Interactions between stakeholders in Lourdes: An 'Alpha' framework approach

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Abstract

Purpose: Taking Lourdes as an example, this paper aims at understanding the relationship amongst the main tourism and events industry stakeholders.

Methods: To achieve the objective of the study, data were collected through interviews of key players. The results where then filtered through the 'Alpha' framework to theorise the interactions amongst stakeholders.

Results: The study also provides a (1) typology of the ultimate alpha syndrome in the context of destination management; (2) typology of the delta syndrome. (3) Finally, the study argues that in destinations where there is an ultimate alpha hallmark event, or an ultimate alpha stakeholder, a situation quite similar to an anti-competitive market can arise. This situation is referred as 'ultimate alpha tourism monopoly'.

Implications: Based on the findings of this study, Destination Marketing Organisations need to ensure that there is a suitable synergy amongst all stakeholders involved in the tourism industry (and related sector), to avoid anti-competitive market 'ultimate alpha tourism monopoly' to arise.

Keywords: Lourdes; Alpha framework; Hallmark; Destination management; Performance

1 Introduction

Existing research has already pointed out the lack or ineffective collaboration amongst stakeholders as a factor at the origin of failure of the sustainability in the tourism industry and cognate sectors (Séraphin et al, 2018; Sun, Rodriguez, Wu & Chuang, 2013). As for Todd, Leask and Ensor (2017), they have established a hierarchy (primary and secondary stakeholders) amongst stakeholders in the event industry. Other academics such as Cayla and Peyrache-Gadeau (2019); Kirschner (2019); Reid and Accordia (2002); Rouard and Schegg (2019), suggested a typology of stakeholders, with an emphasis on comparing and/or contrasting roles and importance. This study is in line with of all these preceded mentioned research as introducing a new typology of event coined as 'ultimate alpha', while theorising the interactions between these stakeholders using a framework which has never been used yet in event management academic research. In a nutshell, this study is offering a different perspective of religious tourism, which is an important segment of the tourism industry (Chantziantoniou & Dionysopoulou, 2017), and an important element of some destination branding (Zouni & Digkas, 2019).

The purpose of this paper is to develop a research agenda to better understand the interaction between stakeholders in a destination. So doing, the study is using the 'Alpha' framework. This framework has previously been used in tourism academic research to discuss gender as a variable when it comes to of career achievement as tourism academics (Ek & Larson, 2017). Using a science or zoology framework in a management research paper is part of the authors critical approach, and part of their will to explore the topic of stakeholder interaction from a different perspective. Indeed, Lugosi (2016) explains that multi-disciplinary approach helps to find inspiration, new ideas, and equally important, to go beyond our normal areas of interests.

Like Getz (2012), who formulated seven future research propositions in the field of events management, this introduction using the 'Alpha' framework is formulating three propositions specific to the interaction amongst stakeholders involved in destination management. As for the body of the study, it is offering a background to understand where these three propositions are coming from.

Proposition 1 (P1): The lack of cooperation amongst stakeholders of a destination triggers a certain number of syndromes, amongst these are the 'Alpha Syndrome', and the 'Delta Syndrome'.

Proposition 2 (P2): Despite the fact the involvement of all stakeholders is important in the success of an event (and destination), this does not stop the fact that a hierarchy amongst them remains.

Proposition 3 (P3): In destinations where there is an ultimate alpha hallmark event, or an ultimate alpha stakeholder, a situation quite like an anti-competitive market can arise (an 'ultimate Alpha tourism oligopoly').

At this stage, it is worth mentioning the fact this study is a collaboration between an academic and a practitioner, who also happens to be working at a senior management level for the tourist office in Lourdes. It is not uncommon that research is informed by the position of their authors (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). It is also important to mention the fact that the role of the second author at the tourist information centre has no known competing financial interest or personal and professional relationships that could have appeared to influence the information reported in this study. The involvement of the second author in this study has to do with the fact she is a PhD candidate.

2 Conceptual Framework

2.1. The alpha

Taking the example of a wolf pack, the 'alpha' is the dominant member of a group, in other words, the one at the top of the hierarchy (Mech, 1999). The posture of the 'alpha' is what distinguishes it from others during social interactions (Mech, 1999), and its role is to make a decision for the entire pack. Having said that, the 'alpha' is not necessarily the strongest member of the pack, but certainly the most capable to lead (Mirjalili, Mirjalili & Lewis, 2014). The alpha does not command on its own, it is helped by the 'beta', which role is to advise the alpha; discipline members of the pack; reinforce orders given by the alpha; and give feedback to the alpha. It is also worth mentioning that it (beta) is the next one in line, if something was to happen to the alpha (Mirjalili et al., 2014). Just below the beta is the 'omega', which is the lowest level in the pack. It has to obey to all other dominant wolves. Its scapegoating role within the pack

contributes to vent frustrations, and therefore tension with the pack. All the other wolves are subordinates, also called 'delta' (Mirjalili et al., 2014).

Applied to mankind, Ludeman and Erlandson (2006) explained that human history is full of alpha males, whom he presents as being authoritative and powerful individuals males who have done and achieved exceptional matters, such as: discovering new places; inventing new products and services; being in winning teams; heading big businesses; etc. Ludeman and Erlandson (2006), also added that they are individuals who are either feared and/or admired. They are also deemed to be very important for a society because of their leadership skills. Despite the positive depiction of alphas, it is also important to mention that they may have negative impacts on their organisations and/or surrounding, as all the elements that contribute to their strengths, are also their weaknesses, and as a result, have negative impacts (Ludeman & Erlandson, 2006).

The concept of alpha is therefore to be related to the concepts of scapegoat and villain, who are considered simultaneously as harmful individuals/organisations but also as heroes (Mirjalili et al., 2014; Mkono, Hughes & Echentille, 2020). This ambidextrous or Janusian nature of the alpha (Ludeman & Erlandson, 2006) described in table 1 below, is to be related to the ambidextrous or Janusian nature of the tourism industry (Sanchez & Adams, 2008).

Table 1: The alpha syndrome: When strengths become liabilities

Alpha attitude	Value to organisation	Risk to organisation
Dominant, confident, take charge	Decisive, courageous leader, get people to take action and move forward	Does not develop strong leaders, intimidating, create fear, stifle disagreement
Charismatic, magnetic leader who leads the way	Brings out the best in others	Manipulates to get his way
Aggressive, competitive	Determined to win, and turn others into winners	Competes with peers
High achiever	Produces results	Takes strong performance for granted
Bold, innovative, creative thinker	Solves problems, see further than others	Imposes own views
Persistent	Has courageous convictions	Drives others to exhaustion, thinks rules do not apply to him
Strong appetite for newness and change	Drives people and organisations to change and growth	Overzealous
Sees what is possible	Can see gaps and potentials	Focuses on the future
Sees what is missing	Spots problems and prevents them for getting worse	Fails to recognise others' contributions

Source: The author (Adapted from: Ludeman & Erlandson, 2006)

Apart from this paper, the concept of alpha has been used in tourism academic research only once. Indeed, in order to highlight the consequences of the glass ceiling phenomenon on women career and image in academia, Ek and Larson (2017) explain that the most celebrated academics in tourism are males, whom he calls the 'alpha male'. Those males, presented as pioneers, conductors, and acting as mentors, are often journal editors invited at conferences, etc... (Ek & Larson, 2017). Out of all the 54 leading academics in tourism identified by the study, only 7% (4) are women (Ek & Larson, 2017).

2.2. Hallmark events (as alpha events)

Hallmark events, also referred as mega event or special events, are those with international status, which contribute to give competitive advantage to destinations in terms of image within the tourism industry, while addressing the issue of seasonality (Getz, Svensson, Peterssen & Gunnervall, 2012; Hall, 1989), and more generally speaking, local development issues (Chirieleison & Scrucca, 2017). Hallmark events support the development of social capital amongst members of a community, while also giving them opportunities for self-expression (Getz et al., 2012). Additionally, they are either totally or partially financed by public money and are expected to generate large benefits for all stakeholders, particularly the hospitality, transport and entertainment sectors, however, the positive impacts of hallmark events are short term (Hall, 1989). Hallmark events (alphas) by definition place themselves at the top of the hierarchy of other events, and/or stakeholders of the industry.

As far as long-term sustainability in the tourism industry is concerned, the role and involvement of all stakeholders have been identified as key. A good organisation and interaction amongst them is also required (Todd, Leask & Ensor, 2017). This is all the more important amongst primary stakeholders, as they are involved at all stages of the planning and delivering of the event (Todd et al, 2017). According to the stakeholder theory, a good interaction and organisation implies clear roles for each stakeholder; ethical, equitable, successful relationship; and risk sharing (Sun, Rodriguez, Wu & Chuang, 2013; Todd et al, 2017). The stakeholder theory is therefore calling for a context where alpha, beta, omega, and delta would be working hand in hand, as opposed to how a wolf pack is currently organised. As a matter of fact, the failure of the 2009 World Game in Taiwan (considered as a hallmark event), was partly attributed to an ineffective collaboration amongst stakeholders (Sun et al, 2013). Tension within any group where there is a hierarchy (Mech, 1999; Mirjalili et al, 2014) could be addressed using Consensus Problem- Solving Model (CPSM).

2.3. Consensus Problem- Solving Model (CPSM)

Consensus Problem- Solving Model (CPSM) is a tool that enables solving problems amongst members of an ecosystem (Harley, 1996). The CPSM is articulated around 11 steps:

Step 1. Transition to team status - which is based on the principle that teamwork as a tool, consists in assisting members to move from taking individual actions to collective actions to deal with an issue. This could be achieved by identifying how each member feel, without censuring any point of view.

Step 2. Identify the problem – Until that step that aims to encourage solution sharing, members of the group were working individually to sort out problems they are facing, without agreeing on a problem to be solved, and how to do it.

Step 3. Agree on the problem – All members need to agree on the problem to address.

Step 4. Identify the facts – Members can voice their opinions on the problem even if they are contradictory.

Step 5. Agree on the facts – At this stage, all disagreements are discussed until a consensus is found.

Step 7. Agree on the principles/values involved – If consensus is still not achieved, objectives are changed until an agreement is reached.

Step 8. Identify the solutions – This step is all about coordinating the efforts of the team.

Step 9. Agree on the solutions - One solution or a bundle of solutions are identified.

Step 10 and 11. Identification and implementation steps – At this stage, the implementation of the strategy is discussed, alongside the assignment of roles to members, and deadlines.

2.4. Hypothesis

Based on information collected in section 2, it seems that there are three main types of alphas:

First, the member who stands out from the crowd thanks to his personal and individual achievement. This alpha does not have to collaborate with others. Actually, collaboration might impact negatively on him (Ek & Larson, 2017; Ludeman & Erlandson, 2006). For those alphas, CPSM does not apply.

The second type of alphas, are alphas leading, but in collaboration with others, without whom they would not succeed (Mech, 1999; Mirjalili et al, 2014). For those alphas CPSM applies.

The third and final group, combines characteristics of the two other types of alphas. That would be the case of alpha hallmark events, which stand out from other type of events as they are iconic by nature (Chirieleison & Scrucca, 2017; Getz et al, 2012; Hall, 1989), but also need to work with other stakeholders for their sustainability (Sun et al., 2013).

This study is arguing (Hypothesis 1) that alpha hallmark events, which are falling in the third category of alphas, are finding themselves in an ambidextrous context, namely a context combining opposites simultaneously (Vo-Thanh, Séraphin, Okumus, & Koseoglu, 2020), which put them in a difficult situation, resulting sometimes in failure (Sun et al., 2013), due to tensions (Mech, 1999). This alpha is what this study is referring to as the 'ultimate alpha', namely, a tourism driver within an ecosystem which is more interested with personal performance rather than group performance, and which is subsequently unable to develop large scale projects. The 'ultimate alpha' could be assimilated to what Brooker and Joppe (2014, p. 500) called a 'painter' (as opposed to 'artist' and 'artisan') in their tourism innovation typology: 'The painter's art is exclusive rather than inclusive, based on personal rather than broader perspectives. In essence, painters anticipate that the past will be replicated in the future such that what worked yesterday will work tomorrow'. For the ultimate alphas CPSM applies, but need to be adapted. As a result, this study

is then arguing (hypothesis 2) that a consensus amongst tourism stakeholders must not be systematically looked for in a context where there is an ultimate alpha hallmark event, in order not to tone down the driving force potential of the event. Indeed, Brooker and Joppe (2014) explain that despite the fact 'artists' and 'artisans' can be prolific and quite innovative, they are sometimes disconnected from the real world. Instead of a CPSM, a Problem- Solving Intersection Model (PSIM) might be needed., in other words, a model that enables to solve problems amongst members of an ecosystem, while ensuring that the key features and strengths of each stakeholders are maintained and used for the benefits of all.

3 Contextual Framework: An overview

Religious tourism (which includes the visit of religious sites) is one of the oldest, and most popular form of tourism in the world, as a matter of fact, more than 50% of individuals visit a religious place when holidaying in France (Grimaud, 2003). Pilgrimages which can be considered as a quest for healing (Winkelman & Dubisch, 2005), are one of the fastest growing motivation for travel (Conigham, 2016). The interaction amongst individuals is the main motivator, (Bajc et al., 2007). For this form of tourism to be sustainable, a strong partnership amongst stakeholders should exist in order to improve the quality of products and services delivered to visitors; share good practices; set up a more effective marketing strategy, etc. (Grimaud, 2003).

As for Lourdes, it attracts a wide range of visitors in terms of age, nationality, length of stay, etc. (Tavares & Thomas, 2007). The main reason for their visit is to see the grotto where Bernadette Soubirous appeared in 1858 (Thomas et al., 2018). Visitors are also motivated by a quest for authenticity (Moufahim & Lichrou, 2019). From 1858 to the early 2000s, the number of pilgrims to Lourdes has been steadily increasing to reach around 790,000 international arrivals in 2019, representing around 2,2 million overnight stays (Insee, 2019). If the COVID-19 pandemics has impacted the number of visitors, Séraphin and Jarraud (2021) are suggesting that the online delivery of some of the main pilgrimages will on the long-term generate even more visitors to the destination. Seasons at Lourdes are determined by pilgrimages, what made Lourdes a tourism destination (Eade, 1992), and place the Lourdes Pilgrimages as 'ultimate alpha' hallmark events. Indeed, every euro invested by the Sanctuary (entity in charge of hosting all the pilgrimages) turns into 12 euros return on investment for the destination (Guénois, 2020). It is not farfetched to assume that the hospitality sector is the main beneficiary of this godsend, as over the years the number of hotels in Lourdes have grown steadily to reach a total of 275 (15,000 rooms) in 1993 (Insee, 1993). However, since the turn of the century, the number of hotels have been dropping steadily to 135 hotels in 2021(Insee, 2021). Having said that, Lourdes remains the second city in France, in terms of hotel capacity right after Paris and just before Nice, Marseille, Bordeaux (Rinschede, 2009), which are rather big cities compared to Lourdes, which only accounts for 13,389 inhabitants (Insee, 2017).

Despite the fact that Lourdes is an established tourist destination (Séraphin & Jarraud, 2021), this study (which is focusing on the working relationship amongst stakeholders), is from now on going to investigate the relationship between the Sanctuary and the hospitality sector as they are the most prominent stakeholders of the event tourism sector at destination level (Séraphin & Jarraud, 2021).

4 Methodology

4.1. Positionality

In research, 'positionality' is all about how the authors position themselves with regards to the conduct of their study, as their position can affect the entire process (Hammond & Wellington, 2013). Having said that, positionality is presented as a 'double-edged sword' by Hammond and Wellington (2013) on the basis that when practitioners take advantage of their position to inform their research, it leads to sounder research outcomes, and more valid outcomes (Rogelberg, 2008; Warwick, McCray & Palmer, 2021), as their experience is filling gaps in knowledge that other researchers in the team (or not) may have (De Lavergne, 2007). Using a personal position is totally legitimate in research, as this positionality is at the heart of 'action research', a well-established research method, usually applied by practitioners on an attempt to improve practice within an organisation (Hammond & Wellington, 2013; Quinlan, 2011).

This study could be assimilated to some extent to action research, as one of the authors of this study works for the Lourdes DMO. Having said that, the purpose of this research is not to improve any current management approach, but instead, to understand how a theoretical framework (Alpha framework), could be applied to theorise the interaction between stakeholders within the destination. Based on the objective of the study, it is in the best interest of the authors to be as objective and critical as possible. Additionally, whatever the outcome of the study, the authors have no conflict of interest (as already stated in the introduction).

It is also worth mentioning that action research (and more broadly speaking, research requiring authors to take advantage of their position) 'has always been the poor relation in academic research' (Warwick et al, 2021: 388). Equally important, the purpose of results collected from action research does not need to be generalised as the full purpose of the approach is to use the findings at individual or local level (Warwick et al, 2021).

4.2 Qualitative research approach

As often in qualitative research, qualitative interviews have been conducted following an unstructured approach. This method of interviewing implies that the interviewer is not guided by any framework, but instead is led by the participants' narratives (Moyle, 2002). This method of interview has proven to be in some cases more reliable than structured interviews (Axelson, Kreiter, Feguson, Solow & Huebner, 2010), mainly due to the fact that participants are not influenced in any way whatsoever by the interviewer (Moyle, 2002).

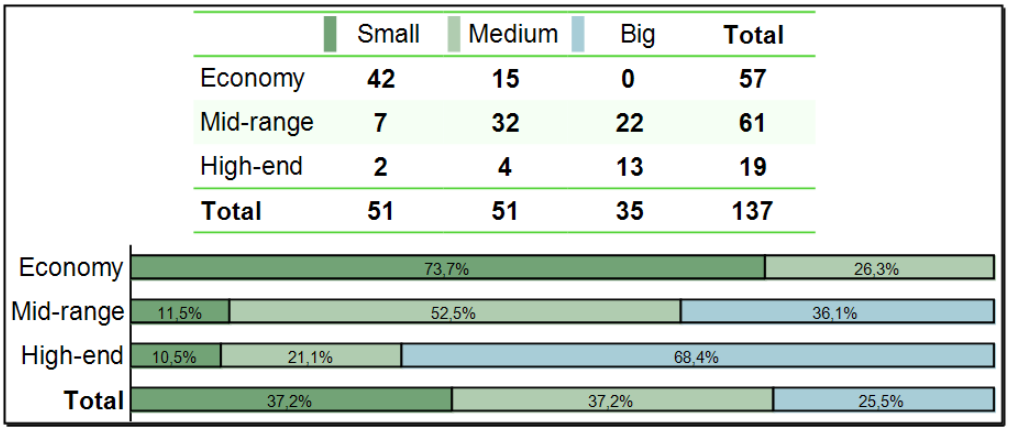
When conducting the interviews, the second author introduced herself as working for the tourist information centre, not only to get access to the respondents, but also for credibility reasons. Indeed, De Lavergne (2019) explains that when a practitioner-researcher carries-out research, s/he needs to take full advantage of it position, as not only facilitates access to respondents, but gives the practitioner-researcher more credibility. Additionally, before starting interviewing respondents, the second author highlighted the following to them: (a) She is conducting the interview as a PhD candidate, and not as an employee of the tourist office (b) she then explained the purpose of the study, and how long the interview would take (c) it

was also explained to the respondents that their answers will be kept anonymous and confidential (d) respondents were told that they could withdraw from the study at any time (e) last but not least, the second author ensured that her body language was not displaying any kind of judgement. Basically, all interviewing good practices as detailed by Alami et al. (2019) has been applied. The same impartiality has been applied when analysing and discussing the verbatim.

4.3. Data collection

This empirical study is based on interviews of two of the main stakeholders of the tourism industry in Lourdes, namely the hoteliers (110) and the representatives of the Sanctuary (3). The hospitality sector is not an heterogenous sector, which can be segmented in many ways (Bowie, Buttle, Brookes & Mariussen, 2017; Evans, 2020); Okumus, Altinay, Chathoth & Koseoglu, 2020). Among these are: the type of accommodation (hotels, motels, guest houses, villas, and time-shares, etc); the standard of the hotel (luxury hotels, boutique hotels, midmarket hotels, budget hotels); their purpose and philosophy (boutique hotels, eco hotels and resorts, large convention and gambling centres; extended stay hotels, capsule hotels, etc); the size (small, medium, and large); and the type of customers targeted (corporate, vacationers, etc.). In Lourdes, the hotels can be classified as follow (figure 1).

Figure 1: The hospitality sector in Lourdes



Source: The authors

In order to provide reliable and valid data, every single hotel manager has been considered in this study. Only 10 refused to be involved (for a variety of reasons). This research approach is one of the most commonly used to collect data (Gill et al., 2008). The hoteliers and representatives were interviewed between July and November 2020. The context (COVID-19) was particularly convenient to get hold of the hoteliers, as all the hotels were closed, as the hospitality sector was one the most impacted by the pandemic in the world (Krishnan et al., 2020). It is also worth mentioning the fact that 34% of hotel owners in Lourdes own more than one establishment (Lourdes Tourist Office database).

The data (verbatim) were originally collected in French, the mother language of the respondents, in order to ensure a greater reliability of the data (Brunt, Horner & Semley, 2017; Mkono et al., 2020). The verbatim

collected in this study have not been translated and/or edited for grammatical errors to preserve their raw authenticity, and avoid translation issues (Brunt, Horner & Semley, 2017; Mkono et al, 2020). Having said that, the verbatim have been translated into English, for the benefits of the readers of the study.

4.4. Data coding and analysis

Amongst the research strategies suggested by Getz (2012), when planning to suggest a research agenda are: Hermeneutics research (analysis of texts); and phenomenology (in-depth interviews). This is the approach adopted in this study.

A qualitative inductive method has been applied to the coding. Inductive method allows the researcher to start with some theories and apply them to a specific context (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach contributes to consistency, clear meaning , and understand of social realities (Boyatzis, 1998; Patton, 2002). In the case of this study, it is the relationship between an 'ultimate alpha' hallmark event and hoteliers. So doing, the coding of the verbatim following the interview of hoteliers is largely influenced by conceptual framework of the study. Indeed, the negative comments regarding the Sanctuary have to be related to table 1 (first and last column). As for the coding of verbatim following the interview of the Sanctuary they have been mainly influenced by the hypothesis (2.1) developed in this study.

The interviews have been coded and analysed using the MAXQDA software, which is part of the Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) package (Baugh et al., 2010; Morison & Moir, 1998). It supports text exploration and analysis (Lejeune, 2019), and proposes graphical representation of findings (Lewins & Silver, 2007). MAXQDA was used due to the fact it is considered to be better suited for text analysis and coding than NVIVO (Saillard, 2011), and even more so when it comes to tourism academic research (Trawoger, 2014).

5 Findings

5.1 Alpha 1 and risks for the destination

Hoteliers in Lourdes are expressing very strong feelings against the Sanctuary, which they argue are leading the town to the wrong direction.

-"The Sanctuary has killed the town"

-"They have stolen our excursions"

-"The Sanctuary does not help us"

-"There is not enough communication"

It appears that the Sanctuary has an influential role:

- "They decide the day and time of the pilgrimage, as a result, they influence the season. Their objective is first and foremost to have all their rooms booked'

A good (tour) guide is supposed to be a good animator, someone who interacts with the people he is leading, while listening and respecting their preferences (Cohen, 1985). The hoteliers are saying that the Sanctuary is doing the opposite.

The Sanctuary can also be perceived as persistent with courageous convictions, driving others to exhaustion. Rules do not seem to apply to them:

- "Oh no, don't even mention the Sanctuary, have you seen what they did to us!" (referring to the virtual pilgrimage)

The Sanctuary is depicted by hoteliers as a scapegoat/villain and a hero at the same time. Criticism towards the Sanctuary are powerful, nevertheless, it is recognised as an alpha. The Sanctuary could therefore be compared to Janus, the Roman god who looked into opposite directions simultaneously, and whom has been pivotal in the creation of the world (Rothenberg, 1996). A Janusian thinking approach, or ambidextrous approach is therefore required to understand the Sanctuary. This is another reference to the ambidextrous or Janusian nature of the tourism industry (Sanchez & Adams, 2008).

5.2 Alpha 2 and value for the destination

Despite the fact hoteliers scapegoat the Sanctuary, they are also aware of its driving tourism potential as hoteliers (9) commented on the fact that the closer an hotel is to the Sanctuary, the more customers it has. "It is in the lower part of the town, near the Sanctuary, that businesses are flourishing" (Laborie, 1981, p. 548).

- "In Lourdes, being nearby the Sanctuary is a competitive advantage".

- "I am 2 minutes away from the Sanctuary! You can tell the difference with other hoteliers".

One hotelier even sold his hotel, and bought one closer to the Sanctuary:

"I have changed to be closer to the Sanctuary".

Despite their criticism, hoteliers are acknowledging the driving role of the Sanctuary, and is expecting a lot from it:

- "If the Sanctuary doesn't help us, we're not going to make it"

- "If there were no Sanctuary, there would be no hotels in Lourdes"

The hoteliers are also acknowledging the importance for all stakeholders to work together:

- "Unless we can get the city council, the Sanctuary, hoteliers, shopkeepers, etc. together, it won't work".

Nevertheless, they are also well aware about the difficulties of putting this collaboration into practice:

- "Each stakeholder has its own agenda"

- "I don't know if we will succeed, but it's our ambition"

- "It takes a real effort to get all stakeholders to work together"

As illustrated by literature and table 2, an effective collaboration amongst stakeholders is required for the sustainable development of a destination.

5.3 Alpha 3 and appetite for newness and changes

The preceded verbatim highlighted the perspectives of hoteliers. The following quotes are from the Sanctuary:

The Sanctuary sheds light on the existing mistrust between them and the hoteliers.

- "Hotels regard the Sanctuary with suspicion. It is because we are also an accommodation provider".

Here, it is worth highlighting the fact that the Sanctuary insisted during the interview on the fact they are not competing against the local hoteliers as they do not offer the same standard of service:

- "Our rooms are falling apart. They are not nice"

- "We do not provide nicely presented soaps in the bathrooms"

- "We do not provide sheets, and customers have to make their own bed"

Sanctuary understands that both its future and the future of local hoteliers are entwined. This is in line with the stakeholders' theory which states that the actions of members of a group impact on the others (Anderson & Getz, 2008).

- "Our future is connected"

- "We can't survive without the hotels and the shopkeepers"

During the interview, the Sanctuary mentioned its will to be more integrative in their management approach:

- "Instead of being a city within a city, we want to be an actor of the territory development"

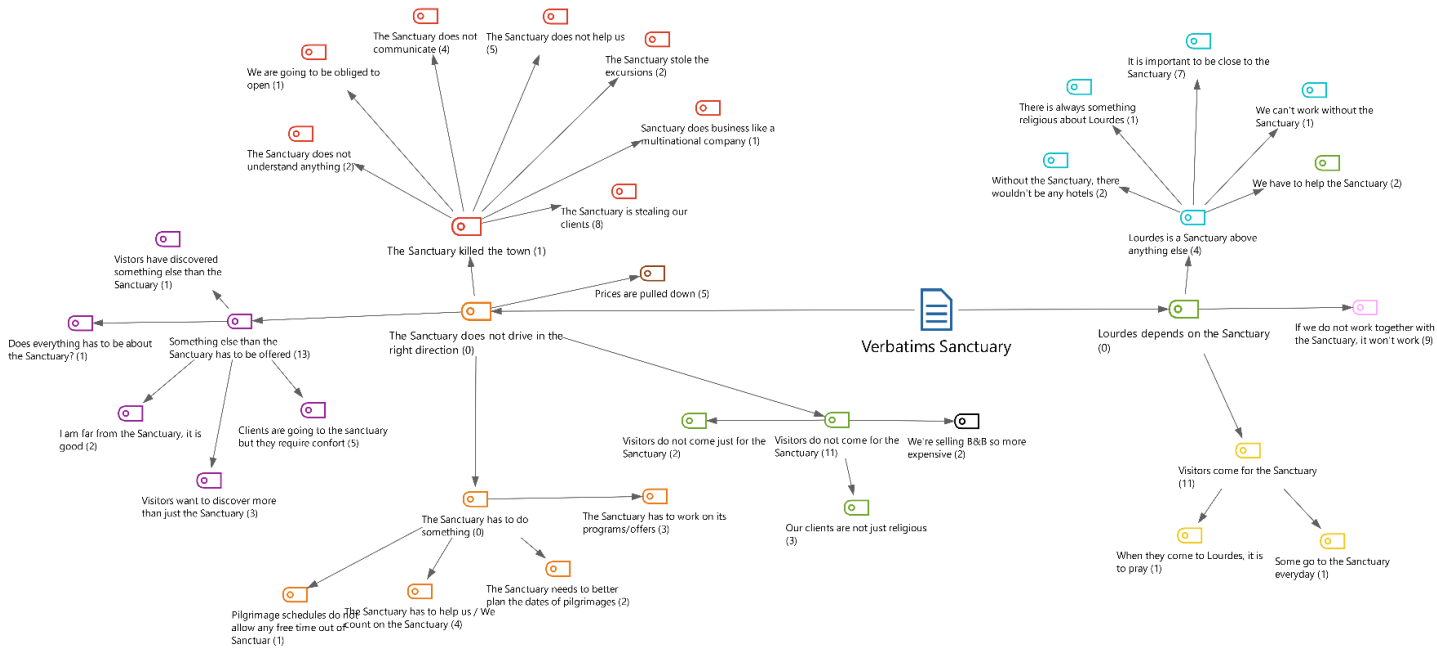
6 Research Discussion and implications

6.1. Lourdes pilgrimages and the Sanctuary from the perspectives of hoteliers

The verbatim from hoteliers and Sanctuary are actually backing up the fact that Lourdes is a destination spearheaded by an 'ultimate alpha' event (figure 2) with the benefits and limitations already identified by Ludeman and Erlandson (2006). As a result, the first proposition of the study for future research is as follow:

Proposition 1 (P1): The lack of cooperation amongst stakeholders of a destination triggers a certain number of syndromes, amongst these are the 'Alpha Syndrome', and the 'Delta Syndrome'.

Figure 2: Lourdes pilgrimages and the Sanctuary from the perspectives of hoteliers



Source: The authors

Based on the Mirjalili et al (2014) model, the alpha leads with the beta whom role is to help, advise, and give feedback to the alpha; while disciplining other members of the pack; and reinforcing orders

given by the alpha. The results of this research are challenging Mirjalili et al (2014), as the Sanctuary which is allegedly the alpha is developing strategies which are not taking into consideration the hoteliers who are not playing the role of beta. Still according to Mirjalili et al (2014), the omega, who is just below the beta (lowest level), only has to obey the alpha and the beta. As the hoteliers in Lourdes do not play this role either, they can't be considered as omega. As delta are mere subordinates (Mirjalili et al, 2014), it appears as the role that suits the most the conditions of hoteliers in Lourdes for the moment. For this reason, this study is referring to the Sanctuary and Lourdes pilgrimages as 'ultimate alpha' hallmark event.

Based on the Ludeman and Erlandson (2006) model, the Sanctuary (ultimate alpha) simultaneously represents a value (alpha hero) and a risk (alpha villain) for the destination. The Hall (1989) model adds more specificity to the risks, by highlighting the fact that the attitude of the Sanctuary might cause a leakage of profits from the destination (alpha villain). Groups or individuals angered by others tend to put forward their positive contributions to the community (hero statements), against less positive contributions (villain statement) on the same community in order to find an agreement (Mkono et al, 2020). The preceded information, has led to the formulation of the second research proposition:

Proposition 2 (P2): Despite the fact the involvement of all stakeholders is important in the success of an event (and destination), this does not stop the fact that a hierarchy amongst them remains.

The preceded information, has also led to the reiteration of the research proposition 1:

Proposition 1 (P1): The lack of cooperation amongst stakeholders of a destination triggers a certain number of syndromes, amongst these are the 'Alpha Syndrome', and the 'Delta Syndrome'.

The reason why the Sanctuary is scapegoated is also due to the dissonance based on the fact that the sanctuary does not live up to the expectations hoteliers have of leaders. The hoteliers are accusing the Sanctuary of Moral double standards which happens 'when people judge the transgressions of others more harshly than their own transgressions' (Mkono, 2020, p. 4). Indeed, it seems that the Sanctuary is putting its own interests first, despite the fact it fully knows its driver role for the destination. Visser (2015) argues that sustainability leaders should focus on the interests of the group before their own.

6.2. Hoteliers in Lourdes from the perspective of the Sanctuary

Based on the Mirjalili et al (2014) model, the Sanctuary perceives itself as an alpha, willing to lead with the hoteliers, whom they would like to view as beta, and / or omega, instead they are perceived as delta. That said, the Sanctuary admits that its working relationship with hoteliers could be better, hence the gap in comprehension. Based on the Ludeman and Erlandson (2006) model, the Sanctuary views itself as bringing value to the destination, which is not fully maximised, due to the fact that hoteliers are taking the current performance of hospitality sector in Lourdes for granted, and drive others (Sanctuary) to exhaustion, by relying too heavily on them (Hall, 1989 model).

Table 2: The ultimate alpha and Delta syndrome in the context of destination management: Values and risks

	Attitude	Value to organisation	Risk to organisation
Ultimate Alpha	Dominant, confident, take charge	Produces results	Does not develop strong leaders, intimidating, create fear, stifle disagreement
	Aggressive, competitive	Has courageous convictions	Takes strong performance for granted and/or leakage of profits from host community
			Imposes its own views
			Drives others to exhaustion, thinks rules do not apply to him
			Overzealous
Delta	Sees what is possible	Can see gaps and potentials	Takes strong performance for granted
	Sees what is missing	Spots problems and prevents them for getting worse	Drives others to exhaustion, thinks rules do not apply to him, and fails to recognise others' contributions

Source: The author (Adapted from: Adapted from: Hall, 1989; Ludeman & Erlandson, 2006)

The Sanctuary is accusing the hoteliers of moral duplicity, which is 'the false appearance of virtue or morality by preaching one thing while doing another, or publicly criticising others for things one actually does oneself' (Mkono, 2020, p 4).

6.3. From the blind spots to the Consensus Problem- Solving Model (CPSM)

The discrepancy between the way the Sanctuary and the hoteliers perceived themselves, and the way they perceive each other, highlights the existence of blind-spots within the destination. Blakeley (2007, p 21) argues that 'blind spots are areas where we resist learning and prevent us from adapting and learning'. (Blakeley, 2007, p 35). Blind spots also have negative impacts on interactions amongst individuals, and on perceptions (Blakeley, 2007). The existence of the blind spots denotes a certain hypocrisy within the destination, which arise when stakeholders are uncomfortable with their actions and the ones of others, but are denying it, and therefore not taking actions to sort out the issue (Mkono, 2020). Tourism hypocrisy could be used as an indicator or barometer for the performance of a destination (Mkono, 2020).

The results of this study (section 3-4) have covered stage 1 to 4 of the Consensus Problem- Solving Model (CPSM), namely the identification of the issues and its sources. Section 5-10 which are basically about finding solutions to the issues is starting from this point (5.3). This study is arguing

that it is the role of DMOs to address issues amongst stakeholders in order to ensure a smooth management of the destination, so that the latest can perform to the best of its performance (Gowreesunkar, Séraphin & Morisson, 2017). As part of the CPSM, an anti-competitive situation in the tourism industry needs to be put in place.

In the tourism industry, anti-competitive situations happen when a dominant organisation exert some kind of control over less prominent organisations (Font & Sallows, 2002). In small destinations, and developing destinations, major international tourism organisations (hotel chains, tour operators, etc.) are sometimes engaged in anti-competitive practices at the expense of other tourism organisations which are often smaller (Rodriguez & Murdy, 2006; Valentin & Boghean, 2007). As a result, to protect those smaller and/or local organisations, destinations are enforcing anti-competitive or antitrust measures, but these measures have often proven to be ineffective due to a lack of political will (Rodriguez & Murdy, 2006; Valentin & Boghean, 2007). This situation happens in contexts where there is no legal framework regarding how actors should behave in a specific sector (Valentin & Boghean, 2007). As a result, setting sustainability standards could be a solution (Font & Sallows, 2002).

The Sanctuary is exerting an indirect control over the economic sustainability of the tourism industry in Lourdes, as its driver role puts it in an ultimate alpha position within the tourism ecosystem of the destination. In the case of this destination, anti-competitive situation is not happening out of choice, but by default. On that basis, the third research proposition of the study is:

Proposition 3 (P3): In destinations where there is an ultimate alpha hallmark event, or an ultimate alpha stakeholder, a situation quite like an anti-competitive market can arise (an 'ultimate Alpha tourism oligopoly').

The opposite of an ultimate alpha tourism monopoly would be an inclusive tourism alpha management approach, where the destination would be managed following the model of a wolf pack, as presented in section 2.1. Having said that, for this situation to happen, the following needs to be in place:

1. A relationship based on trust and ethics
2. DMOs to have a regulatory and mitigating role
3. Stakeholders to have a broader view of their role (at destination level instead of just for their own business)
4. Individual and destination strategies should cross over

6.4 Limitations

The positionality of this study could be considered a strength of as highlighted in the preceded sections. However, this advantage can turn into a limitation if a critical distance (thinking and reflecting) is not observed (Quinlan, 2011). These limitations could have been moderated by having the lead author (academic) to conduct the interviews. Because of the pandemic, that was not possible, as travel was limited, and in some cases not allowed (Jamal & Budke, 2020).

Additionally, the conclusions obtained following the analysis of the verbatim are not to be considered as findings, but as a basis for futures research. Indeed, Getz (2012) explained that the design of research agenda needs to be based amongst other things on antecedents and choices (evaluation; decision-making; constraints), and on management strategies analysis.

7 Research Discussion and implications

Despite the fact that it is well documented that all stakeholders in a destination must be involved in the affairs of the tourism industry, and that a good interaction amongst them is required for a steady and sustainable growth of the industry (Chen et al, 2017; Lim & Cooper, 2008; Mech, 1999; Mirjalili et al, 2014; Parolo et al, 2009), this study highlights the fact that it is not systematically the case. In the case of Lourdes, the lack of quality interaction amongst stakeholders is based on the existence of: (1) blind spots (2) ultimate alpha monopoly (3) moral double standard (4) moral duplicity (5) and self-centered (as opposed to destination interest) attitude of stakeholders. This situation has led to an anti-competitive market or 'ultimate alpha tourism oligopoly'. The three research propositions formulated in this study are strategies suggested by the authors to enable a better understanding of the function and interaction of stakeholders within a destination.

Despite the fact that the purpose of this type of research is not to generalize the findings, as already explained earlier, and as also supported by Warwick et al (2021), the fact remains that the 'Alpha' framework could potentially be applied to other destinations and events, even if these events are not as established and structured as Lourdes Pilgrimages. The main challenge in that case would be to identify all the stakeholders.

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