10 Meta-organisations as drivers for sustainability across tourism clusters in the Alps

A case study of 'Alpine Pearls'

Monica NADEGGER and Leonhard DOBUSCH

Introduction

The tourism industry currently discusses the urgency to change tourism development towards economic, ecological, and social sustainability. Scholars like Ruhanen et al. (2015) discuss a wide range of sustainability topics within tourism research, from sustainable tourism practices and development to more specific fields like rural or heritage tourism. However, implementing sustainable changes requires 'a commitment to move beyond steady-state tourism, the redefinition of spatio-temporal system boundaries, an appreciation of complex socio-ecological systems and the accommodation of global environmental forces' (Higham & Miller, 2018, p. 4). Realising the need to better understand collaborative intra-destination approaches for sustainable development, tourism researchers have explored the concept of clusters (Pearce, 2014; Porter, 1998). The concepts of tourism destinations and clusters show distinctive overlaps. Tourism destinations, similarly to clusters, are characterised as an array of simultaneously competing and collaborating actors and businesses in a distinct geographical location (Beritelli et al., 2014; Buhalis, 2000; Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011). In tourism destinations, collective effort is needed to implement (sustainable) innovation and development along the customer journey. Thus, the cluster perspective offers the possibility to evaluate destinations as 'a conglomeration of activities and facilities . . . where tourism production and consumption occur simultaneously' (Pearce, 2014, p. 143). Destinations can display dynamics similar to clusters where heterogeneous actors collaborate and compete to provide services to travellers along the value chain in a distinct territory (García-Villaverde et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020). Although cluster approaches can account for intra-destination innovation through collaborative and competitive, that is 'coopetitive', dynamics and local ties along the supply chain (Fundeanu, 2015; Lee et al., 2020; Novelli et al., 2006), they fail to explain how to organise change beyond a destination's geographical boundaries and how to collectively address the grand challenges of sustainable tourism development in the long term.

Questioning sustainable innovation as a task of isolated tourism clusters in a fixed, given territory (Beritelli et al., 2014), a meta-organisational perspective

DOI: 10.4324/9781003215066-14

can help to understand both the potential and challenges for sustainability (Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2016) in the tourism industry beyond predefined destination boundaries. Meta-organisations can facilitate long-term collective action and the creation of legitimacy and accountability among member organisations by introducing (at least partially or temporarily) organisational characteristics like common goals, shared values, and 'soft' approaches to monitoring and sanctioning (Ahrne, Brunsson, & Seidl, 2016; Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2011; Berkowitz, 2018). The aim of this chapter is thus to investigate how 'coopetitive' intra-destination cluster dynamics and meta-organisational inter-destination management can be combined to facilitate sustainable development in the tourism industry. The study investigates this research question with an illustrative example of the Alpine Pearls, an association of several tourism destinations which develop green mobility across the Alps.

The following chapter is structured as follows. First, the literature review focuses on the concept of the tourism cluster, its peculiarities and implications for sustainable intra-destination development. Then, the chapter introduces the theoretical lens on meta-organisations for collectively organising sustainable development across destinations. In the following, the case study of the Alpine Pearls illustrates three meta-organisational characteristics which facilitate sustainable development: rationale for collective action, membership, and decision-making and structure. The chapter outlines the opportunities and challenges for organising sustainable development by combining cluster and meta-organisational collaboration in tourism destinations.

Literature review: destinations as tourism clusters

Tourism destinations are defined as an 'amalgam of tourism products, offering an integrated experience to consumers within a geographically well-defined area' (Buhalis, 2000, p. 97). Within these areas, multiple firms in diverse sectors, such as hospitality, infrastructure, or public institutions, provide services central to tourists' travel experiences (Beritelli et al., 2014; Fundeanu, 2015; Laing & Lewis, 2017). However, suppose a destination is merely considered a loosely connected agglomeration of individual business firms in a specific place. In that case, one fails 'to uncover the engine that powers destination and the dynamic process between context-bound interconnected actors' (Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011, p. 136). These territories or their geographical boundaries are usually set by public organisations like 'Destination Management Organisations' (DMOs) (Grimstad, 2011), which, at the same time, assist in the coordination of inter-firm relations (Jackson & Murphy, 2002, 2006). With DMOs, tourism clusters can become (at least partially) organised (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005). A DMO can deploy resources, finance specific initiatives in a given region, and assist in the identity development of a destination (Beritelli et al., 2014). It provides 'a political and legislative framework for tourism marketing' (Buhalis, 2000, p. 98). However, the link between different firms and service providers is crucial to creating value along the customer journey and a holistic tourism experience to be advertised

by the DMO. To understand how these businesses co-exist as rivals in the same sector and partners along the value chain, the approach of tourism clustering has emerged to conceptualise the complexity, interdependence, and coopetition in tourism destinations (Jackson & Murphy, 2006; Laing & Lewis, 2017).

Porter (1998) defines clusters as 'geographic concentrations of interconnected companies, specialised suppliers, service providers, firms in related industries, and associated institutions (for example, universities, standards agencies and trade associations) in particular fields that compete but also cooperate' (Porter, 1998, p. 197). While the geographical boundaries can shift over time (Beritelli et al., 2014), the role of territory and local resources is crucial for a successful exchange of services between the supply (i.e. destination) and the demand (i.e. tourist) sides (Kádár & Gede, 2021). In contrast to horizontal clusters with multiple manufacturing businesses from the same sector, tourism clusters are considered diagonal. They include interdependent, complementary, and heterogeneous firms that supply a wide range of products and services linked through consumer experiences (Fundeanu, 2015; García-Villaverde et al., 2020; Laing & Lewis, 2017; Michael, 2003). To collectively create value and services, organisations in tourism clusters must cooperate while competing: the product or service (i.e. a holistic travel experience) can only be created through partnerships between multiple companies, institutions, and authorities (Fundeanu, 2015). If an organisation within a destination fails to cooperate and merely competes, the destination cannot offer a holistic travel experience.

With geographical proximity at the core of its definition, the concept of a tourism cluster is especially helpful in describing and understanding regional development within destinations (Fyall et al., 2012; Novelli et al., 2006). To leverage these coopetitive dynamics successfully, firms within destinations exploit territorial resources and benefit from geographic concentration and proximity (Pearce, 2014). Once the relations between firms are established, tourism clusters pioneer and drive innovation, creativity, and development (García-Villaverde et al., 2020; Żemła, 2014) through the reduction of transaction costs, systematic learning, and access to specialised services, investments, and funding, synergies, availability of knowledge and information, as well as benchmarking of performances among firms within the cluster (Lee et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Victoria et al., 2017). All these benefits occur due to the simultaneous competition and cooperation between co-located firms in the cluster's immediate area (on a local level) to increase (global) competitiveness (Erkuş-Öztürk, 2009; Gardiner & Scott, 2014; Lee et al., 2020; Novelli et al., 2006). Once again, (geographical) proximity is critical, as Porter (Porter, 1998) outlines: 'Competitive advantages in a global economy lie in local things – knowledge and relationships that distant rivals cannot match' (Porter, 1998, p. 77). Local, territorial uniqueness is crucial to the functioning of tourism clusters (Pearce, 2014), allowing to channel economic advantages and stay competitive beyond the local context (Laing & Lewis, 2017; Novelli et al., 2006). With their case of UNESCO heritage cities in Spain, García-Villaverde et al. (2020) exemplify how firms can be the first 'to offer new products and services to provide attractive experiences' leveraging their 'deep knowledge of the territory

based on close ties with agents of the cluster, with the ability to identify changes in preferences of customers through diverse ties and with enough financial resources' (García-Villaverde et al., 2020, p. 11). The goal of (organised) tourism clustering is thus to strengthen competitiveness in a global market by increasing economic growth, productivity, and efficiency through cooperative advantages like economies of scale (Gardiner & Scott, 2014; McLennan et al., 2016). The relationship among clusters is, thus, a competitive one, where the profits of one cluster (e.g. a customer deciding to choose a specific destination) depend on the losses of another cluster (i.e. a customer not visiting another destination) (Jarillo, 2013).

Development within tourism clusters has mainly been discussed from an economic perspective. As Derlukiewicz et al. (2020) highlight, tourism clusters can also strengthen, promote, and ensure sustainable development among members through coopetition. However, research on tourism clusters focuses on how inter-firm relations in the destination are managed but not in what context or with what goals in mind (except for economic growth) these clusters operate (Pearce, 2014). It fails to acknowledge joint management structures and collaborative efforts beyond geographic proximity or discuss how inter-destination collaboration can help address shared problems or grand challenges requiring joint solutions (Fyall et al., 2012; Żemła, 2014). Sharpley (2020) urges rethinking how to 'rebalance tourism on a global basis' and highlights the need for 'research into how the necessary institutional, structural and behavioural transformation might be achieved' (Sharpley, 2020, p. 1942). If the focus is on sustainability as a shared (global) problem with the need for collaboration on a larger scale, the required mediated inter-destination development and innovations cannot be grasped by cluster theory linking innovation and development solely to ties within destination boundaries. Fyall et al. (2012) argue that the 'inter-destination collaboration requires a clarity of purpose . . . with the emphasis on system value creation' (Fyall et al., 2012, p. 22).

Consequently, to reach ambitious sustainability goals and face 'super-wicked' problems like climate change (Wright & Nyberg, 2017), inter-destination collaboration must be organised around long-term collective goals to tackle grand challenges (George et al., 2016). While tourism clusters can face some of these challenges and fuel innovation through coopetitive dynamics within a particular territory, the collaborative efforts beyond these geographical boundaries remain unclear. Collective efforts on an inter-destination level have to be organised differently. Thus, this chapter focuses on the concept of meta-organisations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2011) to theoretically frame this joint endeavour for sustainable development across destination boundaries.

Theoretical background: meta-organisational approaches for inter-destination collaboration

While organisations in tourism clusters are bound through co-location in a shared territory, meta-organisations have other organisations (from various sectors or industries) as formal members. Ahrne and Brunsson (2005, 2008)

define the characteristics that distinguish meta-organisations from organisations or firms with individuals as members. With organisations as members, meta-organisations face not only different challenges but also opportunities. They usually have better access to resources and are able to leverage more organised forms of collective action (compared to individuals) (Ahrne et al., 2016; Ahrne et al., 2016; Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005). While individuals' membership in organisations depends on their free will and incentives through economic benefits (e.g. salary), members in meta-organisations are united by sharing a common goal (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005). As Jarillo (2013) points out, their relationship can be regarded as a cooperative one with a non-zero-sum outcome in mind: each member believes 'there will be more to share (and will be shared fairly) by cooperating' (Jarillo, 2013, p. 131). In the case of sustainable tourism and the protection of environmental resources through strategic cooperation, the net gain (i.e. an intact environment and a liveable planet) benefits all tourism clusters without inflicting any losses on competitors.

Without formal authority (like an institution or government) (Chaudhury et al., 2016; Gulati et al., 2012), membership in meta-organisations is often voluntary and linked to the member organisations' strive for a system-level goal such as sustainability (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005; Berkowitz & Bor, 2018; Valente & Oliver, 2018). As member organisations are independent, autonomous actors, who have decision-making power and resources themselves, meta-organisations often cannot exercise organisational strategies like sanctioning or monitoring (Ahrne et al., 2016; Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2011; Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz & Bor, 2018). Decisions in meta-organisations are often made by member organisations collectively following heterarchical structures and 'producing soft laws through decision-making by consensus' (Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019, p. 58). With autonomous organisations as members, meta-organisations are often 'reluctant to accept too much organisation' (Ahrne et al., 2016, p. 97). Thus, meta-organisations can be seen as partial organisations, exhibiting only some of the elements of complete, formal organisations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011; Schoeneborn & Dobusch, 2019).

Tourism clusters and meta-organisations both unite various organisations as their members to foster innovation and collective action in a more or less organised way. Although these aspects are similar and overlap in both concepts, there are three differences leading up to the collective action worth exploring (see Table 10.1). First, tourism clusters create collective action, development, and innovation through coopetition within local ties and draw their resources and advantages from their geographical proximity and their striving for economic competitiveness. Meta-organisations channel collective action through shared identity, accountability, and legitimacy linked to a shared vision, not shared territory (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2016; Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019). However, as Viachka and Duprat (this volume) show, some meta-organisations inherit spatial dimensions of clusters and are anchored in their territories, contributing to their social sustainability. Bound by a collective identity, meta-organisations as associations or networks of organisations can be especially

Table 10.1 Comparing tourism clusters and meta-organisations as different ways of collective action

	Tourism clusters	*Meta-organisations*
Rationale for action	• Exploitation of territorial resources through coopetition. • Increasing efficiency and productivity.	• Guiding members through a shared, common goal (e.g. sustainable tourism).
Member organisations	• Firms situated diagonally along the customer chain. • Geographically proximate actors.	• Organisations that fulfil the membership criteria. • Voluntarily contribution to a shared vision.
Decision-making	• Cooperation and competition among individual firms along the value chain. • No formalised decision-making mechanism. • Rationale for decision: local innovation and global competition.	• Heterarchical through consensus, standards, and 'soft' laws. • Members can be sanctioned via exclusion.

effective at knowledge management across firms or geographical boundaries. As Dyer and Nobeoka (2000) emphasise with their case study of knowledge-sharing networks at Toyota, 'the effectiveness of collaboration increases when stakeholders "have a shared purpose"' (Dyer & Nobeoka, 2000, p. 351).

Second, tourism clusters link (member) organisations to provide services guided by customer experiences (diagonality) and create economic and competitive advantages within territorial boundaries (Fundeanu, 2015; García-Villaverde et al., 2020; Laing & Lewis, 2017; Michael, 2003). Meta-organisations, however, select their members according to more or less formalised membership criteria and align their actions through soft rules and standards or the so-called informal or social forms of control and governance (Dyer & Singh, 1998).

Third, tourism clusters emerge without a specific structure or hierarchy. Dominant organisations can leverage existing business opportunities, while smaller firms with weaker ties struggle to collaborate and be included in the territorial value chain (Fundeanu, 2015). There are no defined paths or rationales for collective decision-making in tourism clusters. These processes are rarely formalised as they emerge from localised ties between firms. From a tourism cluster perspective, decisions to become more sustainable are thus situated in values within the individual firms (Grimstad, 2011) but are not guided by shared vision spanning these organisations. In meta-organisations, decision-making is often heterarchical and based on consensus, with the voices of all members being included (Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019). While this allows all members to participate in the decision-making process, some actors can still have more influence than others.

While cluster theory can explain intra-destination collaboration as well as innovative capabilities and efficiency within destinations (Erkuş-Öztürk, 2009; Novelli et al., 2006; Porter, 1998), meta-organisations can extend the power of collaboration beyond geographical limits and govern inter-destination collaboration guided by a shared vision, working towards sustainability as a system-level goal (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018). Thus, in this chapter, we argue that the combined intra- and inter-destination collaboration striving for sustainable development should be understood through the complementary perspectives of tourism clusters and meta-organisations as two paths leading to collective action on different levels.

Illustrative case study: Alpine Pearls – destinations striving for green mobility & sustainable travel

With an illustrative case study of the 'Alpine Pearls', a meta-organisation in the European Alps, this chapter explores how meta-organisations can help to foster sustainable tourism development across destinations. Alpine Pearls considers itself an umbrella organisation for sustainable tourism and soft mobility. The meta-organisation was founded in 2006 with 17 member destinations as a follow-up to two projects funded by the European Union (Alp Mobility I + II). Fifteen years later, members include 19 destinations ('member pearls') in Alpine regions spreading across five countries: Austria (Werfenweng, Mallnitz, Weissensee, Hinterstoder), Germany (Bad Reichenhall, Berchtesgaden), Slovenia (Bled, Bohinj), Switzerland (Disentis/Mustér), and Italy (Ceresole Reale, Chamois-Le Magdeleine, Cogne, Forni di Sopra, Limone Piemonte, Moena, Moos im Passeiertal, Taschings, Villnöss, Alpe Cimbra). Additionally, more than 90 accommodation businesses (hotels, bed and breakfasts, apartments) in the designated destinations are included as affiliated hosts. All these destinations share some commonalities in terms of their destination territory. They offer 'spectacular mountain views, breath-taking beauty, and authentic Alpine customs' (Alpine Pearls, 2022) and are similar in their destination structure, being community-based Alpine areas with family-led and small businesses (Flagestad & Hope, 2001). With a focus on car-free holidays and green mobility, the goal of Alpine Pearls is to protect the environment while maintaining a smooth and trouble-free service experience for travellers.

The Alpine Pearls serves as an insightful case of meta-organising in the context of tourism clusters for two main reasons. First, the members of the Alpine Pearls span several different types of organisations (private, single firms like accommodation businesses and public organisations like DMOs or municipalities). Second, although they focus on a specific destination type (alpine, rural areas), they go beyond individual destination borders and span five countries with varying governmental structures. Figure 10.1 illustrates the meta-organisation of Alpine Pearls as extending the localised, intra-destination ties of tourism clusters to inter-destination, transnational collaboration, united by the goal of sustainable tourism development.

The following section will outline three main differences between tourism clusters and meta-organisations (see Table 10.1) with an illustrative case study to explore how meta-organisations like the Alpine Pearls build upon or extend the ability for sustainable development across destinations.

Rationale for collective action

Member destinations of the Alpine Pearls share a common goal. The members want to foster sustainable, soft, and gentle tourism through the means of green mobility. Five overarching guidelines specify the vision of the meta-organisation and its members: (1) environmentally friendly mobility, (2) environmental protection and renewable energy, (3) conservation and biodiversity, (4) preservation of local heritage, and (5) supporting local businesses and local food suppliers. To implement these goals, Alpine Pearls encourages all destinations to engage in the collective production of knowledge (e.g. through conferences and annual meetings in one of the destinations), product development on a local (e.g. establishing localised supply chains for affiliated hotel businesses), and transnational level (e.g. through shared marketing and branding campaigns with public transport or other public institutions). Alpine Pearls, as a meta-organisation, understands its mission in the linkage of the destinations and the establishment of core principles and values guiding (and uniting) all destinations. By bundling up destination resources all over the Alps, Alpine Pearls coordinates and secures the funding of projects together with the European Union (e.g. the INTERREG project for alpine areas).

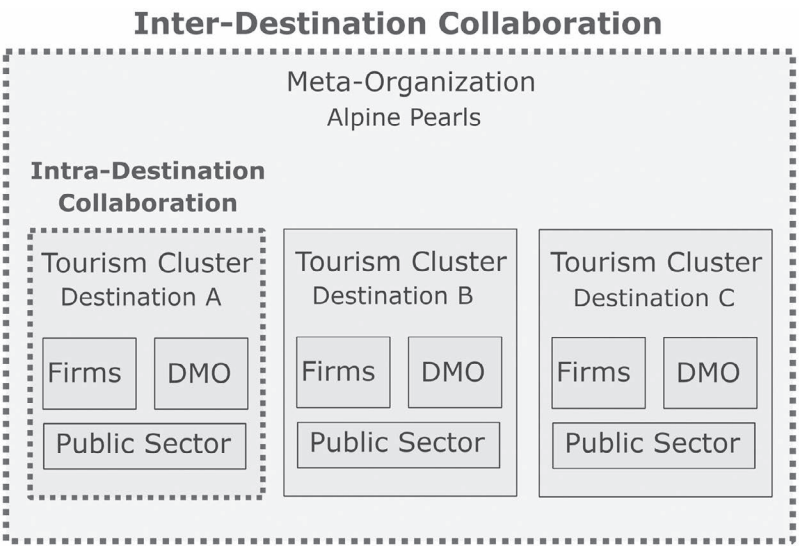

Figure 10.1 The Alpine Pearls as a meta-organisation that spans across destination borders and localised tourism clustering

Similar to the coopetitive rationale in tourism clusters (Erkuş-Öztürk, 2009; Lee et al., 2020; Rodríguez-Victoria et al., 2017), the vision and strategic goal of the Alpine Pearls are to offer a holistic and sustainable travel experience for the consumers too. However, the economic profit and efficiency inherent in competitive cluster dynamics are not the guiding principles. The Alpine Pearls encourages members to act sustainably: to secure tourism travel's long-term viability, preserve the region's unique character, and gain a competitive advantage over other destinations with a different (non-sustainable) focus.

Membership

Members of Alpine Pearls feature various types of organisations such as municipalities or destination management organisations (which represent associations of multiple municipalities in geographically connected regions). The destination has to be represented by a legal entity with an organisational structure (e.g. a designated spokesperson or a CEO). Further, the municipality or destination has to agree with the principles of sustainable development with a written resolution. In addition, tourism has to be a central part of its economy, manifested in a 3-year-median of overnight stays or the overnight stays per inhabitant. The tourism intensity sets the annual membership fee, dividing members into four categories with annual fees ranging from 12,000 to 25,000 Euros. All members have to commit to the membership criteria before being admitted. Each of the guidelines mentioned before (environmentally friendly mobility, environmental protection and renewable energies, conservation and biodiversity, preservation of local heritage, and supporting local business and local food suppliers) entails mandatory criteria that all members must meet. For example the town centre has to offer pedestrian or traffic-calmed zones and represent some elements of a traditional, rural alpine village with no industry plants or other pollution-intensive infrastructure (e.g. transit roads). In addition, there are premium criteria, which serve as suggestions for members who strive for the proliferation of sustainable tourism practices in a specific area. The list of mandatory and premium standards spans 12 pages and ranges from e-mobility requirements for citizens and tourists to the use of the Alpine Pearls logo on a destination's website. There is the possibility of becoming a 'candidate pearl' for 3 years if the destination does not meet the mandatory criteria yet. Introducing the candidate status should facilitate destinations to benefit from the knowledge and the resources of member pearls and the meta-organisations while developing sustainable tourism services.

Like tourism clusters, Alpine Pearls includes organisations along the customer journey: hotels, infrastructure, DMOs, or municipalities. Compared to the local ties within tourism clusters, the Alpine Pearls only indirectly strengthens intra-destination collaboration (e.g. fostering locally produced goods in hotels or developing new e-mobility transportation offers). Alpine Pearls presumes that these local ties exist with the prerequisites for an already functioning inter-firm destination network with tourism as a core economic sector in the respective

regions. Their goal is to unite tourism clusters and guide their individual efforts towards sustainable development.

The Alpine Pearls as a meta-organisation is distinct from tourism clusters in two more ways. First, membership in the Alpine Pearls is voluntary. Organisations or destinations, which focus on sustainable travel, can become a part of it, but they also have other options. In contrast, some tourism clusters and DMO networks (e.g. in Austria) require mandatory participation in the activities of destinations (e.g. through mandatory tourism taxes). However, this participation cannot be considered membership per se but is rather an allocation to a legislative territory on the basis of the firms' geographical location. Second, membership in the Alpine Pearls meta-organisation is only partly limited to a geographical area. Member destinations have to be situated in an alpine context but are not limited to a specific country, district, or governmental destination boundary. They can consist of multiple clusters or only parts of the tourism cluster. The members are not united by their geographical context within a particular area but by facing similar challenges in their common quest for sustainable development. With a focus on small and community-structured destinations as members (Flagestad & Hope, 2001; Gajdošík et al., 2017), Alpine Pearls offers the possibility to share knowledge and establish solutions helpful for various clusters across destination borders.

Decision-making and structure

Although the membership is formalised (through annual fees, prerequisites for membership, and mandatory and premium admission criteria), the Alpine Pearls structure is rather heterarchical. All members make strategic decisions about future steps, the admission of new members, the evaluation of the requirements, and planned activities in an annual general assembly. When it comes to monitoring, each member is individually responsible for evaluating the extent to which they meet the prerequisites. In addition, an independent, external team (currently integrated into a student project at an Austrian University of Applied Sciences) is visiting a designated pearl each year to check on the criteria and the progress of the destination. If some members do not meet all requirements, weak spots are discussed in the assembly, and the meta-organisation provides suggestions for improvement in these areas. The only possibility for sanctions is the exclusion of the respective member or voluntary resignation from the meta-organisation.

The monitoring requirements in the Alpine Pearls meta-organisation focus on its members' accountability, trust, and reflexivity. This is typical for 'softer' approaches to administrative laws, rules, and standards and draws upon the accountability of the destinations to meet the collectively established values (Berkowitz, 2018; Berkowitz & Bor, 2018). The association-like structure ensures that every member can vote and participate in the decision-making concerning all members. Although the tourism clusters within the Alpine Pearls, their individual firms, and organisations can be guided by this shared

vision, trust, and reflexivity, they still mainly situate their collaboration in intra-destination ties. Collaborating through localised ties and proximity does not mean that tourism clusters cannot or will not evolve towards more sustainable businesses. However, the path towards sustainability is not guided by a formalised decision-making process as it is in meta-organisations, but the decisions to collaborate emerge out of geographical proximity and localised business ties.

Discussion: opportunities and challenges for sustainable development through intra- and inter-destination collaboration

By focusing on the rationale for participation, the type of members, and decision-making processes, Alpine Pearls as a meta-organisation unites tourism clusters around a common goal and enables sustainable development across destination boundaries (Berkowitz & Bor, 2018; Berkowitz & Dumez, 2016; Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019; Fyall et al., 2012). Echoing Berkowitz (2018), the results show how the Alpine Pearls as a meta-organisation fosters collective action and innovation through reflexivity, accountability, and responsiveness to grand challenges and extends the innovative capabilities of tourism clusters beyond economies of scale. Meta-organisations such as Alpine Pearls can add an overarching goal to the localised ties in tourism clusters and direct the collective action towards a common goal (Grimstad, 2011; Pearce, 2014). While clustering strengthens the local initiatives and fosters innovation and collaboration by focusing on specific characteristics of a given territory, meta-organisations can guide inter-destination development towards a longer-term, macro-perspective of sustainability on a global scale. United by a shared vision, meta-organisations can direct local and global ties towards a common agenda and enable collaboration beyond short-term economic benefits and competitive advantages through economies of scale. Being part of a meta-organisation, tourism clusters can improve intra- and inter-destination development efforts by leveraging knowledge from other meta-organisational members and their striving for sustainability without neglecting their territorial resources and competitive advantages (Fundeanu, 2015; García-Villaverde et al., 2020; Laing & Lewis, 2017; Michael, 2003) .

In our case, the members are pre-selected through the more formalised membership criteria of Alpine Pearls that reflect the shared purpose of the meta-organisation. However, these criteria can only be established with soft monitoring and sanction rules (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005, 2011; Carmagnac & Carbone, 2019). Referring to Berkowitz (2018) and Berkowitz and Dumez (2016), the collective strive for sustainability is guided by accountability and reflexivity rather than by 'too much organisation' (Ahrne et al., 2016, p. 97). Although soft rules and informal types of social control and governance can be as (or even more) effective than formal contracts or laws (Dyer & Singh, 1998), the partial (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2005) or varying degree (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) of organisation and the heterarchical structure can lead to difficulties in altering, extending, or changing the meta-organisational values

and aligning them with the goals of member organisations. Organisations as members and meta-organisations themselves face tensions with respect to their autonomy in decision-making. As Ahrne et al. (2016) state: 'The members must be autonomous actors, although belonging to an autonomous organisation; and the meta-organisation must be an autonomous actor, even though its members are autonomous' (Ahrne et al., 2016, p. 9). This struggle for autonomy can lead to difficulties in establishing actorhood for destinations as autonomous organisations and associations as Alpine Pearls as meta-organisations (for an in-depth discussion of actorhood in relation to accountability, reflexivity, and restructuring, see the chapter by Berkowitz and Gadille in this volume). Without exercising decision-making power on a local level, the Alpine Pearls can only guide member destinations through accountability, reflexivity, and moral and ethical values and offer them shared knowledge, global partnerships, and pooled resources. This may not be enough for more powerful destinations or tourism clusters capable of leveraging such benefits independently.

While there is a need for the membership criteria and monitoring and sanctioning strategies, the shared vision, the heterarchical structure, and the common goal of all members of Alpine Pearls are central aspects of collaboration (and success) in meta-organisation. Dyer and Nobeoka (2000) highlight the importance of a shared purpose for effective collaboration, as they state:

> The "identity" of the firm is defined by the organisational boundaries which dictate who is (and who is not) a member of the organisation, by shared goals and values, and by patterns of interaction among many individuals that give rise to a common language unit and common frameworks for action.
>
> (Dyer & Nobeoka, 2000, p. 352)

These collective goals and frameworks for action, facilitated by the umbrella of the meta-organisation, can also guide intra-destination development in tourism clusters, even if formal membership criteria or decision-making structures are missing. Within Alpine Pearls, the ties among members and guiding visions (see previous subsection on membership) for the meta-organisation develop in yearly meetings and conferences, where autonomous and sometimes competing destinations meet. The destinations situate their shared identity as being alpine and sustainable rather than as being competitors for the same market (although they are). They foreground collaborative relations to create additional value through ecological travel (Jarillo, 2013). With the emphasis on a shared purpose and values as 'the glue that holds [autonomous organisations] together' (Schoeneborn & Dobusch, 2019, p. 319), future research can reflect upon the role and dynamics of shared values for inter-organisational collaboration from a meta-organisational perspective. Mainly because of the dependency on values as uniting principles and the absence of hierarchical structures and sanctioning mechanisms in meta-organisations, they may be especially valuable for reflecting upon the role of value-based management.

Conclusion

This chapter shows how a meta-organisational perspective on sustainable development can extend the understanding of inter-destination collaboration in the tourism industry with a case study of Alpine Pearls in European Alpine regions. Circling back to the redefinition of spatial boundaries, an appreciation of socio-ecological systems, and acknowledging global environmental forces as requirements for sustainable change (Higham & Miller, 2018), the combination of tourism cluster dynamics with meta-organisational approaches outlines a possible way of implementing sustainable development practices in the tourism industry.

While this is an important first step in analysing the interdependence of both concepts for intra- and inter-destination collaboration (Fyall et al., 2012), future research could explore this dynamic with longitudinal, empirical research. This chapter highlights the importance of a meta-organisational approach to inter-destination collaboration as a suitable framework for analysing other transnational tourism associations and underlines the practical relevance for meta-organisations in the tourism industry. The conclusion outlines the interplay between meta-organisations and tourism clusters as being particularly valuable for community-based tourism destinations (Flagestad & Hope, 2001) with many small and family businesses. Meta-organisations like Alpine Pearls can help these complex arrays of actors create knowledge, implement change, and strive for a more sustainable future for the tourism industry. They can help unite individual regions and destinations by channelling their innovative capabilities towards a common goal without neglecting their unique territories and the local ties within the destinations. We, thus, see meta-organisations as capable of transcending destination boundaries and fostering inter-destination collaboration without neglecting the role of geographical proximity and coopetitive dynamics within destinations.

References

Ahrne, G., & Brunsson, N. (2005). Organizations and meta-organizations. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *21*(4), 429–449. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scaman.2005.09.005

Ahrne, G., & Brunsson, N. (2008). *Meta-organizations*. Edward Elgar Publishing. www.e-elgar.com/shop/gbp/meta-organizations-9781847209504.html

Ahrne, G., & Brunsson, N. (2011). Organization outside organizations: The significance of partial organization. *Organization*, *18*(1), 83–104. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508410376256

Ahrne, G., Brunsson, N., & Kerwer, D. (2016). The paradox of organizing states: A meta-organization perspective on international organizations. *Journal of International Organizations Studies*, 7(1), 5–24.

Ahrne, G., Brunsson, N., & Seidl, D. (2016). Resurrecting organization by going beyond organizations. *European Management Journal*, *34*(2), 93–101. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2016.02.003

Alpine Pearls. (2022). *Alpine pearls | About us*. www.alpine-pearls.com/en/about-us/alpine-pearls/

Beritelli, P., Bieger, T., & Laesser, C. (2014). The new frontiers of destination management. *Journal of Travel Research*, *53*(4), 403–417. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287513506298

Berkowitz, H. (2018). Meta-organizing firms' capabilities for sustainable innovation: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *175*, 420–430. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.12.028

Berkowitz, H., & Bor, S. (2018). Why meta-organizations matter: A response to Lawton et al. and Spillman. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *27*(2), 204–211. https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492617712895

Berkowitz, H., & Dumez, H. (2016). The concept of meta-organization: Issues for management studies. *European Management Review*, *13*(2), 149–156. https://doi.org/10.1111/emre.12076

Berkowitz, H., & Gadille, M. (this volume). Meta-organizing clusters as agents of transformative change through "responsible actorhood". In E. Lupova-Henry & N. F. Dotti (Eds.), *Clusters and sustainable regional development: A meta-organisational approach*. Routledge.

Buhalis, D. (2000). Marketing the competitive destination of the future. *Tourism, Management*, *21*, 97–116.

Carmagnac, L., & Carbone, V. (2019). Making supply networks more sustainable "together": The role of meta-organisations. *Supply Chain Forum: An International Journal*, *20*(1), 56–67. https://doi.org/10.1080/16258312.2018.1554163

Chaudhury, A. S., Ventresca, M. J., Thornton, T. F., Helfgott, A., Sova, C., Baral, P., Rasheed, T., & Ligthart, J. (2016). Emerging meta-organisations and adaptation to global climate change: Evidence from implementing adaptation in Nepal, Pakistan and Ghana. *Global Environmental Change*, *38*, 243–257. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2016.03.011

Derlukiewicz, N., Mempel-Śnieżyk, A., Mankowska, D., Dyjakon, A., Minta, S., & Pilawka, T. (2020). How do clusters Foster sustainable development? An analysis of EU policies. *Sustainability*, *12*(4), 1297. https://doi.org/10.3390/su12041297

Dobusch, L., & Schoeneborn, D. (2015). Fluidity, identity, and organizationality: The communicative constitution of anonymous. *Journal of Management Studies*, *52*(8), 1005–1035. https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12139

Dyer, J. H., & Nobeoka, K. (2000). Creating and managing a high-performance knowledge-sharing network: The Toyota case. *Strategic Management Journal*, *21*(3), 345–367.

Dyer, J. H., & Singh, H. (1998). The relational view: Cooperative strategy and sources of interorganisational competitive advantage. *The Academy of Management Review*, *23*(4), 660–679.

Erkuş-Öztürk, H. (2009). The role of cluster types and firm size in designing the level of network relations: The experience of the Antalya tourism region. *Tourism Management*, *30*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2008.10.008

Flagestad, A., & Hope, C. A. (2001). Strategic success in winter sports destinations: A sustainable value creation perspective. *Tourism Management*, *22*(5), 445–461. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(01)00010-3

Fundeanu, D. D. (2015). Innovative regional cluster, model of tourism development. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, *23*, 744–749. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00501-8

Fyall, A., Garrod, B., & Wang, Y. (2012). Destination collaboration: A critical review of theoretical approaches to a multi-dimensional phenomenon. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, *1*(1–2), 10–26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2012.10.002

Gajdošík, T., Gajdošíková, Z., Maráková, V., & Flagestad, A. (2017). Destination structure revisited in view of the community and corporate model. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, *24*, 54–63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2017.07.009

García-Villaverde, P. M., Elche, D., & Martínez-Pérez, Á. (2020). Understanding pioneering orientation in tourism clusters: Market dynamism and social capital. *Tourism Management*, *76*, 103966. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2019.103966

Gardiner, S., & Scott, N. (2014). Successful tourism clusters: Passion in paradise. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *46*, 171–173. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2014.01.004

George, G., Howard-Grenville, J., Joshi, A., & Tihanyi, L. (2016). Understanding and tackling societal grand challenges through management research. *Academy of Management Journal*, *59*(6), 1880–1895. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.4007

Grimstad, S. (2011). Developing a framework for examining business-driven sustainability initiatives with relevance to wine tourism clusters. *International Journal of Wine Business Research*, *23*(1), 62–82. https://doi.org/10.1108/17511061111121416

Gulati, R., Wohlgezogen, F., & Zhelyazkov, P. (2012). The two facets of collaboration: Cooperation and coordination in strategic alliances. *Academy of Management Annals*, *6*(1), 531–583. https://doi.org/10.5465/19416520.2012.691646

Higham, J., & Miller, G. (2018). Transforming societies and transforming tourism: Sustainable tourism in times of change. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *26*(1), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2018.1407519

Jackson, J., & Murphy, P. (2002). Tourism destinations as clusters: Analytical experiences from the new world. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, *4*(1), 36–52.

Jackson, J., & Murphy, P. (2006). Clusters in regional tourism an Australian case. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *33*(4), 1018–1035. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2006.04.005

Jarillo, J. C. (2013). *Strategic networks*. Routledge.

Kádár, B., & Gede, M. (2021). Tourism flows in large-scale destination systems. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *87*, 103113. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.103113

Laing, C., & Lewis, A. (2017). Exploring clustering as a destination development strategy for rural communities: The case of La Brea, Trinidad. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, *6*(3), 184–195. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2016.03.006

Lee, Y.-J. A., Jang, S., & Kim, J. (2020). Tourism clusters and peer-to-peer accommodation. *Annals of Tourism Research*, *83*, 102960. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2020.102960

McLennan, C. J., Becken, S., & Watt, M. (2016). Learning through a cluster approach: Lessons from the implementation of six Australian tourism business sustainability programs. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *111*, 348–357. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2015.01.085

Michael, E. J. (2003). Tourism micro-clusters. *Tourism Economics*, *9*(2), 133–145. https://doi.org/10.5367/000000003101298312

Novelli, M., Schmitz, B., & Spencer, T. (2006). Networks, clusters and innovation in tourism: A UK experience. *Tourism Management*, *27*(6), 1141–1152. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2005.11.011

Pearce, D. G. (2014). Toward an integrative conceptual framework of destinations. *Journal of Travel Research*, *53*(2), 141–153. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287513491334

Porter, M. E. (1998, November 1). Clusters and the new economics of competition. *Harvard Business Review*. https://hbr.org/1998/11/clusters-and-the-new-economics-of-competition

Rodríguez-Victoria, O. E., Puig, F., & González-Loureiro, M. (2017). Clustering, innovation and hotel competitiveness: Evidence from the Colombia destination. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, *29*(11), 2785–2806. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-03-2016-0172

Ruhanen, L., Weiler, B., Moyle, B. D., & McLennan, C. J. (2015). Trends and patterns in sustainable tourism research: A 25-year bibliometric analysis. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *23*(4), 517–535. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2014.978790

Saraniemi, S., & Kylänen, M. (2011). Problematizing the concept of tourism destination: An analysis of different theoretical approaches. *Journal of Travel Research*, *50*(2), 133–143. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287510362775

Schoeneborn, D., & Dobusch, L. (2019). Alternating between partial and complete organization: The case of anonymous. In G. Ahrne & N. Brunsson (Eds.), *Organization outside organizations: The abundance of partial organization in social life* (pp. 318–333). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108604994.015

Sharpley, R. (2020). Tourism, sustainable development and the theoretical divide: 20 years on. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *28*(11), 1932–1946. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1779732

Valente, M., & Oliver, C. (2018). Meta-organization formation and sustainability in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Organization Science*, *29*(4), 678–701. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2017.1191

Viachka, A., & Duprat, L. (this volume). We are all in this together: The significance of meta-organisations for cluster policy. In E. Lupova-Henry & N. F. Dotti (Eds.), *Clusters and sustainable regional development: A meta-organisational approach*. Routledge.

Wright, C., & Nyberg, D. (2017). An inconvenient truth: How organisations translate climate change into business as usual. *Academy of Management Journal*, *60*(5), 1633–1661. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2015.0718

Żemła, M. (2014). Inter-destination cooperation: Forms, facilitators and inhibitors–the case of Poland. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, *3*(4), 241–252. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2014.07.001