

## **The Relevance of Collective Action in Tourism**

**Ricardo Alexandre Fontes Correia**  
**Assistant Prof.**  
**Bragança Polytechnic Institute – Portugal**

Apartado nº128  
5370-326, Mirandela, Portugal

Phone: 00351 919 405 717

Fax: 00351 278 265 733

Email: [ricardocorreia@ipb.pt](mailto:ricardocorreia@ipb.pt)

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## **ABSTRACT**

Tourism normally develops in a confined territorial area where diverse organisations shall have to congregate efforts in order to enhance its potentiality. This industry tends to be described as encompassing a large number of small independent companies free from any conglomerate. Even those who do not consider being tourist-dependent shall act in a manner that will shape its development since they are part and parcel of the socioeconomic dimension of the tourism destination image. The various perceptions of social and economic benefits linked to tourism may be influenced by the degree of “the residents’ tourist education”.

If one takes the tourism destination as a global product it finds lots of supplementary links, diverse sectors and multiple interlinks between public and private, which originate a multi-fragmented supply. Unless we establish common values and norms, we cannot find enough sustainability to become a desirable and visible destination, so there is a need to integrate all these structuring elements capable of generating interlinks in a harmonious and compatible manner.

Therefore, we must have large numbers of intervening parties in a tourism network since it will help reinforce the image. Many a study has proven that community’s involvement in planning and developing are critical factors for such tourism destination sustainability.

Indeed, policies of “going alone” as in the past, which characterised many tourism sectors are being replaced by a strong cooperation and collaboration. However, the huge sectorial interdependence may not be enough in itself to motivate collective actions. Many organisations cannot identify with the tourism industry clouding the reasoning for such possible cooperation. The creation of partnerships in order to create tourism plans does not warrant its practical implementation.

In this paper, through a methodological update of the major available theoretical views, we expound on the relevance of collective action movements applied to tourism, finding the motives behind such movements and obstacles to their implementation and suggesting recommendations to develop sustainable regional policies for tourism development.

We conclude that the dynamics of a regional tourist destination results mainly from the collective thought and the need for cooperation to create a structure between multiple partners. This led to a coherent and integrated product that became attractive to the tourist and produced a value-added to the territory. As such, these movements must be also understood as sustained policies for territorial development.

Keywords: Collective Action, Tourism, Networks

## **1- INTRODUCTION**

The tourism has become a major player in worldwide economy and it is anticipated that tourism market reaches 1.6 million people in 2020 or twenty per cent of the population then (World Tourism Organisation, 1997). In tandem with one of the fastest growth rate among all sectors of the economy, tourism products diversify towards new offers and experiences. Notwithstanding these facts, there has been no consensus in the definition of the tourism industry, possibly because it is a product

hard to define and to co-ordinate through a diversity of companies and transversal levels of offers (Smith, 1994).

Indeed, defining a tourism concept is not at all consensual. Leiper (1979) presents the predominant vision among many authors of considering tourism as an industry, raising relevant problems. Leiper (1979) initially gives voice to a group of authors who consider tourism not as an industry but part of linked industries, whose purpose is the supply of tourist needs. This view is based upon two principles: tourism industries overlap regular industries and those industries do not produce the same goods nor do they use similar technologies. Later, the author introduces another theoretical group opposed to the first one who considers tourism as an industry. This is based upon tourism great commercial importance, since one of the main criteria to belong to this industry is the proportion of tourism-related business in each organisation.

Leiper contrasts these two with yet another view: the utility of defining tourism industry as the coordination of activities aiming at serving tourists. This position moves the criterion of belonging to the industry from the affinity of productive factors and/or technological replacement to the operators' reciprocities and interdependence, who share the responsibility to manage tourist flows. Thus, participation in the coordination of the tourist production becomes the most relevant criterion for belonging to this industry (Tremblay, 1998).

Resources integrated in the tourist product generally assume a dimension of common good where, due to economics rules, its use by a party reduces its availability for the others, although it is hard to exclude somebody from its consumption. In the tourism sector, these resources are transversal and used in an interdependent manner by multiple groups. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of these resources is the distribution in a varied manner of its ownership, private, state, associative and free, before and after the tourist development (Healy, 1994). This leads to a multiplicity of actors that with potentially diverse management perspectives manage great part of the constituent resources of the tourist product.

A tourist destination attractiveness as an integrated product depends on a correct activation of complementarities and interactions between its elements, enabling the tourist with an image and coherent experience that can be simultaneously divulged. Without this interaction between actors, akin to its own culture and a distinctive tourist destination this can become multi-fragmented (Pavlovich, 2003) without enough sustainability or visibility to affirm itself as a desirable destination.

Such value sharing is vital for this industry characterised by the suppliers' transfer of customers from organisation to organisation, in order to provide a coherent and understandable tourist experience (Grefe, 1994). It is unworthy to have a higher tourism service if other surrounding and complementary actors have diverging standards. Thus, tourism provides experiences that will include a "global package" of product services and interactions (Kandampully, 2000).

Actually, small organisations and tourist destinations, usually offer multiple possibilities for tourists. However, from the tourist's point of view these activities are merely a partial experience that will only contribute to the formation of an integrated experience, of a global tourist product (Lehtolainen, 2003).

It will be an added difficulty for the tourist to integrate these experiences by itself without coordination by the supplying organisations in order to provide an invaluable

and uniform knowledge of the provided destination. Consequently, there is a dialectic relationship from the tourists' point of view, when the tourist destination offers a unified product comparatively to other destinations. Within such destination, there will be competition between the different elements of the tourist product (Grängsjö, 2003).

Clearly, "the destination domain is thus characterized by an "open-system" of interdependent, multiple stakeholders, where the actions of one stakeholder impact on the rest of the actors in the community. Furthermore, no single organization or individual can exert direct control over the destination's development process." (Jamal and Getz, 1995: 193). Thus, the tourism sector is made up of a multiplicity of small organisations that only contribute separately for a global good, assuming for its development the characteristics of public and social goods whose benefits could be shared by numerous actors (Saxena, 2000).

## **2- TOURISM AS A NETWORK**

The particular tourism characteristics imply a limited value for the traditional marketing theories for most of the tourist organisations. These generally, take as granted the global control by an organisation over marketing and image creation of its product (Grängsjö, 1998). This only assumes a limited plausibility of adequacy to them, because the tourist product confined to a territory involves the ownership of factors or resources by a set of actors that only when totally combined and coordinated, will provide the final and complete image of this product. Underlying this shared and multivariate resources' ownership are the values and perspectives attributed by those organisations, which control and activate them. When they diverge, the final product may become fuzzy and less coherent creating a bad image for the consumer of such destination.

Indeed, each operator will be able to influence and satisfy the consumer, only in what concerns its product. No matter how big an organisation is, it will never be capable of offering the wholesome experience the consumer has in that destination.

Thus, the tourism is placed as an adjusted reality to be explained by network approach. The development of such approach is a direct result of the research efforts of IMP Group authors. This group was created in 1976 and initially had its great impulse in the Swedish University of Uppsala, its research techniques spread to other European countries (Ford et al., 1986; Easton and Araújo, 1989) and later to North America (Achrol, 1991; Nohria and Eccles, 1992).

In the network conceptualization, the market is taken as a multidimensional net of dynamic relationships (Figure 1) between actors who control resources and develop activities (Mattsson, 2003). A common trace between all these conceptions is the interlinkage and interdependence of activities developed by the networking actors (Easton and Hakansson, 1996). In the network, the interactions between actors are vital because they do not withhold all the resources they need to develop its activities. It is through the relationships with other actors that they access them.

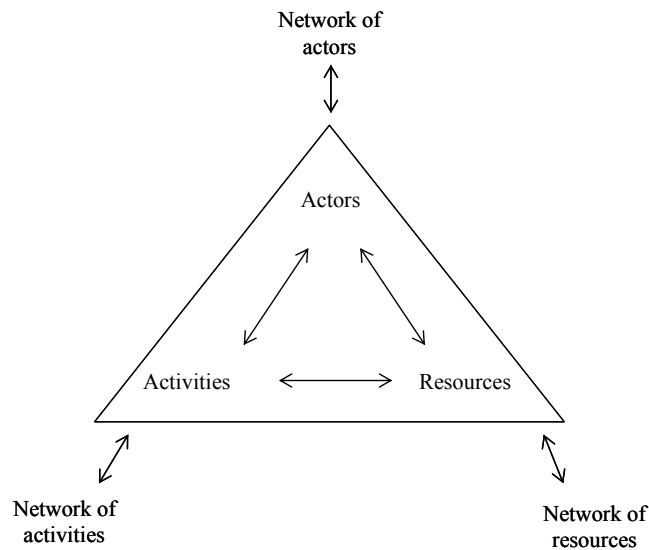


Figure 1. Basic structure of the ARA model  
 Source: Hakansson and Johanson (1992: 29)

A clear cut rupture between the positions that defined borders between organisations and their environment is also a common trait for this approach. As a matter of fact, in this type of approach the organisations do not adopt the environment in a firm and unchanged manner but interact with it in a peculiar way (Hakansson and Snehota, 1989). Long lasting relationships create visibility and their own and distinctive profile within an organisation environment (Anderson et al., 1994).

Tinsley and Lynch (2001) recognise the merit of the network approach, to understand the organisations, however they acknowledge that research within small tourist organisations is little developed. The network approach, adjusts particularly well to the study of this sector abounding interconnections between actors that simultaneously cooperate, compete, and influence, trying in these way to assume a privileged position with greater influence in the network, but without ever acquiring complete control over the inter-organisational network and preparation of the tourist product.

In fact, tourist activity results from a more or less explicit coordination to a greater or lesser degree of voluntary work of multiple actors who use their complementary and competing characteristics to implement the tourist experience in order to attain their commercial objectives. Thus, there is a product in the tourism industry, which shall have to be produced from a common origin by resources and activities of diverse actors. In most cases they do not belong to the same economic groups, have no common objectives or interests albeit compatible, being the interaction and the relationships between actors essential for the preparation of such integrated product.

### 3- THE COLLECTIVE ACTION

The essence of the collective action problematic derives from the individual and collective interests of each member when the organisation is taken as a unit. In fact, the collective action is structured in the chance of obtaining impetus and better synergies than if going alone. Therefore, any participant aims at earning a higher compensation for its investment than it would get if going on his own. However, when each party tries to soften its effort or contribution for the prosecution of the common

goal, a potential “free-rider” effect appears where each economic agent trying to maximize its benefits may feel encouraged to reduce or cancel its efforts, benefiting from higher outcomes deriving from the efforts of the remaining elements.

The confrontation of individual and collective interests, and the configuration of the incentive systems which sustains its development, is the key to understand the collective action phenomenon. The seminal study of Olson (1965) constitutes one of the great help references of this intention.

In its work, Olson (1965) reports collective benefits may not be enough to motivate the individual participation. For this argument, much contributes the previously portrayed “free-rider” effect, which may imply the loss of potential multiplication effects deriving from the joint action.

The decisive factor will be the configuration of an effective system of incentives within the organisation. This way, collective benefits may not be enough to motivate individual contribution. Olson (1965) suggests that to overcome this insufficiency, specific incentives may be brought in to control individual actions within the group. Such incentives, as a disciplinary measure may be positive or negative. According to this author, these incentives may have two configurations: one, monetary, which rewards individual members according to their performance or contribution, and a social one that shall imply a reinforcement or degradation of the image that each member keeps within the group, according to the approval or disapproval of their behaviour.

The work of Hardin (1968), offers a complementary vision to Olson’s, since it stresses that trying to obtain at any cost the maximum individual benefit may lead to the destruction of the association. Thus, according to author, the common good may result in individual actions of self-destruction, and one way to avoid such outcome would inevitably be the limitation of the individual freedom to act. The voluntary work and cooperation shown by the actors would be no more than mere intents without practical effect. This vision may bring to evidence the need create coordinating structures of the collective dimension. Its action would diminish the realm of individual actions, relieving the tension and aiming at the common good. Individually, no matter how express were those intents of cooperation the common good would not be achieved.

The works of Olson (1965) and Hardin (1968) are assumed as the structural theoretical pillars of the collective action phenomena, whilst their structures are indeed complementary. Olson (1965) studies what motivates the particular agents for collective action, namely paying to obtain a common remuneration, which is hardly enough to motivate them. On the other hand, Hardin (1968) tries to find what is needed for them to renounce to specific particular remunerations in order not to compromise a global remuneration.

Another clarifying study regarding the appearance of collective action movements is suggested by Waarden (1992). The author therein suggests a vision of the collective action materialised through the so-called BIA (Business Interest Association) which he defines as “... formal organisations of groups of business people which have as their goal the aggregation, definition, representation and defence of the group’s business interests” (Waarden, 1992: 521).

The factors that would prompt the creation of these BIA relate to the specificity of the question that prompts their appearance or when they target specific and well-

designed tasks. The probability of its avowal and support by its regional demarcation enables stronger identifying bonds between the partners. Finally, the BIA would be eased by the action of political entrepreneurs. These factors (specificity, regional demarcation and political entrepreneurs) are particularly well known in the tourism sector, as we will show later.

### 3.1- The collective action integrated in network approach

Network approach is essentially introduced with a double dimension, therefore susceptible of being represented in a plan, in which relations between different levels of interest will be shown on the vertical axis and actors of the same acting sphere, or interacting interests are shown on the horizontal axis. The existence of collective action, adds a new attribute to this traditional dual dimension represented in a plan, with the appearance of true transversal dimensions only caught in the three-dimensional axle (Figure 2), since they imply the same actor in multiple grids for different levels of interest (Brito, 1996).

The existence of collective action leads to the creation of actors aimed at solving a specific problem. This can assume a formal or informal dimension, according to Brito (2001: 156) “collective actors consist of nets of relationships that support the formulation of internal rules, the making of decisions, and the implementation and execution of their actions”. On the other hand, and introducing the concept of issue-based net (Brito, 1999), nets are created to solve a specific problem through relationships between actors, where these are part of a structure and try to guide the evolution of the configuration of the resources and activities of the said structure. Thus, the notion of collective actor and issue-based net could be taken as comparable.

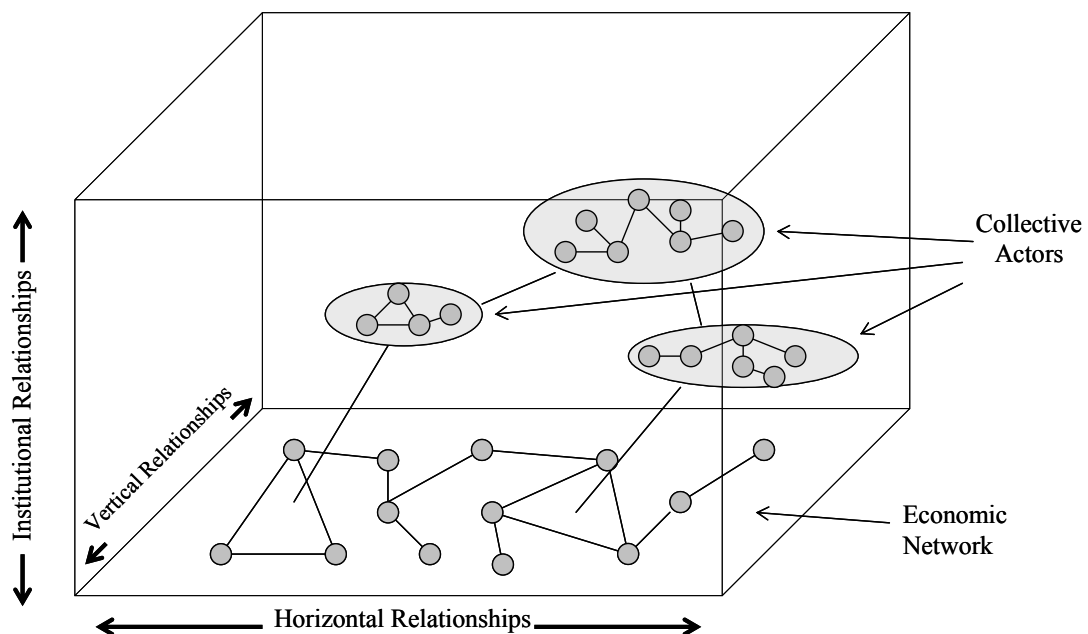


Figure 2. The three-dimensional model of industrial networks  
Source: Brito (2001: 157)

The collective actors will affect the entire structure and the definition of force, powers and position, giving therefore origin to a new dimension, “the institutional” dimension.

Brito (1996) introduces this dimension appealing to the concept of translation (Callon, 1986), being in its essence the application of this concept of network approach. It translates the transfer of dispersed and fragmented interests by multiple individual actors into collective actors who will act on their behalf providing coherency and unity to their intents and providing an eventual reinforcement of all individual actors.

Callon and Latour (1981), state that the power and the strength of collective actors will result in their capacity to collectively interpret the problems or to line up group interests. Quite often, they also hinder other actors with interventions that could make their intents fragile. These collective actors, when not assuming a formal dimension, will have a time-limited action, with its existence being conditional to solving the problem that motivated its aggregation. It is also frequent that the configuration or priorities of issue-based net changes in accordance with the evolution of the originating question giving it a volatile characteristic. However, in any situation, the last objective of a collective actor will be the reinforcement of "its members' power within the overall network" (Brito, 2001: 157), what is frequent reached by a change in the framing system of the economic activity where the actors are inserted (Figure 3).

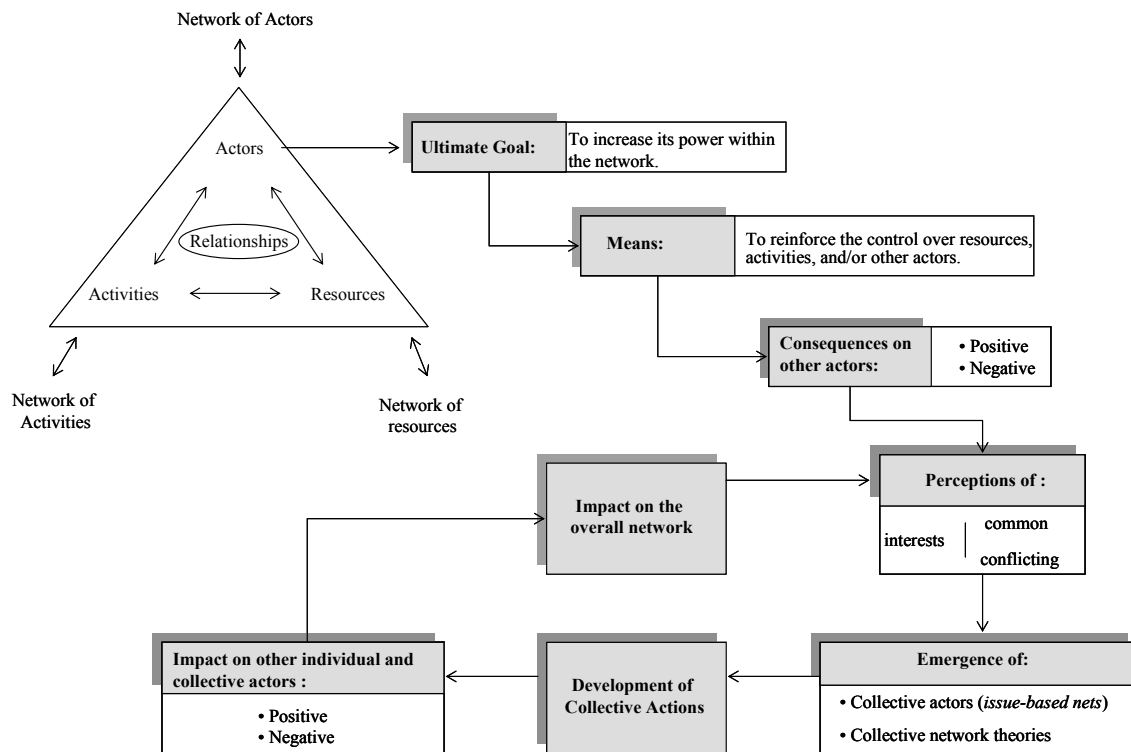


Figure 3. The network approach and the collective action phenomenon  
Source: Brito (1996: 95) adapted

However, a collective action will have in its origin a search for an improvement of position and power within the network by individual actors and the consubstantiation or identification of other actors that can share common interests in a joint action, being in the last instance the collective action instigated by these.

A frequent issue-based net in the tourism sector will involve local tourism companies whose purposes are evident efforts towards a common product or concerted marketing strategies. Network actors may be more than tourism companies, public

administration representatives, multiple organisations and associations and even local population (Komppula, 2000). In fact, the collective action is particularly visible in the tourism industry, as it will be shown in the next chapter.

### **3.2- The Collective Action in Tourism**

The tourism sector could be taken as a space where organisations for the defence of collective interests abound. They generally develop their activity collecting heterogeneous resources mainly originating from their associates, whose activity materialises towards common objectives, including its members' remuneration. Here, this remuneration assumes a very ample dimension, whether it is the direct production of goods or services for their fruition, or influencing other actors' behaviour to their own benefit (Knoke, 1988). In the tourism sector great part of this remuneration simultaneously implies the creation of a more appealing and coherent tourism product that in turn, will have the influence to modify the image and behaviour of the potential users of this product.

The potential overuse of common resources as portrayed by Hardin (1968) may take the form of a not sustainable use of those translated in their subsequent loss of feasibility. Alternatively, it may be the trend of "free-riding" for investment increases, which can reduce or disable the appeal of an area or tourist destination. All these factors make inevitable the presence of collective organisations, being these institutions defined by Kasper and Streit (1998: 28) "man-made rules which constrain possibly arbitrary and opportunistic behaviour in human interaction. Institutions are shared in a community and are always enforced by some sort of sanction".

In fact, external investors may have very opposing perceptions of the shelter community, what will imply different perceptions of norms, values and even the patterns of resources' use. It may also imply the lack of perception of the collective interest in the use of common resources, and it does not promote the efficient accomplishment of the common interest as a whole (Olson, 1965). This problem will be further compounded by the multiple shapes of ownership of tourist resources who may have in itself diverse forms of control and management which may need to be integrated.

Providing an "arena" where all the actors can debate one another, an organisation created by collective action will be able to, interactively satisfy all that was promised to the tourist (Grängsjö, 2003). Being the government one of the main tourist actors, inasmuch as it withholds great part of its assets, its presence characterises most of these organisations.

According to Palmer (1996), the government will have four main reasons to be involved in the process of local tourist development. The first will be the fact that tourist development will increase taxable incomes in the area, what will bring greater revenue to the government. In addition, in an indirect way it will help to reach social objectives, such as fighting unemployment and reducing social shortcomings. Tourism expenses will be able to strengthen the image of a territory and favour investments in non-tourism areas.

Another reason as stressed by this author, relates to the public good when promoting a destination in what may appear a "free-rider" effect and make it more difficult to achieve the optimal level of private investment implying a higher public investment to balance up that deficit. A third reason relates to the fact that many tourist actors have intents and goals different from the public interest and may try to manage the

demand throughout their member organisations. This will be opposed to the public organisations' purposes. Lastly, the public actors are responsible for guaranteeing the essential elements of any tourist destination.

Stereotypes can condition the development of a collective action that involves public organisations, because generally, these actors are seen by its pairs and potential private partners as little productive and overpaid. However, the fact that the actors have knowledge, complementary resources and develop activities with potential of reciprocal value impel to the participation, as a means of reducing frailties of the involved parts.

Thus, even if the private actors point out at the lack of a strategic vision, as well as the lack of a marketing culture, the mere fact that the government holds the tourism development basic resources will push them into collaboration. All prejudice will be overcome and the gap shall be bridged between the bureaucratic world of public authorities and the marketing culture of the private sector (Palmer, 1996).

The collaboration and the collective action are essential for the development of bonds and nets between diverse local and not local, public, private and semi-public groups, for their mutual benefit (Bramwell and Lane, 2000). In fact, the coordination between the multiple domains of the public sector, between the private, the public sector and the different levels of private organisations involved in tourism are a complex task. To be well managed it needs to integrate all these elements in a collective action phenomena (Jamal and Getz, 1995).

Tourism destination as competitive base, will be based upon a composite unit, which may have a double dimension, operating both at intra-regional and interregional level of the competition dimensions (Huybers and Bennett, 2003) and transversally will have many private and public actors and distinct social dimensions.

However, the municipalities may perceive some risks in the collaboration, resulting in the loss of control for the preparation and management of a tourist destination. These, frequently compete for public subsidies, grants and private investments, by definition scarce (Jamal and Getz, 1995). Notwithstanding this demobilizing fact, local authorities may not have a perception of the tourist product as seen by the eyes of the consumer as a unified and complementary set. They may see it as a fragmented set of experiences competing between themselves for the tourist budget resources. These circumstances and perceptions may help to eliminate the interregional competitive base in a strong tourist destination, and to broaden up into multiple tourist destinations fragmented at management level and perceived by the consumer as a weaker and inevitably incomplete global destination.

With the elaboration of the tourist product and the need to integrate multiple complementary experiences with a joint value, the collective action translates into a higher cooperation level, surpassing a mere intraregional dimension. This only integrates actors of a region, usually administratively limited. One has to assume an interregional dimension with other regions or destinations, whose characteristics are concordant and complementary with the first one. In this manner, the collective action reaches a new dimension better understood by the eyes of the tourist. It is also a more robust competitor with other destinations inasmuch as coherent unit with uniform values.

In this regional transversality (as displayed in figure 4) authorities will have the difficult task to conjugate the interests of the private sector, with the needs and

desires of the local residents, in order to keep the economic health of the community. This is in order to keep community's identification and acceptance towards tourism, as well as ensuring they also contribute to the sustainable development of the region as a tourist destination.

In fact, the need for private intervention to ensure projects of greater dimension can bring together multiple perspectives, interests and values that will need to be coordinated (Jamal and Getz, 1995). The coordination search will lead to conflicts between values that the collective organisation shall have to solve.

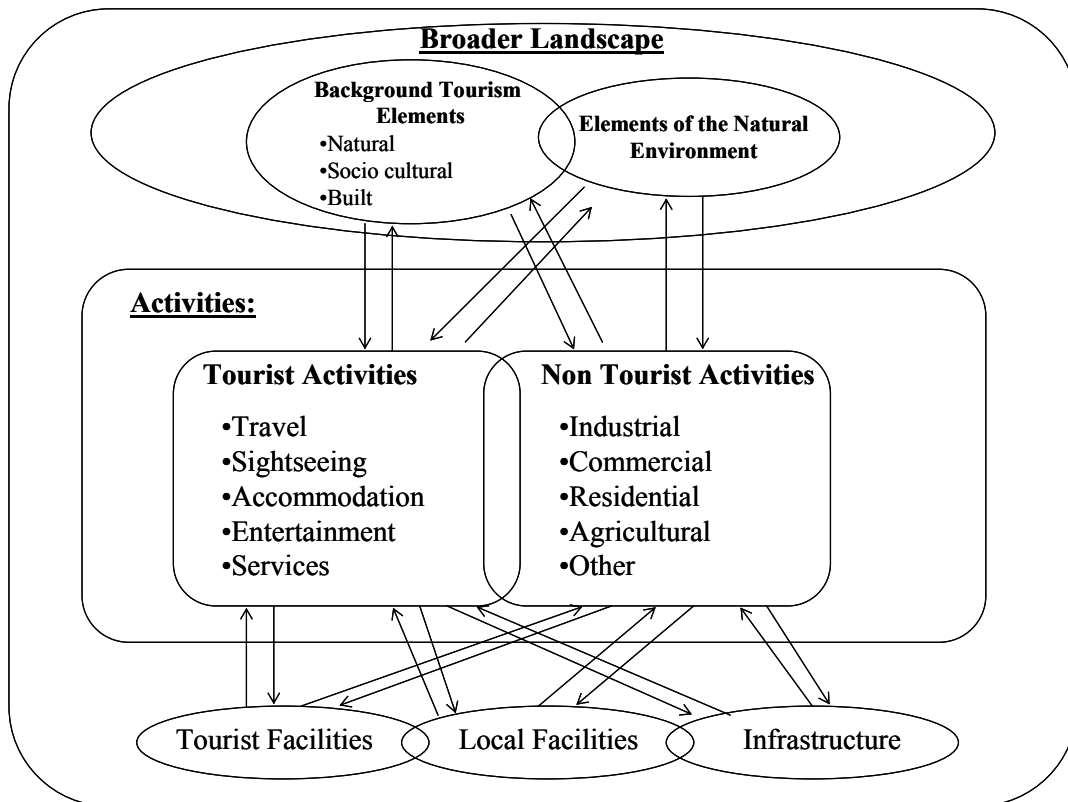


Figure 4. The Relationship of the Commons with Tourism and Other Activities  
Source: Briassoulis (2002: 1070)

Great part of the collective action in the tourism, expresses itself in plans and projects leading to the understanding of how they appear. It is a precious instrument for the understanding of those movements. Yüksel and Yüksel (2000) point out and describe four generic factors that affect the implementation of tourist plans and they are primarily top-down implementation of the plan, after checking and preparation it will be implemented at base level. It is here where they are normally formulated without any vision, perspective, values and perception of those who are going to enjoy them.

A second factor pointed by the authors, sends to ambiguous institutional contexts the underlying to the negotiations that are the support for plan elaboration and that involve multiple interactions between heterogeneous organisations that need at all moments an understanding and adjustment flexibility to these contexts.

The authors point out as a third great generic factor the different responsibility and power distribution, normally seen in the elaboration of tourist plans where the local administrations have a relatively limited importance. Finally, the relational patterns

and the nature of the tourist context that depends on existing governmental institutions' consistency and the way these interact will also be able to limit the success of the tourist plan applicability.

In very concentrated political systems, local groups of interest are not called to make their opinions known, and solutions are imposed without consultation of those these key elements, which obviously may lack sustainability and may alienate the residents (Briassoulis, 2002). These will have a fundamental role in the creation of the tourist destinations' image, affirming itself as one of its more important intangible elements. In fact, multiple authors (Jamal and Getz, 1995; Selin and Chavez, 1995), point to the involvement and strengthening of decisive elements of the local community in the so-called "critical mass" of the organisation, as an essential condition for its success.

#### **4- CONCLUSIONS**

In this article, firstly we presented tourism characteristics, where became evident as distinctive sectorial factors, the heterogeneity of resources, the transversal supply with the complementarities of their actors, and the multiplicity of values and understandings these had. This way, the tourism sector is extremely propitious to a perception and subsequent analysis of the same through the understanding generated from the network approach.

Due to the characteristics of public good of most tourist resources, coupled with the ownership of related resources being distributed by an heterogeneity of will generate stagnation if they are not compatible, the relevance of the collective action was made clear as the support base for tourism dynamics.

At this level it was analysed the relevancy of the collective movements based in a coordination of actors around the creation of a coherent tourist product. It also stands out the importance of the collective action create and promote a correct functioning of these movements.

These movements will consequently have to be an object of interest in the definition of concerted development policies. It is recommended that they assume a broad regional dimension exceeding that of mere territorial criterion confined by administrative divisions. These obfuscate the tourist vision and may only generate a fragmented product from his point of view. It is imperative to adopt, instead of administrative criteria divisions, factors that generate complementarities and value to an integrated tourist product.

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