This, of course, requires professional work on technical and legal issues, but specially on creating trust and motivating participation, while neutralising negative social capital in the form of old mind-sets and practices that can represent strong barriers for innovation.

Main contribution from Paper 5

Paper 5 demonstrates, using a systems thinking approach, an empirical application for analysing how to enhance the social capital of destinations for local actors to attract the desired type of international visitors. The main contribution of this paper is both theoretical and a practical value. Theoretically, the paper bridges systems thinking and social capital theories within the context of the case study, through the application of the iModel (from Paper 3). In practical terms, the analytical application provides insights into how collective actions at the tourist destination level can be enhanced to tackle determinants for international market access. Nevertheless, the paper provides more generalisable insights for other destinations, such as the fact that barriers for international market access depend more on the internal collective capacities than on external circumstances, and the

need for enhancing facilitating actors through extending and formalising their competences, creating proper networking structures, and providing technical specialised capacities in order to promote collective trust and foster positive social capital. Also, an important contribution in the context of internationalisation is the observation that 'local actor' might refer more to degree of participation in the destination's system than to physical proximity or origin.

5.6 ON THE CASE STUDY

I consider it also valuable to look in retrospective to consider whether the case study was appropriate for the research purposes and whether generalisation is possible.

The research project needed a case study with a rich scenario in terms of having different interacting elements to explore the behaviour of a complex social system in the context of tourism. From this perspective, I consider that the Cajas Massif offered the right conditions, as described in the 'Case study' section of this thesis, to make interesting and insightful observations. Its paradoxical situation offered a really interesting case. On the one hand the Cajas Massif is an area with multiple world-wide recognitions by UNESCO regarding its exceptional universal cultural and natural values, with political, entrepreneurial and academic support for tourism development; but on the other hand, it is very limited in terms of its capacity to proactively attract the desired type of visitors.

The situation of the Cajas Massif can be the situation of many other secondary destinations in Latin America and around the world, where, in spite of the potential they have in touristic attractions and local actors, tourism does not consolidate as the powerful development means as it is expected. Therefore, I consider that the results from my case study, in the context of its relationship with Germany as the target market, can be generalisable to several other destinations with similar challenges and goals. The issues analysing the gaps between agreements on goals and actual results from collective initiatives, and regarding the importance to look for destination development in an inward-outward perspective, discussed in Papers 4 and 5 respectively, are especially interesting for other destinations.

If I could continue researching along the same lines as this thesis, I would focus on how to enhance the capacities of the Municipal Foundation as a collective facilitator for the current case study. Special interest would be put on the functions (as discussed in the iModel in Paper 3) of collective 'Design', 'Data sorting and information generation', and 'Distribution and booking'. And regarding those functions, I would more specifically focus on: the role of the catalysing Norms & Trust dimension within the social capital continuum, on the dynamics of trust generation among the actors of the destination, and on the potential of new information and communication technologies in trust enhancement towards collective actions to attract international visitors. This is because I consider that the collective enhancement especially of those functions (considering all the technical, social, political and commercial challenges) is what can make the difference in filling the gap between agreements and practical results. With that in mind, I would dig deeper into the Cajas Massif as case study, but adding comparative analyses looking into other cases in Ecuador or internationally that have successful collective experiences regarding the cited functions. This would be useful to identify strategies, conditions and determinants that led to success or failure and to reflect on to what extent those conditions can be replicated or not in the Cajas Massif or in the context of the other researched cases.

5.7 IN RELATION TO THE LITERATURE

Findings confirm that the more traditional dimensions of networks and norms & trust, mostly used in conceptual literature to describe social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Häuberer, 2011; Putnam, 1995a), are indeed useful to study the behaviour of social capital within the context of tourism. This research also confirmed that Collective action, which on the contrary is mostly used in methodological literature as a dimension to study social capital (Grootaert et al., 2004; Nyhan Jones & Woolcock, 2009), was also useful and integrates in a logic manner with the former two dimensions to describe a continuum of interrelated dimensions in the process of social capital's emergence within tourist destinations.

Findings also confirm the idea that a tourist destination can accurately be depicted as a complex adaptive system (Meekes et al., 2016). It is important to clarify, however, the difference in the notion of 'system' as proposed in traditions such as Luhmann's theoretical perspective, where

systems are referred to as autonomous entities with clear limits to its environment, and functional closure, which might lead to the conclusion that for the case of tourism '…the idea of a system or an autonomous topic does not fit…' (Darbellay & Stock, 2012, p. 446). On the contrary, systems thinking within complexity sciences conceives a system as an interdependent entity, without necessarily clear limits to its environment, and with functional openness as the system's outcomes and its environment are constantly influencing each other's behaviour (Baggio, 2008; Dekkers, 2015; Mella, 2012). From this perspective, *complex* refers to changing dynamics that generate different outputs, *adaptive* refers to changing behaviour in response to the environment, and *system* refers to a set of elements that collectively produce outcomes. In light of this thesis' findings, tourist destinations were demonstrated to be: *complex* collective entities interacting at different aggregation levels (local, national, international), influenced by a large set of determinants, which generates different results across time, collective entities whose members react in an non-centrally controlled *adaptive* manner, constantly reconfiguring their territorial limits according to the actors required to provide a certain type of tourism experience, and susceptible to be described and studied in terms of a *system* where its elements (the tourism actors) collectively generate an outcome called the tourism experience. Thus, the findings confirm that the notion of complex adaptive system may properly describe the nature of a tourist destination.

The outcomes of this thesis confirm as well that entities intending to facilitate collective tourism initiatives, regardless of whatever structure or name they have, such as Destination Management Organisations (DMO), need to correct and adapt their institutional structures and competences (Pike & Page, 2014). Rather than focusing on marketing, key collective facilitators require concentration on enhancing collective internal processes to effectively support the internationalisation of their destinations and connect results with local development aims. Moreover, findings confirm that although the public sector is key for effective tourism development, there are perhaps overly high expectations of improving international market access through legislation and regulation (Squalli et al., 2010) or by counting with large public financial resources. On the contrary, determinants such as legislation or financial resources, although important, turn out to be some of the least influential when they are tackled in isolation from other key internal determinants as, for example, capacity for collective action and other discussed in Paper 4.

On the other hand, this research contradicts or questions models and notions in the tourism literature that propose industrial or commercial-led perspectives to describe the tourism phenomenon (Goeldner & Ritchie, 2009; Judd, 2006; Smith, 1994). The application of the iModel and the insights produced through this research process demonstrated how systems thinking and social capital can be combined to arrive at a more connective view of the different aspects of the tourism phenomenon. The systems thinking based iModel supported a more integrative and enriching reflection on the dynamics of social interactions, while simultaneously maintaining the grip on the commercial aspect of tourism. The empirical application demonstrated that factors such as local development, collective enhancement, and other psychological aspects of the collective such as trust, can very well be studied alongside and in relation to commercial interests, allowing for the description and study of tourism phenomenon in a more integrated way than through industrial analogies.

The unique contribution of this research to the literature is its demonstration of how tourism and social capital share in their nature the characteristic of being emerging phenomena when considered from a systemic perspective. This means that neither the tourism phenomenon or social capital fully exist in the possession of only one actor. Tourism and social capital remain latent, only as potential experiences, until interactions take place allowing those phenomena to emerge ‘on the spot’, lasting while involvement lasts, to later return again into a latent state.

Another contribution to the literature is to present a structured and relational way to assess social capital at the level of the tourist destination considered as a collective entity. Although there is extensive literature dealing with social capital in tourism, as well as in other fields, and the dimensions proposed in the assessment matrix are not totally new when taken individually, the literature presents them in a very varied and disintegrated form. Especially in the case of the tourism literature, social capital theory has been used in unstructured ways and mostly as a theoretical framework to study other subjects of interest. However, social capital as the central research subject offers a powerful way to study how a destination can enhance its collective capacities. Thus, the introduced three dimensional and multileveled assessment matrix organises and proposes a more structured way to go deeper into the study of social capital in tourist destinations. Based on this assessment matrix, another key contribution from the empirical stage was to find that the dimension of norms & trust, is, in fact, the catalysing element that allows or hinders a destination’s actors from carrying out collective actions, either with positive or negative outcomes. In other words, collective trust, at the level of the tourist

destination, is the factor that can bridge the gap between agreements and real actions, or to pass from intentions into application.

In relation to determinants of access to international tourism markets, new contributions include a novel and prioritised list of 46 determinants for tourist destinations (Paper 4), classified into 10 categories. But more specifically, within that list, and although the tourism internationalisation literature to some extent implicitly discusses related aspects, there are eight determinants that have not been explicitly discussed before as key determinants for access to international tourism markets. They are: implementing and sustaining efficient processes, customers' awareness of the destination, official promotion of the destination, efficient follow up and sales closing, political leadership, authorities' control and regulation at destination, transparent and efficient bureaucratic processes, and coherent policy to make official statements. These tourist destination-specific determinants stemmed from findings in the empirical cases and add to previously proposed determinants in the tourism internationalisation literature.

Finally, considering that market access is studied in the tourism literature as a condition strongly determined by proximity to transit routes to main destinations or by the distance from source markets (McKercher, 1998, 2008), the relatively international isolated condition of the Cajas Massif (with no international airport or borders) could be deemed as a strong barrier. However, on the other hand, we must also consider the potential and current social conflicts generated by overcrowding in world renowned examples such as Venice, Barcelona or Bruges. These social pressures could be further increased by the continuous growth in the number of international travellers. Thus, from the perspective of enhancing collective capacities to attract visitors that meet local development goals, which requires time, perhaps international isolation is an opportunity, as it prevents, to a certain extent, that tourism develops to major scales in an improvised way. Nevertheless, findings suggest that such circumstance of isolation could be exploited as an advantage only if local actors learn to act proactively and in a collective way. From that perspective, another key contribution to the literature is the definition of the *destination's levels of collective awareness* and the description of three levels in the 'General conclusions' chapter of this thesis. These concepts point out the characteristics that differentiate a proactive from a reactive destination. They serve as a starting point to reflect

upon enhancement of collective capacities, which is a complex long-term process, as the research results suggest.

VI. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

6.1 HOW TO ENHANCE SOCIAL CAPITAL FOR INTERNATIONAL MARKET ACCESS

This discussion relates to the general question posed in Chapter I: How to enhance the social capital (SC) of a tourist destination to enable local actors to access international markets, in a way to attract the desired types and quantities of tourism flows? In this question, the expression 'desired types' refers to the types of visitors that meet the development goals of the destination. This section attempts to answer this question by drawing upon the five papers of the thesis (Chapters II, III and IV) in a more interconnected and general way.

When trying to address how to enhance social capital as the key resource for a collective to achieve effective action towards common purposes, the nature of social capital as a latent resource is a particularly salient characteristic to consider. Other material and intangible resources (such as attractions, facilities, cultural heritage), and even the agreement for a certain type of desired development path through tourism, might be available within a collective. Nevertheless, only quality relationships (as discussed in the 'Theoretical Introduction to Social Capital' section) among the actors of that tourism collective, based on trust and networking throughout the 'continuum' of collaboration, will allow effective actions to emerge and fill the gap between agreements and implementation. Depending on those dynamics, social capital might be transformed from a latent into an effective resource through collective action. And collective actions, in turn, is possible only when actors contribute with their available economic, human and physical resources towards their shared objectives. In other words, the moment of truth for social capital to emerge is when actors pass from *defining* a certain goal to *actually trying* to achieve it. The challenge, therefore, is first and foremost how to build trust among participants so that they feel it is worth putting their resources to work to achieve a certain goal. My research has explored how this transition from potential to real collective mobilisation of resources proves to be more complex and difficult than expected in a tourist destination. As in the case of my study area, this difficulty is especially frustrating for destinations that are endowed with internationally recognised attractiveness, institutional discourse and public opinion supporting tourism initiatives, and quality infrastructure in place. Despite these favourable conditions, the discernible impact of internal determinants in the form

of barriers such as lack of sustained processes, vague market definition, weak institutional structures, and low tourism professionalisation to perform specialised functions, suggest that the biggest threats come from within the system of the destination, more than from the national or international environment.

In order to overcome internal barriers such as the mentioned above, it is key to understand the importance of fostering positive social capital (in the sense of collective action towards local development goals) as a key resource for effective international market access of the destination as a collective. In general, marketing campaigns are among the most common initiatives promoted by collective tourism organisations (e.g. DMOs) attached to regional or local political institutions, which are eager to demonstrate 'concrete' actions to their constituents, hoping to build trust in the organisation. This typical tendency for promotional initiatives manifests the illusion of quickly achieving what the destination is trying to become. Nevertheless, very often this mistake causes exactly the contrary. When promotional activities are not based on a common development vision and a corresponding target market, nor connected with a coordinated offer development and distribution channel implementation, then any market or tourism form could look like an opportunity, leading to inefficiency in the use of resources and to the impossibility of measuring results. The urgency to perform promotional activities takes away attention from strengthening internal destination coordination and capacities first, and ultimately results in generic promotional campaigns without a commercialisation process in place that connects with local actors. Contrary to what was expected through marketing, these poor results in terms of market access undermine confidence in collective tourism organisations. In fact, the most critical steps to improve a destination's social capital and its ability to attract the type of visitors it wants are those taken before it comes into contact with the market. These critical steps are the political and technical processes of a collective effort to agree on visions, the resources required and the pathway to implement those visions. The intensity of the collective's internal capacity to agree and act *represents what the destination really is as a collective* and defines its real possibilities of proactively attracting the desired type of international visitors. In other words, trust building and the improvement of social capital have the following dynamics: the better a destination can begin by defining a collective vision, the better collective actions can be focused, results can be measured, participants can be informed about them, and corrective decisions can be made for future collective initiatives, strengthening confidence in a continuum of feedback interactions. Of course, as discussed throughout this thesis, such dynamics do not happen through a linear

deterministic process with a clearly defined beginning and end. On the contrary, it is a continuum of simultaneous interactions between multiple actors and at multiple levels. And this continuum, far from trying to control it centrally, could at best be facilitated and, to a certain extent, coordinated by one or more key actors with the aim of catalysing collective actions at the destination.

More importantly, the impacts of improving the capacity of a destination's actors to discuss and find common paths goes further than only the economic aspect of attracting visitors. As mentioned throughout this dissertation, in a system, different aspects are interconnected. Moreover, the research question expressly mentions access to international markets not only in economic terms, but in terms of attracting the type of visitors that look for activities compatible with local development goals (see 'Research questions' in the 'Introduction' chapter of this thesis). This implies that in the final empirical stage of this research, in Paper 5, all the pieces from the previous stages were focused to reflect upon how to improve social capital for attracting the desired type of visitors. The desired types of visitors, in turn, are determined by the tourism development vision of the destination, which in the first place was previously agreed among the destination's actors, thanks to the existing social capital that worked as a resource to reach such common vision. This collective vision is key from a sustainable development perspective, because when local actors envision their development, they think of quality of life improvement in general terms. This implies not only the commercial side of a certain activity, but also refers to the ultimate desire of human beings: improving their overall living conditions, which includes the social, environmental and economic aspects. In this respect, it is not so important that the vision of a certain destination expressly mentions the words 'sustainable development'. What is really important is that local actors reflect about 'development' on their own terms, assuming the commitment to act and the responsibility to evaluate and tackle the effects of those acts on their own society and environment. Thus, although this research focuses on social capital and access to markets, it is based upon the approach of supporting local development from the perspective of a common development vision, which goes beyond the economic side of tourism. Thus, having a collective vision of the desired future is a fundamental starting point for considering in a more comprehensive way any further efforts to improve social capital for market access. In our case study, such tourism development vision was previously developed through the facilitation of the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation, an actor that was capable of mobilising the social capital of the collective to reach such agreement.

Therefore, to enhance the social capital of a destination, **there is the need for coordinating actors within the collective to serve as** catalysers of common decisions and trust. In that sense, the key actor of the final case study, the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation (MF), has a vast potential positive social capital. Nevertheless, redundant planning processes, combined with a lack of institutional and legal capacity for collective action, as well as a lack of clearly defined target markets, and the incapacity to objectively show results from collective efforts, have undermined the potential of the Municipal Foundation to further enhance the social capital of the destination. Consequently, the capacity of the destination to proactively access international markets is very limited or non-existent as a collective. In that sense, actors trying to act as catalysers of effective collective action, regardless of their name or nature, require some special characteristics. Although these actors could be strengthened through normative standards to act with authority, firstly and ultimately, catalysers of collective actions mostly depend on their internal technical capacity to: connect with the different sectors (firms, residents, governments, academia), move at different levels (local, regional, international), and understand the different implications (social, economic, environmental, cultural) of the tourism phenomenon in their own context. The fundamental mission of these key catalysing actors, their added value, is to foster an integral view of the collective as a unit and of its parts in a connected way, and to have a higher-level knowledge and understanding of the possible paths to reach the goals of the collective. Metaphorically speaking, catalysing actors should have access to the top of a vigilant tower with a panoramic view and the capacity to come down to the people at the ground level to inform them of the situation and options to advance. In other words, actors catalysing effective collective actions require the ability to be simultaneously above the situation—with a higher integrated understanding—while participating in the situation with an understanding of practicalities, and to enhance the awareness of the other actors at the destination as a collective, and of those actors' individual roles within the collective.

Regarding the awareness of a destination as a collective, this study has allowed me to come up with the concept of the *Level of Destination Collective Awareness*. I refer to this as *the level of the actors' understanding about their individual roles, their sense of responsibility, and their capacity to contribute within the collective generation of a tourism experience that attracts the desired type of visitors*. Three levels of collective awareness are proposed:

1. The ***Lowest level of a Destination's Collective Awareness*** is when the tourism experience is totally *visitor-led*. Here, visitors are the ones connecting facilitators based on their own personal itineraries, only known by the visitors, structured beforehand or changing 'on the go' in a spontaneous way. The actors at the destination (the facilitators) have only a partial perspective on the visitors' expectations and of the role of other participating actors. The facilitators of the destination do not fully understand why visitors arrived at the destination in the first place. And they compete against each other mostly based on the lowest price, to 'capture' the visitors that are already at the destination. A destination at this level could be called a *Reactive Destination*.

2. The ***Middle Level of a Destination's Collective Awareness*** is when the tourism experience is *central-actor-led*. Here, an influencing facilitator from within or from outside the destination, such as a tour operator is able to coordinate several other facilitators to propose a complete itinerary to its customers. In this case, the aim is usually tourism as a business. Apart from the central actor, the participating facilitators have a perspective on the global offered experience, but limited influence on its configuration. A destination at this level could be called a *Semi-Proactive Destination.*

3. The ***Highest Level of a Destination's Collective Awareness*** is when the tourism experience is *non-centrally-controlled*. Here, there is at least one or are several strategic coordinators or catalysers of collective actions. These could be some type of public, private, communitarian or mixed collective organisation (e.g. a destination management organisation), whose aim is tourism as a means for local development. These coordinators act as the catalysers of collective actions empowering local actors to network, propose and participate in the configuration of the itineraries. Coordinators, more than leading, empower the actors' full understanding of the experience to be offered, and the awareness of their individual roles supporting such experience. In this case, the destination's actors are not expecting others to lead or to show results before contributing. They fully understand and are capable of performing their roles with the required proficiency, being proactively responsible for their contribution within the collective, because

they have already experienced or are able to visualise the benefits of doing so. A destination at this level could be called a *Proactive Destination.*

The table below presents the proposed levels of a destination's collective awareness in a schematic form:

Table 6. **Levels of a Destination Collective Awareness**

Level of awareness	**Tourism phenomenon's characteristics**	**Destination actors' characteristics**	**Type of destination**
HIGHEST collective awareness	•Non-centrally-controlled phenomenon. •One/several empowering coordinators. •Approach: tourism-as-a-means-for-development. •Actors actively network on structuring of itineraries.	•Actors are fully aware of the offered experience as a collective. •Actors understand their individual role within the whole. •Actors act according to collective goals and attract the desired type of visitors.	PROACTIVE DESTINA-TION: highly influential on tourism outcomes
MIDDLE collective awareness	•Central-facilitator-led phenomenon (e.g. Tour Operator). •Approach: often, tourism-as-a-business. •Central actor coordinates other facilitators into an itinerary.	•Actors have a better perspective of the offered global experience. •But a limited influence on its configuration. •They participate according to the itinerary crafted by the central-facilitator.	SEMI-PROACTIVE DESTINA-TION: partially influential on tourism outcomes
LOWEST collective awareness	•Visitor-led phenomenon. • Approach: itinerary crafted by the visitor previously or 'on the go'. • Independent visitors connect facilitators.	•Actors have a partial perspective of the visitors' expected experience. •And of other participating destination's actors. •They participate in a disconnected way only incidentally linked by the visitor.	REACTIVE DESTINA-TION: no influential on tourism outcomes

Author's elaboration.

Here I would like to return to the metaphor of the 'vigilant tower', and the notion of the 'highest level of collective awareness', both discussed above. Translating these two ideas into practical terms points to the need for a transformation in the roles and capacities of coordinating actors. As discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, the decline of state funded DMOs and the introduction of private-led DMOs within an increasingly networked context, calls for a transition towards a distributed leadership approach, where different forms and combinations of citizen-, firm- and state-based collectives can perform functions through a collective social process. This distributed leadership approach resembles what is proposed in the above table as the 'Proactive destination', fostered by a high level of 'Collective awareness'. The point here is not whether the traditional conception of a DMO as an authority state representative is still relevant or not. The point here is whether one or several collective coordinators, whatever form or names they take, can effectively foster the conditions to aim for higher levels of collective awareness among the actors of the destination in the form proposed in the table above. This is fundamental for a destination as a collective to connect its local development goals with the desired flows of international visitors.

In our final case study, the coordinating actor is the Municipal Foundation, which could be categorised as a DMO. However, as explained in the choices made in the Methodology section of this thesis, the MF was not chosen as the central actor of the case study because it is a DMO. It was selected because the Municipal Foundation was the most cited actor among the interviewees when talking about collective action aimed at international markets. Now, regarding the notion of a DMO in more general terms, I argue that in the context of this discussion, they need in practical terms to transform the 'M' from only meaning 'Marketing', as is usually the case, into becoming real 'Management' actors. However, here the term 'Management' must be also understood in a broader sense. That is, not in the sense of centralised control, but in the sense of facilitation and fostering of networking and cooperative environments that catalyse collective trust and efforts. For this, and returning to my case study, a fundamental determinant for market access according to local development goals is the political will to provide coordinating actors with the proper legal and institutional structure. And within the organisation of such coordinating actors, another fundamental determinant is individuals with enough professional specialisation in local and international tourism affairs, capable of triggering and sustaining long-term facilitation processes among multiple stakeholders. Therefore, the collective's capacity to proactively access international markets depends mostly on skilled individuals working within the proper collective structures. These

individuals must be able to conduct a progressive process of interaction: starting by triggering and sustaining initiatives within their own organisations, to later on facilitate higher-level political, social or commercial agreements among the destination's actors, to finally connect further with other destinations and players at regional levels to build the collective capacity of appealing to international markets in a proactive way. However, in practice destination actors often start the other way around. This means that they try to develop tourism by building infrastructure and performing international generic promotion, without previously having prepared the capacities of local actors to harvest benefits from those external efforts. Trying to enhance access to international markets in this way will continuously lead to the same random and poor results and to the impossibility of objectively demonstrating direct benefits. As a consequence, poor results in attracting the desired types of visitors harm the established *trust* upon which collective activities are based, weaken *networks* formed by the destination's actors and their partners, and hamper the capacity of the destination for future *collective actions*. In other words, poor results due to dynamics of disconnected initiatives feed back into the three key dimensions of social capital in a negative form, undermining the collective capacity of the destination.

Now, regarding the three dimensions of social capital the research shows that trust (the cognitive/emotional and more intangible dimension) is one that allows networks to pass from having agreements into actually performing collective actions. This is reflected in the shadowed cells of the iModel 'Matrix Layout' in Paper 5, which cross the matrix from left to right at the level of the 'Trust' dimension within the 'What is lacking?' sub question. In this respect, coordinating actors apparently face a paralysing paradox: trust can be fostered by effective collective actions, but, for effective collective actions to happen trust is required in the first place. Because of this paradox, I argue that enhancing a destination's access to international markets requires a progressive inward-outward process to enhance its capacity of acting proactively in a collective way. This enhancing process could be facilitated by coordinating organisations capable of identifying short-term steps that provide little collective victories, to advance one step at a time but connecting with the long-term development vision. For example, the application of the iModel in Paper 5, allowed the Municipal Foundation to identify a specific international market segment that matches the local tourism development vision. This is a strong basis to facilitate further agreements among the destination's actors for concentrating the limited resources of the collective towards the identified target market. For this, the iModel in its 'Matrix Layout' (in Paper 5) displays a long-term overall roadmap, which

is based upon an 'Extended Report' that suggests a set of specific actions to be taken within an action plan. Taking for example only the 'Design' function within the 'iModel's Extended Report' (see Table 2 in the section 'General Methodology of this Study' in page 30) under the 'How to tackle the problem?' sub question, and through the facilitation of the Municipal Foundation, the collective could engage in aiming for little achievements that progressively build their collective trust, such as:

- Create a specialised unit that coordinates the offer design for the specific desired market in a collective way;
- Specify in a more detailed form the profile of the desired visitors of German organised groups;
- Identify and connect with Ecuadorian and German actors interested in participating in the tourism development of the study area. For example, through actions such as having obtained from a German certifier in 2017 (led by the Municipal Foundation), the 1st Latin American Collective Certification of Sustainable Destination.
- Or design an offer of an experiential nature, according to the tourism development vision, in collaboration with the identified Ecuadorian and German partners.

These are concrete examples of short and mid-term tasks that can engage the collective into specific and well-identified actions with a clear orientation and demonstrable results. These better focused and facilitated specific collective actions, in turn, feed back into the collective's trust to keep on tackling the following functions described in the iModel, towards attracting the desired type of visitors.

The need to foster positive social capital (in the sense of collective actions that support local development goals), starting by enhancing local interactions in an inwards-outwards direction, resembles the complex system's principles of non-linearity and self-organisation. These characteristics are also present in the behaviour of tourist destinations as complex systems. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the destination's system cannot be controlled at all. Although the full range of dynamics and outcomes is impossible to control, tendencies can, however, be influenced. Systems thinking argues that a complex system's general organisation emerges from local interactions between elements, which progressively integrate their outcomes at different levels of aggregation. Destinations considered as collectives of actors are good examples of this: they try to integrate diverse efforts at the local and regional levels, to progressively reach international markets. From this perspective, social capital and the tourism

phenomenon are bridged through systems thinking in my research, in the sense that the first two emerge from actors' interactions at different geographic levels. Furthermore, systems thinking provides the concepts to study a tourist destination's social capital simultaneously as a process and as an outcome that continuously feeds back into its own process. Seen as a system, a destination's social capital requires several elements (the destinations' actors such as governments, firms or residents) which interact based on their individually owned resources (such as knowledge, funding, facilities) towards common goals (in this case to selectively attract international visitors). These interactions generate the emergence of social capital and its outcomes, in turn, enhance or hinder the destination's capacity to attract the desired type of international visitors. This (in)capacity, is a characteristic that does not reside in any of the participating actors individually, but in the functioning of the system as a whole; this aspect of a system's functioning is known as *emergence*, a basic principle of systems thinking.

Finally, it is important to recognise that attracting specific types of visitors to a destination is not a task achievable by any actor independently. Even in the case of well-established powerful firms trying to act as independently as possible, they also depend on governments, suppliers and the general social and natural environment to keep their business up and running. These interdependences are even more influential in the case of communities, cities or regions trying to use tourism as a development means to improve their living conditions. In that perspective, this research shows that the lack of internal capacity and mechanisms to collectively implement development plans are the key barriers that prevent destinations from proactively attracting the desired types of desired international visitors. This is mainly due to barriers such as limited competences of coordinating actors, overlooking the importance to clearly define the target markets that match local development goals, low availability of specialised tourism professionals, and inappropriate coordinating structures. All of these, in sum, impede the destination's capacity to sustain effective collective processes, strongly weakening positive social capital and hindering consistent collective action towards the vision established in development plans.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Several recommendations with policy implications can be drawn from the research results.

Regarding the relation between systems thinking and social capital, the notion of non-linearity, which refers to outcomes not proportional to effort, helps to understand the unpredictability of the tourism phenomenon. In a perfect and linear cause-effect world, given the characteristics and efforts that the destination's actors have performed, such as: achieving multiple UNESCO recognitions, implementing a varied offer of tourism services from high-end to low budget, providing a diversity of cultural and natural attractions, developing political support and a promotional organization that constantly contacts international distribution channels, Cuenca and the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area should have a higher collective capacity to access international markets. However, despite these overarching positive characteristics, the Cajas Massive Biosphere Area as a destination does not have the capacity to mobilise its social capital to influence the type of arriving international visitors, as it was evident after the analytical application of the iModel in Paper 5. Thus, small changes in the way efforts towards collective initiatives are approached might bring important non-linear effects in the final outcomes. Efforts should focus on improving internal capacities in the destination's system, for example, the capacity to 'perform collective initiatives' (see prioritised list of determinants in Paper 4), instead of putting more efforts on new externally perceived characteristics, such as titles, facilities or attractions. In that respect, the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation is the coordinating agent that could further develop the capacity to foster collective efforts, not from the perspective of trying to eliminate the non-linear nature of collective outcomes, but from the perspective of identifying opportunities for a focused use of available resources, empowering actors for networking, sharing common goals, and advising them on how to connect efforts in a sustained way. While non-linearity is hardly avoidable, learning how to dynamically adapt to changing circumstances as a collective in a proactive way, assisted by a clear shared purpose, is an acquirable practice.

The non-linear nature of complex systems is also intimately related to self-organisation. This is especially the case with tourist destinations, where geographic limits are dynamic, depending on the type of visitor, the places visited, and the types of facilitators involved in the final experience. This is true as well in the case of German organised groups visiting Southern

Ecuador, whose itineraries include not only the city of Cuenca and the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area (CMBA), but a combination of other national and often international destinations. In this context, the self-organising characteristic of social capital (the capacity to work together towards common goals) is highly evident, as the coordination of interactions, even when dealing with organised groups, is a complex issue. Although in the case of organised groups there is a leading tour operator carefully crafting the different parts of the experience into an itinerary, this does not mean that the operator can fully control all the variables in the practice, nor that other destinations' local actors can easily get inserted or modify existing itineraries to match local development expectations. Many local and international factors have a role in structuring tours that can be successfully sold in target markets. In general terms, the most challenging point with non-centrality in tourism systems is how to mediate between destination actors', tour operators', and visitors' expectations. Destinations, in contrast to a corporation, are not top-down structures, but sets of actors within sets of territories. Thus, although the final experience cannot be fully centrally controlled, it does not mean it cannot be studied and improved. In this complex context of interactions, it is social capital as a resource, through the mediating role of a collective action catalysing agent interested in developing more than only the commercial side of tourism, which can canalise efforts in an iterative process of trial and error, to progressively enhance the destination towards the desired results. In our case study, the systems thinking based iModel allowed us to identify 1) who are the involved actors in the relation between the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area and German organised groups, 2) where are those actors located, and 3) what are the functions they exercise. This has provided a systemic understanding of the destination's social capital dynamics and valuable insights for the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation, as a catalyser of collective actions, on how to deal with the non-centralised nature of its destination's specific system. By constantly reviewing the outcomes from the iModel's application, the Municipal Foundation can use it as a follow-up tool for management, by contrasting planned activities (the 'How to tackle the problem' sub question of the iModel in Paper 5) with reality through time to dynamically adapt its approach and strategies.

Other policy recommendations in more practical terms, referring specifically to the final case study, are detailed bellow.

The destination in my case study already has a first fundamental piece, a collective tourism development vision. It is defined in its 2016 – 2021 tourism development plan as a type of

creative and experiential tourism with offers related to culture, adventure, nature, urban and emotional and bodily well-being. However, the other fundamental piece is to define in detail a specific target market segment (country, location, age, tastes, income, behaviour, segment size, service standards), from which the destination's actors want to proactively generate flows of visitors. Only in this way can the destination focus its efforts, concentrate resources and objectively demonstrate direct results in relation to the efforts made.

Once the destination has connected the vision of the desired type of tourism with a corresponding target market, the following priority is to design, together with regional and national partners, concrete offers for that target market (itineraries, facilitators, costs, required investments, selling price, profitability, return and feasibility). These offers should incorporate Cuenca and the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area into larger regional or national itineraries, sufficiently attractive for that international market.

Another critical activity that the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation is leading, and which must be sustained, is regarding the collective certification of Cuenca's Historic District as a Sustainable Destination, obtained in November 2017. On the one hand, this certification provides local actors with a vision of purposeful and targeted collective action in the tourism field. And On the other hand, the work with the German certifier, Tourcert, is key because of its links with the target market country. However, the coordination capacities of the Municipal Foundation will be really put to the test now, because the certification has to be sustained and benefits for the participants must be demonstrated. Therefore, the recommendation here is to concentrate efforts on obtaining the formalisation of the new competences in tourism for the Municipal Foundation, as proposed to the City Council, so the Foundation can have more impact on tourism management and quality assurance in the city and influence in the region.

An additional critical function to be strengthened within the structure of the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation is that of distribution and booking, through the creation of a regional platform for distributing products developed for the target market. This is key, not only because this function is one of the main weaknesses of the destination's actors, who lack techniques, tools and experience for distribution, follow-up and closing sales internationally. But also, because this is a function lacking in the region with the potential to generate additional financial resources for the Municipal Foundation. Nonetheless, for the implementation of such distribution platforms actors must be aware that information and communication technologies

are not the ultimate solution, as some might expect them to be. Again, the solution has to be considered in a comprehensive way, taking also in consideration the specialised personnel, the correct processes, and the institutional structures required to efficiently operate a regional platform for distribution of products.

Finally, it is essential that the destination achieves the approval of the new Tourist Ordinance, that will allow the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation to modify its structure and carry out additional required functions. Among these functions, one of the most important will be the regulation of service providers, since they represent the critical point of contact during the visitors' full involvement in the tourism experience, which ultimately determines the present and future success of the destination.

6.3 TAKING A FEW STEPS BACK

I also find it valuable to try to include some comments from a more 'outsider' point of view on the research process and its results, in relation to three issues: 1) the most important contributions of this research considered from an outsider perspective, 2) my impact as a researcher on the research process, and 3) the dialectic between the role of the 'scientist', which I have taken in this doctoral research, and that of the 'practitioner', which I used to fulfill before this research.

Regarding the first point, *from an outsider's perspective the main contribution* is the availability of a clearly defined and practical framework for guiding the study of tourism (Paper 3). The combination of a model with an analytical methodology opens the door and extends an invitation for empirical application. In that sense, the iModel is conceived for use in different contexts. Also, the list of determinants for international market access (Paper 4), could be considered as one of the most interesting 'takeaways' from an outsider's perspective. It presents a very clear and comprehensive set of conditions, relatively easy to understand, that explain the difficulties for internationalisation in tourism. When these two contributions (iModel + the list of determinants) are combined, researchers and practitioners interested in analytical tools have a well-structured set of principles, concepts and a methodology to explore their own cases of interest. For example, the Municipal Foundation, as the entry point to study the tourism system of the Cajas Massif, was able to interconnect originally fragmented

information regarding the role of different actors or the content of certain documents with the market of interest. After the implementation of the iModel, the information was finally structured in such a way that the key aspects to be worked on were identified and some possible ways to improve the collective capacity of the destination to access international markets were visualised.

As for *my impact on the research process*, it was undoubtedly a challenge to disassociate myself from my final case study, the Cajas Massif Biosphere Area, to a degree that allowed me to add an external perspective to the analysis of the study area. Because of my professional involvement for many years in some decision-making and management processes of the CMBA, I was aware of my possible attachment to certain ideas or perspectives, not necessarily wrong, but that could hamper new insights. Therefore, I performed different activities throughout the research stages in order to broaden my perspective. In the early stages of my process I did research on several regional tourism development cases in Belgium and got acquainted with different tourism management approaches and governance structures. In addition, I performed a review and discussion of two broad theories within the context of tourism, namely systems thinking theory and social capital theory. Afterwards I developed an integrative analytical methodology with the emphasis on allowing different analytical perspectives. Additionally, I had the opportunity to visit and to interview the practices of stakeholders within and beyond the CMBA in Ecuador related to the research subject. And finally, I was also able to interview Ecuadorian and German stakeholders in Germany. Facing this vast array of perspectives definitely helped me to realise and question my previous conceptions regarding my case study. For example, I still consider that actors such as destination management organisations are potentially key catalysers of collective actions. However, I realise now that destination management organisations need to evolve and be flexible to effectively perform that role. From trying to be almighty holders of authority, they need to become the sort of agents with a higher-level connective vision that promotes cooperative conditions. However, despite the extensive theoretical and methodological stages and the large number of interviews and collected data, I am aware that the baggage of my experience still has an influence on the final outcomes. Nevertheless, I also consider that precisely my former experience adds a richer and in-depth perspective to the analysis, which we would have missed with other unfamiliar case studies. Thus, I consider that the trade-off between the difficulty of being an impartial analyst and the richness of understanding complex details of the case study thanks to my previous experience, is justifiable and balanced. This

balance is also reinforced thanks to the effort put into previously building strong theoretical (Papers 1 and 2), methodological (Paper 3), and empirically-based (Paper 4) frameworks before proceeding to the analysis of the final study case (Paper 5), that is the Cajas Massif, and thanks to internal discussion with other researchers.

In any case, decisions had to be made throughout the research process. In retrospective reviewing the research path, systems thinking as the analytical perspective to approach tourism was more challenging than expected. Systems thinking offers a set of concepts and tools to ease the study of complex phenomena. However, that does not mean that making a logical and well sustained use of those concepts and tools was easy. Nevertheless, precisely that challenge demanded a thorough iterative revision and rethinking process in order to translate systems thinking into tourism not only in theoretical terms (Papers 1) but also in methodological and practical terms (Paper 3). Thus, looking back on the results, systems thinking was ultimately a useful and applicable theory to build a tool for describing the tourism phenomenon in a more integrative way. Moreover, as systems thinking principles allow for discussion of tourism as the result of sets of elements interacting and collectively generating diverse outcomes, it also allows for connection and is compatible with conceptual principles from other theories such as Network Analysis or Actor Network. In this way, a systems thinking-based analysis does not restrict or limit the understanding of the tourism phenomenon only to the realm of its conceptual principles to a number of principals that are quite locked-in into tourism studies.

On the other hand, there was the selection of social capital as a theory to provide a conceptual basis to conduct analysis on a destination as a collective (Paper 2). Throughout the process of a study, one can only attempt to foresee the outcomes of the selected frameworks, and even test them to some extent. But the final effects of those choices can be evaluated only after the research process has been finalised. These were some of the concerns regarding social capital as a theory that could provide clear guidelines for a well-structured analytical process since the construction and use of social capital is not a linear process. Given the extensive literature on social capital, it was also challenging attempting to contextualise it for the case of tourist destinations as collectives of actors. However, when the three dimensions of social capital identified in Paper 2 were incorporated into the iModel proposed in Paper 3, this combination provided the clear conceptual guidance needed to organise a systematic questioning process and to conduct a detailed exploration of the case study in Paper 5. I consider, therefore, that

the decision to work preliminarily on the theory of social capital applied to tourist destinations was worthwhile, as it provided clear guidance for analytical application in practice.

Finally, a decision had to be made regarding the application of the outputs from the theoretical and methodological stages to the analysis of the Cajas Massif case study. Thus, in order to set the analytical focus as suggested by the Methodological stage of this thesis (Paper 3), the chosen approach was to enter the case study from the perspective of the facilitating role of a key actor enhancing the collective capacities of the destination. Looking back on this decision, it could be argued that this focus misses the wide diversity of interactions possible in a destination as a system. However, the intention of the methodology is precisely to facilitate focus within complexity, without losing interconnections, in order to extract valuable insights for practical decision-making. In other words, we chose the DMO as a point of entry but we studied its ring of interconnected players and payed attention to signs for (important) disconnected stakeholders.

Furthermore, 'analytical focus' does not mean 'limited analysis'. Tourism efforts within a destination can take many forms, and precisely the challenge was how to analytically navigate through that complexity. I believe that the decisions made using the methodology proposed in Paper 3 allowed me to navigate through that complexity for the case study. Approaching analysis from a key actor perspective offered indeed a highly rich analysis regarding the dynamics and interactions between the destination's social capital and the market access determinants involved in the Cajas Massif – German organised groups relationship. This rich and detailed analysis is briefly illustrated in the 'iModel's Extended Report' displayed in the 'General Methodology of this Study' section. This analytical richness is also illustrated in the 'iModel' Matrix Layout' in Paper 5, which displays a set of 81 boxes, each one containing a summarising key phrase, that represents detailed information collected in the analytical Extended Report previously mentioned. Thus, I conclude that the decisions made to apply the methodology in the case study did not lead to losing the richness of the system. On the contrary, it led to exploring and discovering richness of dynamics within the case study that would not be considered when using another approach, not including such an "iModel". Nevertheless, I am curious to see how other researchers can apply and adapt the methodology proposed for the application of the iModel, which could bring innovative ways of using the tool.

In practical terms, there were also other advantages of my previous experience that impacted the research process. This relates to accessing contacts, reports, planning documents, and inquiring about political and administrative organisation details of the territory that would not have been able to realise or access by someone studying the case for the first time. For example, access to updated information on the configuration and features of the Cajas Massif was published for the first time when I started my research. That information was not known at the time and is still not known to many people. However, I was able to access that information first hand because the co-authoring of that publication was part of my previous duties. This information was useful to characterise and clearly define the destination component of the case study. Another example of advantages in how I influenced the research process thanks to my previous experience was having access to recent, first-time ever published statistics on international visitors to southern Ecuador. I could have really early access to that data thanks to my previous contacts with some actors in the region. This information allowed me to confirm and back up several facts that I previously knew from personal experience; for instance, flows of international visitors to southern Ecuador are really limited in terms of organised groups, but nevertheless, within those limited numbers German markets are really relevant. This was key to sustaining the relevance of the decisions made for the analysis of case study in Paper 5.

And finally, *the dialectic between the scientist and the practitioner* is reflected in the fact that this research attempts to mediate between theory and practice, the academic and the managerial, or with the need to obtain in-depth abstract insights to support practical decision-making. After this research process, I can say that I have experienced both perspectives because previously I was involved in planning and management processes in tourist destinations. The mediation challenge is that while practitioners need tools that allow them to quickly understand and make decisions in very practical terms, academics, on the other hand, look for deeper theoretical insights and generalisable knowledge to understand phenomena, which may have interesting but hardly applicable results for decision-makers. Nevertheless, practitioners would highly value strong theoretically and technically based analytical tools that at the same time allow them to acquire key insights with relatively short time investment. This thesis has attempted to create that connection to a certain point. It presents a strong theoretical basis (Papers 1 and 2), introduces a corresponding model and analytical tool (Paper 3), lists the determinants for market access (Paper 4), and provides an example of application of the previous elements (Paper 5).

In addition, looking back in time, it is interesting for me to reflect on my decision on how to get involved in the research process. In a very early preliminary stage, I considered doing research as an insider and remaining in my management position in Ecuador. However, the final decision was to move abroad, physically and institutionally detach myself from my previous context, and conduct research as an outsider but with the experience of an insider. I consider that this was a positive decision for the research process. Taking distance from the managerial context of my case study, taking time for digging into other cases and the broader literature, and remaining mainly in an academic international environment allowed me to be critical regarding my previous conceptions and generate new perspectives for my own work.

These new perspectives, in turn, allowed me to balance my scientist and practitioner sides throughout the research process, providing me with a broader perspective on the final case study when I returned to it in the empirical stage of the research process. In other words, my current role as an outsider researcher allowed me to have renewed perspectives while maintaining the grasp of details thanks to my previous role as an insider. However, the fact that I was familiarised with certain actors and processes related to the Cajas Massif does not mean that I knew all of them. Once I went back into the case study focusing on the subject of tourism, the research led me to visit areas and actors within and beyond the Biosphere Area that I never interacted with before.

Therefore, although my insider side informed me of some actors and dynamics of the destination, for many other new actors and specific locations within the Cajas Massif I was a total outsider. This confirms my previous reflection stating that ‘analytical focus’ on the research subject through a key actor approach in relation to a specific market does not mean ‘limited analysis’ of relationships, but, on the contrary, this analytical focus allows discovery of a richer set of relations and dynamics in a more meaningful and structured way.

I believe that this contrasting process between previous insider experiences and new outsider observations helped me not only to systematise analysis in a form not previously existing for the case study, it also allowed me to highlight some tourism modalities for the Cajas Massif that may allow it to pass from being a secondary into a primary destination and in line with local development goals. For example, as suggested in the ‘Final Remarks’ section of Paper 4, the development of experiential UNESCO Sites-based routes from the Andean region to the

Pacific Coast including culinary, Spanish learning or handcrafting activities would allow us to offer longer-term stays within the territory.

Nevertheless, as this thesis argues, this requires connecting several actors from the public, private and communitarian domains. That act of 'connecting' is precisely the point where the dialectic between my academic and practitioner sides has tried to contribute by, on the one hand, presenting the theoretical constructs to study tourism systems and destinations as collectives of actors, and on the other hand, presenting a methodology and an example analysing how a key facilitator may contribute to foster these 'connecting' dynamics.

Finally, it is important to reflect on the fact that efforts were made to simplify the analytical methodology of the iModel proposed in Paper 3. And although the results were deemed valuable by the Tourism for Cuenca Municipal Foundation in our case study in Paper 5, I consider that the iModel still needs to be taken into a simpler version of application for managers or policy-makers to regularly use it as an analytical and decision-making support tool. One option for future work could be the use of programming tools to transform the iModel from a word processor-based matrix, into a cloud-based multi-user service to support analysis and decision-making. Such service could assist the analyst and its network on tasks such as the configuration of the analytical focus, feeding data online from multiple sources, providing automated insights such as network modelling based on the inputted data, transforming qualitative data into quantitative data based on categories, or facilitating online multi-actor discussion from different locations. But certainly, implementing such informatic functionalities was not in the scope of this research project. I mention this not to suggest that looking backwards I should have considered programming tasks as part of the research project. Instead, I mention this to highlight that the decision for endeavouring in developing such an ambitious analytical tool, although troubling and complex at some point, finally proved valuable, as the nature of the iModel allows its analytical application in other case studies.

6.4 FUTURE RESEARCH

In this section I propose several lines of research to strengthen tourism studies and research on enhancing a destination's local actors capacity to attract the type of international visitors that match local development goals. Doing so will hopefully contribute to continuing development

of a stronger set of conceptual resources for the study of tourism as a multifaceted phenomenon, rather than as a unidimensional economic activity. Researchers, in alliance with practitioners, should strive to propose new perspectives for the study of tourism, putting systems thinking-based approaches to the test as a common ground for the interdisciplinary study of tourism.

Thus, an important aspect that requires further exploration is the role of social capital as the mobilising resource for collective actions in tourist destinations. In my research, I have stressed that if a destination expects to draw benefits from tourism, the positive intervention of key players is needed, but they cannot achieve positive changes alone. A social capital assessment matrix was proposed in Paper 2, which was the basis to explore the study case in Paper 5 that is the relation between social capital's dimensions and international market access' determinants through the application of the iModel (from Paper 3). Nevertheless, the assessment matrix offers a framework to conduct further research on different other cases, exploring in higher detail how social capital behaves at specific levels of scope within the destination. Future research could focus on aspects such as: what determines the actors' decision for joining or opting out from certain collectives within the destination (social capital's 'bonding' level of scope); what are the conditions for effective collaboration between groups of actors, for example between neighbouring destinations (social capital's bridging level of scope), or what are the key factors for obtaining the support of actors in power, such as the national government, to develop a certain local tourism initiative (social capital's linking level of scope).

Additionally, future research could also put more focused attention on the negative aspects of social capital within the context of tourist destinations. Research could focus on the mechanisms of established common practices and power relationships that may hinder effective collective action. Another path could pertain to the conflicts generated by influential actors, such as governments, which might have contradicting interests between the sustainable use of natural resources as attractions and the exploitation of those resources for, for example, mining purposes. These approaches can help to better understand the gap between agreements and actual implementation.

In relation to methodological aspects, this study has introduced a systems thinking-based tourism specific model and methodology for analysis and decision-making support. I have illustrated its application in relation to social capital as my aspect of interest in Paper 5.

However, the iModel can potentially be used to study a variety of other aspects of interest for tourist destinations with a systemic and more integrative approach, such as a destination's governance, environmental management, or position in the global value chain and its opportunities to change its role within the chain. Because of its systemic structure, the iModel could also be tested at a lower level of aggregation, to study the performance of a specific actor, such as a firm, or at a higher level of aggregation, for example, to study the performance of interdependent destinations integrated into one product (a route or an itinerary) as the system of interest. Thus, the wider application of the iModel depends on its adoption by destination managers, researchers and students, who critically assess its usefulness and user friendliness while fulfilling the analytical needs of different cases. That, in turn, may suggest adaptations for the iModel to further improve it for the study of the tourism phenomenon with a systemic approach. As mentioned before (6.3 Taking a few steps back) the iModel can be translated into an on-line tool but not without researching the effects of simplification on the outcomes for decision-making.

Still within the conceptual framework proposed by the iModel (Paper 3), future research could focus on the collective capacity to perform the 'Design', 'Data sorting and information generation' and 'Distribution and booking' functions. I consider that these functions are especially relevant and critical for destinations to connect plans with implementation. Those are functions usually overlooked from the facilitators' perspective, although such functions represent precisely the moments when collective capacities either start taking form, or when efforts transform into result. For example, within the 'Conception Phase' and especially in cases where planning capacities are weak, or actors are eager for more tangible short-term results, the 'Design' function is largely overlooked in favour of 'Implementation of Facilities' or 'Configuration of Services'.

However, in the long run, implementation efforts may prove to be inappropriate if the previous general design of the offer did not correctly identify the type of required facilities and services. In a similar way, within the 'Pre-trip Phase' described in the iModel, the function of 'Divulgation and Marketing' is usually the central activity expected to be performed by collective organisations on behalf of the destination's actors. Nevertheless, little attention and resources are devoted for Data Sorting and Information Generation. This function is precisely when the data about the destination, its facilitators and services should be connected to structure the proper content not only for promotional campaigns, but also to allow effective

distribution, booking, operation and constant restructuring of the destination's offerings. Nevertheless, in destinations' collective efforts, information generation is mostly considered with promotional perspectives, missing its connective function between the 'Conception' and the 'Involvement' phases proposed in the iModel.

Similarly, the 'Distribution and Booking' function within the 'Pre-trip' phase of the iModel represents the capacity to transform promotional efforts into an effective commitment by people form the desired target markets to visit the destination. However, while several 'Divulgation and marketing' efforts have been performed with a collective approach, as in the final case study of this research, the 'Distribution and booking' function is left alone to be performed in an individual manner by the destination's actors. The problem is that local actors independently do not have the expertise and resources for follow-up and establish trustworthy relationships with foreign corporate or individual customers. These disconnections between promotional, follow-up and effective booking capacities in a collective and proactive way produces poor results in terms of attracting visitors or for demonstrating the impact of previous collective promotional activities. To collectively improve the performance of those functions is not an easy task to perform. Trust plays a critical role for catalysing initiatives that allow local actors to sum efforts in more collective manners. These are several reasons why I consider these functions as special inserting focusing points for future research.

In that sense, performing comparative analyses of several successful collective cases regarding the cited functions would be of special relevance. This would help to identify in a more generalisable way the strategies, conditions and determinants that led to success or difficulties and to reflect upon conditions for replicability in other contexts.

More specifically, as previously stated in the 'Discussion and Main Contributions' section (regarding the Case Study), I would focus on researching three aspects within the 'Design', 'Data sorting and information generation' and 'Distribution and booking' functions of the iModel in relation to trust. First (within the social capital continuum) I would research on the role of the catalysing 'Norms & Trust' dimension in collectively performing those functions. Second, I would research on the dynamics among the destination's actors in order to determine the key conditions to foster trust generation. And, third, I would research on the potential of new information and communication technologies in trust enhancement to collectively perform the cited functions in innovative forms. All of these trust-related questions are closely related

to the characteristics of quality relationships discussed in the 'Theoretical introduction to social capital' which already marks an interesting road map for further research.

This study has also produced a consolidated list of determinants of international tourism market access (Paper 4), presented in order of priority as well as classified by categories. This list offers many suggestions for future research to deepen the understanding of key conditions determining destinations' access to international markets. Research could go deeper for example, into the top ten priority determinants as the starting point to explore the situation of other study cases. Research could also focus on the set of determinants for market access of only one of the 10 categories proposed in Paper 4 (e.g. 'Intelligence' category, 'Collective' category, 'Economic' category) to study how to improve those specific aspects of the given study case. Anyhow, researchers must bear in mind that, although some specific determinants might be of higher interest for their cases, they are interrelated and dynamic conditions. This means that during their study it might be important to consider the relations with determinants that were probably not initially deemed important. For instance, in our study case, determinants such as 'public budget for internationalisation' or 'official promotion of the destination' were initially considered (especially by the stakeholders from the private sector) as key determinants for international market access. However, after deeper discussion and analysis based on the actors' own reflections, determinants such as the capacity to 'perform collective initiatives', having a clearly 'defined target market' or 'implementing and sustaining efficient processes', were identified as more critical. Those results suggest that enhancing the capacity to tackle the latter mentioned determinants will impact on the capacity to tackle the former ones. Exploring the interrelations among determinants for international market access may be important to understand the mechanisms to transform them from hindering into enhancing conditions. This type of work can also contribute to the refinement of the consolidated list of determinants presented in Paper 4, to provide a better informed analytical basis for researchers and destination managers.

Finally, tourism is a complex phenomenon, and therefore, its different aspects, actors and dynamics are hard to grasp in an integrative way. Maybe the goal has been too ambitious to create a holistic and fully comprehensive analytical model. The choice to 'limit' this research to combining systems thinking and social capital as theoretical frameworks to understand how to enhance a destination's capacity as a collective, to attract the type of visitors according to their own development goals went, nevertheless, beyond specialised and unidimensional

approaches, creating an interesting proxy to reality. I consider that further exploration of the relation between systems thinking and social capital can still produce greater input for the understanding of tourism in a more holistic way. Future research, therefore, may try to keep advancing on the translation of systems thinking's principles into the context of the tourism phenomenon. Such research could draw upon the tourism-specific framework, model and methodology presented in Papers 1, 2, 3, and 4 or by developing new approaches in the relation between systems thinking and social capital for the development of tourist destinations. The call is that such approaches aim for going beyond intellectual knowledge production in academia *and* respond to the needs of practitioners as well.

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