

Inter-sectorial collaboration in networks: A Boundary Object approach to wine routes

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Abstract

Wine routes are used to enhance food and wine tourism development but, despite academic research devoted to studying them has increased over time, the emergent perspective interpreting wine routes as “Boundary Objects” deserves further research. This study aims to develop a framework rooted in the concept of “Boundary Objects”. To achieve this objective, a qualitative research was carried out on the Cannonau wine route (Sardinia, Italy). Our findings present a “comprehensive” framework, showing how different types of inter-organizational partnerships under the threats of different external and internal factors can shape a “Boundary Object”. Although this research is based on a top-down wine route and on a limited number of interviews, this is the first attempt to apply concepts specifically developed within Boundary Objects literature in the study of wine routes. Managers of similar types of wine routes should make sure that clear boundaries and shared goals are agreed among stakeholders. Future research should analyse other constructs developed within Boundary Objects literature in order to fully understand the contribution of Boundary Objects to the literature on networks in tourism.

Keywords: wine routes, Boundary Objects, network development, inter-sectorial collaboration, Italy.

Introduction

Wine routes, linking a number of small towns, wineries, and tourist attractions across regions, have been developed in many wine tourism destinations. Hence, wine routes can be considered networks linking different members that want to achieve a common goal (i.e. enhancing wine tourism in their region) and that, in order to do so, share knowledge, expertise, etc. (Dredge, 2006a). In light of this view it is then possible to analyze wine routes through the theoretical lenses of networks that, according to tourism literature, have been applied in two ways. On the one hand there are interorganizational networks developed among businesses and, on the other hand, there are public-private networks that can influence tourism planning and governance (Dredge, 2006a; 2006b). Wine routes can be seen as both interorganizational networks connecting businesses belonging to different industries (e.g. wineries, hotels, attractions, etc.), as well as public-private networks since in many cases wine routes see the involvement of public actors initiating/facilitating the creation and development of wine routes. In many destinations around the world, wine routes have been used as a tourism promotional tool and a tool for favouring network development and diversification of regional economies (Brás, Costa, & Buhalis, 2010; Getz, 2000; Hashimoto & Telfer, 2003).

By analyzing the literature on wine tourism and wine routes, it is possible to note that there are three strands of research that have been developed, one of which is still in its infancy: (1) wine routes as Boundary Objects that should facilitate the collaboration among businesses belonging to different sectors (Bregoli, Hingley, Del Chiappa, & Sodano, 2016); (2) analysis of the difficulties that hinder the development of wine routes, with particular attention to the management of connections between wine and other tourism and non-tourism-related sectors (Brás et al., 2010; Hall, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2000; Presenza & Del Chiappa, 2013); (3) benefits for the destination and the involved businesses arising from the development of a wine route (for example, Brás et al., 2010; Hall et al., 2000; Mitchell & Schreiber, 2007).

Among these three strands of research, the one interpreting wine routes through the theoretical lens of Boundary Objects has received less attention in current literature. According to Leigh Star (1989, p. 393) Boundary Objects “is an analytic concept of those scientific objects which both inhabit several intersecting social worlds [...] and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them [...] The creation and management of boundary objects is a key process in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds”. In other words “boundary objects are a sort of arrangement that allow different groups to work together without consensus” (Leigh Star, 2010, p. 602). Wine routes represents a natural setting that could effectively benefit from investigating the applicability of Boundary Objects. In fact, wine tourism development require the involvement of many different actors, belonging to different sectors and owing different viewpoints. These actors usually struggle in finding a fair level of coordination and integrity that is needed to reconcile the different meanings about what wine tourism is and how it should be developed. This reconciliation of views and meanings is needed to allow private and public stakeholders to collectively plan and implement actions aimed to achieve the common goal of guaranteeing a sustainable and competitive wine tourism development in their region, while preserving a certain degree of independency and diversity among each other (Leigh Star and Griesemer, 1989; Leigh Star, 2010). In such a context, wine route would become the arrangement (i.e. the Boundary Object) allowing different stakeholders to work together surpassing organizational boundaries and structures to make their region an attractive wine tourism destination able to meeting wine tourists needs and expectations.

That said, still very limited research has applied the theory of Boundary Objects in tourism literature for the study of destinations / wine routes. Furthermore, none of the three aforementioned research strands of research has been investigated in conjunction and, as a result, research on wine routes is fragmented with many papers having focused on a particular

aspect (as has just been highlighted). Thus, both academics and practitioners lack a comprehensive conceptual framework that is able to interpret what a wine route is, to recognize which are the main barriers to an effective wine route development and to describe the different types of benefits that a wine route can offer to boost the environmental, socio-cultural and economic health of the geographical area in which it is developed. Hence, it is necessary to study these three research areas in conjunction (i.e, wine route as boundary object, barriers to wine route development, benefits of wine route development) so that researchers can thoroughly understand how an effective wine route can be created as a sort of organizational arrangement that allows different stakeholders to increase their networking ability, thus achieving higher level of cooperation and collaboration. By so doing, this study contributes to further deepen, on the one hand, the literature related to wine routes and wine tourism development; and on the other hand, it enriches the current literature devoted to network theory suggesting Boundary Objects as useful lenses through which interpreting the creation and development of networks. From a practitioner's point of view, this would help wine route managers to better understand the factors that are essential in order to develop and manage a successful wine route and which they should pay attention to.

This study was therefore carried out to present and discuss a theoretical framework rooted in the concept of Boundary Objects that combines together the literature of wine routes as Boundary Objects, factors facilitating or hindering the development of a unique Boundary Object, and benefits arising when this is achieved. This framework is first developed and proposed based on the analysis of literature, then it is finalised on the basis of an empirical exploratory research that adopted a multi-prong approach; in other words, we considered production, hospitality, and tourism connections (Alonso & Liu, 2012). In particular, the main research questions that drive our study are:

1. What are the crucial factors in the creation of a wine route as a Boundary Object?

2. What are the links among the development of a Boundary Object, issues that hinder the development of a wine route and benefits arising when a wine route is developed?

To achieve our aims, a case study approach was adopted, and nine semi-structured interviews with some key stakeholders involved in the Cannonau wine route in Sardinia (Italy) were carried out.

Literature Review

Wine routes as Boundary Objects

Boundary objects are work arrangements that can have a varied degree of tangibility and can be used by parties belonging to different social groups (Leigh Star & Griesemer, 1989; Leigh Star, 2010). They allow people belonging to various communities having different culture, languages, etc., to interact with each other (Carlile, 2002; Fox, 2011; Koskinen, 2005), thus facilitating integration, cooperation and collaboration (Sapsed & Salter, 2004). More specifically, within Boundary Objects it is important that involved actors share a common goal that needs to be achieved collectively which, in turn, should drive each individual to carry out those activities that are needed to achieve the shared goal (Leigh Star & Griesemer, 1989). In so doing, however, each individual maintains his/her own identity and his/her daily work is carried out with the view that it contributes to the achievement of the shared goal (Leigh Star & Griesemer, 1989). Boundary Objects can be of four types (Leigh Star, 1989; Leigh Star & Griesemer, 1989) such as: 1) repositories (e.g. libraries); 2) ideal types (e.g. diagrams); 3) coincident boundaries (e.g. maps); 4) standardized forms (e.g. cards for collecting data) that can be developed, although they are not mutually exclusive (Leigh Star, 2010). These entities are usually created through discussion, and one of the outcomes that arises is knowledge sharing among individuals (Koskinen, 2005).

To the best of the authors' knowledge, so far only one research analyzed wine routes by adopting a Boundary Object approach (Bregoli et al., 2016). According to this view, a wine route is an entity that could facilitate collaboration among businesses belonging to different industries (Bregoli et al., 2016). However, this previous research did not use the categorisation of Boundary Objects used by Leigh Star and Griesemer (1989), but it just considered the concept at a broad level, thus there is the need to apply the aforementioned

categorization to wine routes in order to deepen our understanding of wine routes as Boundary Objects and, at the same time, to apply the concepts developed by Leigh Star and Griesemer (1989) to a different context from the one analysed by these authors in their seminal work.

In particular, by considering wine routes as *coincident boundaries*, such as “common objects which have the same boundaries but different internal contents” (Leigh Star & Griesemer, 1989, 410) it is possible to better understand how effective wine routes can be created. Indeed, according to the *coincident boundaries* view, stakeholders operating in a destination and that are characterized by different organizational goals, can overcome these differences if they agree on the boundaries of the destination (the wine route in our case) and on a shared goal. This would only limitedly affect the way in which they operate daily and would also allow them to express their individual identity because the definition of the wine route, its borders and its goals are a harmonization of different identities, needs, and goals.

In light of the features of Boundary Objects, within wine routes, it is fundamental that relationships among members develop, because only in this way can a wine route be perceived as unique (i.e., it becomes a Boundary Object). Relationships that are useful for achieving this aim can be of three types: horizontal (i.e., between businesses belonging to the same industry and involved in the same type of activity, e.g., wineries, etc.); vertical (i.e., between businesses belonging to the same industry but that are involved at different stages of the supply-chain, e.g., wineries and distributors, etc.); lateral (i.e., between businesses working in different industries, e.g., wineries and hotels, wineries and museums, etc.) (Mitchell & Schreiber, 2007; Wargenau & Che, 2006). Research shows that wine routes at their initial stages of development tend to have relationships between businesses belonging to the same sector (horizontal and vertical relationships), while at a mature stage, wine routes tend to be characterized by more complex integrations with a wider range of sectors (lateral

relationships) (Mitchell & Schreiber, 2007; Deery et al., 2012). For example, the Niagara wine route is one successful network case study that highlighted a series of horizontal, vertical, and lateral relationships – including interactions between wine and tourism organizations, inter-cluster cooperation with other related sectors (such as agricultural clusters and food clusters), and governmental and research bodies (Telfer, 2001).

Barriers to wine route development

Creating a wine route that is perceived as unique by its members is not a straightforward process, because several factors can influence it. For instance, an analysis of three types of networks highlighted the factors that can characterise them, such as: the development of a positive culture, communication and engagement among members; a transparent decision-making process, as well as clear responsibilities within the network; a shared vision; willingness to develop knowledge and spread expertise among members (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010). In literature, these barriers have been categorized in two groups: (1) external factors that relate to policy and macroeconomic forces that create a favorable environment for wine tourism to succeed and (2) internal factors, such as the capability and commitment of local stakeholders to engage in tourism development (Hall, 2003; Martin & Williams, 2003).

As one of external factors, crucially, public and political support is seen to be pivotal for the success of wine routes, especially in the early stage of their development. However, literature points out that wine tourism development has been negatively affected by a lack of government support for regional infrastructure development, along with the administrative separation and the existence of multiple public administrative agencies within a region, where different local and regional government administrations may have different approaches and processes (Hall, 2003).

Another factor that exerts a big impact is represented by the extent of funding available for long-term development (such as the development of a place brand) rather than short-term objectives based on membership schemes or political processes (Hankinson, 2010; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). For instance, Del Chiappa and Presenza (2013) pointed out that an organization may be seen to focus on short-term objectives aimed at giving returns to their members or political “sponsor” rather than on long-term objectives aimed at the growth of the network. In addition, spatial separation is considered as another barrier to network development, as it creates distance between vineyards and other resources (natural and man-made) available in the destination (Hall, 2003). For this reason it has been suggested that attention to road networks is crucial for improving the connectivity within the route and when this is achieved, businesses should actively inform their prospective visitors (Xu, et al., 2016). As far as internal factors are concerned, Hall (2003) noted that network development between industries is uneven, and barriers often exist that reduce the social network capacity to establish inter-organization cooperation. Among these barriers, wineries’ poor perceptions of the benefits that tourism can produce for the wine industry, poor skills, lack of stakeholders’ commitment, lack of abilities, and experience in tourism marketing and tourism product development were the most significant (Hall, 2003; Duarte Alonso, 2014). All these barriers to wine route development could be overcome when certain pre-conditions to the development of inter-organizational relationships are met. Indeed, strategic management literature shows that it is possible to create an inter-organizational relationship when: a) there is clarity and convergence among the purposes, values, and cultures of the different stakeholders involved in the organizational network (in our study a tourism destination); b) businesses involved have agreed objectives and strategies; c) businesses show willingness to adapt and are committed to the relationship; d) clear structures aimed at the coordination of the different parties involved are set up; e) “absorptive capacity” exists (i.e. businesses

understand the value of external information, internalize it and use it in their own operation) and there is compatibility of organisational structures (Austin, 2000; Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; De La Sierra et al., 1995; Dyer et al., 2001; Nooteboom, 2000; Perks, 2000).

Benefits generated by wine routes

When stakeholders recognize a unique wine route idea (i.e. when they feel they belong to the same Boundary Object), a set of benefits can be created for both the place (macro-benefit) and the single organizations (micro-benefits) belonging to the wine route. These benefits can be grouped into three categories: (1) economic benefits, (2) organizational benefits, and (3) socio-cultural benefits.

First, from an economic point of view, wine routes can promote the economic development of wine regions through the reduction of tourism seasonality, the diversification of regional economies and the creation of job opportunities (Cambourne et al., 2000; Correia, Ascensão, & Charters, 2004). Not only do wine routes bring about such macro-benefits, but they can also generate micro-benefits for the businesses belonging to the wine route. These latter are mainly represented by positive external marketing outcomes of the wine route in terms, for instance, of economies of scale in promotional activities, new product developments, etc. (Dodd, 1995; Brunori & Rossi, 2000; Cambourne et al., 2000; Correia et al., 2004; Brás et al., 2010).

Second, due to the network nature of wine routes, organizational benefits are generated in terms of, for instance, improved problem-solving capabilities, changes in daily operation, etc. (Gibson & al., 2005). Moreover, by networking with other organizations within the wine route, businesses involved can expand into current or new markets and reach a wider customer base (Koch, Martin, & Nash, 2013).

The third type of benefits is represented by socio-cultural benefits in terms of knowledge and information exchange between stakeholders (Correia et al., 2004), as well as connection to the place identity and local community's cultural and physical resources (Brás et al., 2010). While much of previous research has often highlighted the economic benefits of wine routes, in recent years, the concept of a wine route is more significantly emphasized with an active social network capability for promoting the building and acquisition of skills by encouraging information and knowledge transfer and collective learning between partner agents (Brás et al., 2010). Furthermore, wine routes allow to create and preserve the local wine culture among different stakeholders (Duarte Alonso, 2014) and permit tourists to discover a sense of place as a total experience (Getz, 2000; Getz & Brown, 2006).

Overall, it must be pointed out that these three different categories of benefits are intertwined with each other. For instance, when there is collaboration among businesses, and their own business culture changes (socio-cultural benefit), this could lead businesses to change their operation and to develop new skills (organizational benefit) that can bring about economic benefits for the single business and the place (economic benefit).

Based on our literature review, it appears that current research around wine route development is offering academics and practitioners a conceptual framework that is apparently lacking the ability to recognize and interpret the interdependencies among the three strands of research that have been developed so far (Figure 1).

Insert Figure 1 about here

The aims of our qualitative and exploratory empirical research is to verify whether it is possible to provide academics and practitioners with a more “comprehensive” framework, showing how different types of inter-organizational partnerships (vertical, horizontal, and lateral), under the threats of different external (e.g., level of funding and administrative

complexities) and internal barriers (e.g., stakeholders' experience and commitment) can effectively shape a wine route as a "Boundary Object" that is able to exploit all the benefits that a wine route development could offer the local / regional geographical area.

Methodology

This study aims at developing a theoretical framework which, by unifying three existing strands of research, interprets a wine route as a Boundary Object that needs to be developed so that the local area benefits from the positive externalities that effective wine tourism development allows to exploit. To achieve this purpose it intends to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the crucial factors in the creation of a wine route as a Boundary Object?
2. What are the links among the development of a Boundary Object, issues that hinder the development of a wine route and benefits arising when a wine route is developed?

Given that in current research no studies exist so far aiming at studying conjointly the three research areas identified in our literature review, this research is exploratory in nature and adopts a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews. Specifically, this methodological approach was adopted in order to obtain rich details on the topic under investigation (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994).

Interviews were carried out on a sample of stakeholders who were already formal members of the Cannonau wine route in Sardinia, Italy. This was done to ascertain whether these stakeholders, working within different sectors (tourism and hospitality, wine, food, farming, etc.) and sharing different worldviews and meanings, really had the interpretive flexibility (Leigh Star, 2010) that is needed to shape the wine route as a proper Boundary Object.

The interviewees were chosen on the basis of the official list of members of the wine route; moreover, they were chosen in such a way to represent all types of businesses involved in the wine route (Table 1). A more-detailed description of the interviewees' characteristics is available in Table 2, which shows the gender of the interviewees, the organization for which

each of them worked, and the code assigned to each interview that was used in the analysis of data.

Insert Table 2 about here

The wine route was mainly selected for three reasons. First, Italy is a leading wine producer in which several wine routes have been set up over time, however these wine routes have been set up through a top-down approach; second, previous research studied wine routes in three Italian regions, among which was also Sardinia (Bregoli et al., 2016). However, conversely to this previous research, the wine route of Cannonau had different characteristics compared to the Vermentino wine route. Indeed, although they were set up in the same period of time, in 2013, the Cannonau wine route was reorganized in order to improve it (for example, a new president coming from the business world was appointed). This reorganization process did not happen in the case of the Vermentino wine route, thus making the Cannonau wine route an interesting case to study in this research. Third, previous studies stressed the need to further develop the research on Boundary Objects in the case of wine routes. Hence, it was felt that by studying another wine route in Sardinia, it could have been useful in order to further develop the work of Bregoli et al. (2016).

Interviews were carried out on the basis of an interview protocol that was developed in the literature reviewed. More specifically, since this research is the second, to the best of the authors' knowledge, to investigate Boundary Objects in the context of wine routes, we used the interview protocol developed by Bregoli et al. (2016). In addition to this, we created some prompt questions aimed at better understand the meaning that interviewees were attributing to the investigated wine route and, how they were defining it. In particular, since in this research a Boundary Object is considered a *coincident boundary*, among the prompt questions we

asked what the goal of the wine route was and this allowed us to understand if members had a shared goal and understanding of the wine route. In order to recruit participants, we sent an e-mail to all the members of the wine route (in total 50 businesses), in that e-mail we briefly explained the aim of our research and how data was collected and used so that recipients could make an informed choice. A reminder was sent to all 50 businesses after some days that the first round of e-mails was sent, in this way all participants to the wine route received two e-mails from the authors. After this round of e-mail only nine people agreed to participate in the research. We subsequently asked the wine route's board of directors to promote our research through their official e-mail and, although, the board of director was very supportive of the research, no more participants were recruited. This low response rate can be justified by the fact that some people were not interested in being interviewed, while others lost interest in the wine route itself and felt that their contribution to the study was not valuable. With regards to the number of interviews that are deemed to be appropriate in a research, a recent study showed how there is not a "golden rule", but instead, the decision should be based on a number of factors, such as the objective of the research, the researchers' epistemological and ontological position, and the type of population from which a sample is selected (Saunders & Townsend, 2016). Although the number of interviews was limited, previous research highlighted how a low number of interviews can be sufficient when, for instance, interviewees are chosen from a homogeneous population; for example, Kuzel (1992) stated that in this case a sample between six to eight interviews is sufficient. Considering that in this research interviewees were all people involved in the chosen wine route, the population from which the sample was drawn can be considered homogeneous. Furthermore, previous research suggested also that a small sample of interviews is appropriate when interviewees are knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Romney, Batchelder, & Weller, 1986; Saunders, 2012). Hence, although in this research it

was possible to interview only nine people, this sample size can be considered suitable for the purpose of this research and the population that was investigated.

Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to one hour. All interviews were digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. Following this, the transcripts were analyzed with the support of NVivo 10. Analysis was carried out by using holistic coding, which is useful when the researcher knows what to investigate in the data (Saldaña, 2009). This was the case of this study, since, from the literature review, the researchers identified three macro-areas on which to focus, namely the concept of Boundary Object, factors that might affect the development of a Boundary Object, and benefits arising when a Boundary Object is achieved; hence, codes were identified based on academic studies published around these research areas. Following this first phase, elaborative coding was adopted. The choice of this coding technique was done, because it can be applied when there is the need to refine theory developed in previous studies (Saldaña, 2009), and since this research was carried out in order to develop the work of Bregoli et al. (2016), it was felt that this coding technique was appropriate. The final coding structure is presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

During the overall data analysis phase, analytic memos about the codes developed were kept (Saldaña, 2009). Two members of the research team who coded data independently carried out the analysis process. Following this phase, the researchers discussed their own codes and agreed on the final list of codes, on the basis of which, the final coding process was carried out.

Findings and discussion

Inter-organizational partnerships and Boundary Objects

Similarly to what previous research found (Bregoli et al., 2016), in this study it emerged how different stakeholders belonging to the Cannonau wine route did not have a unique view of what the wine route is (Table 4), meaning that “interpretive flexibility” exists and each member gives to the wine route a different interpretation compared to other members (Leigh Star, 2010). Although this element was present, it should be noted that this wine route cannot be considered a “coincident boundary” (Leigh Star & Griesemer, 1989) for two main reasons: one the one hand there is lack of consensus on the boundaries of the wine route itself. Indeed, as Table 4 shows, interviewees were talking about the place in a vague way (e.g. F09 mentioned “eno-gastronomy destination within Sardinia”; while W06 stated the “overall place”; others did not mention the wine route that were giving for granted) and this was also recurrent while analyzing the other interviews. On the other hand, interviews highlighted a lack of a shared goal attributed to the wine route, showing, hence, that this wine route is not a “coincident boundary”.

Insert Table 4 about here

However, contrary to previous research (Bregoli et al., 2016), all the different ideas expressed by interviewees were similar in relation to the fact that the wine route was perceived (more or less explicitly) as a collective project that benefits the place and all the stakeholders belonging to it, and only as a result of this it can benefit the single business. This could be explained by the fact that all interviewees highlighted how collaboration among wine route’s stakeholders developed, despite being at an embryonic form. In this way, this research supports previous literature on Boundary Objects, where it was shown how discussion among members of different groups was necessary so that a shared Boundary Object is developed (Koskinen,

2005). This suggests that, although internal marketing is quite developed in the form of face-to-face meetings, more efforts need to be put in order to strengthen it. For instance, as previous research suggests (Bregoli et al., 2016), new technologies, such as social media, should be used for internal marketing purposes and, in this way, should overcome the spatial distance existing among businesses within wine routes.

Following from this point, collaboration was analysed in more detail. In general, we found that a positive attitude toward collaboration was developed, although some of the interviewees highlighted that the process of collaboration development was still in its infancy. At the time of the interviews, collaboration existed mainly in terms of horizontal partnerships, while vertical and lateral relationships were growing slowly. This could be explained by referring to the fact that the *Cannonau* Wine Route is currently in its development stage (the wine route was officially set up in 2009), and usually, in this phase, wine routes are mostly characterized by horizontal and vertical relationships, as previous studies showed (e.g. Mitchell and Schreiber, 2007); while lateral relationships usually appear during the mature stage (e.g. Mitchell and Schreiber, 2007). Examples of these types of relationships (namely horizontal partnerships) can be seen in the following interview excerpt, where one interviewee stated:

Either we help each other or we die all together. We started to have shared buying of raw materials in order to save on costs. It could also happen that some clients want 1,000 bottles [of wine] but I only have 100; if I know the price-quality ratio of other businesses, I can suggest my client to approach one of the businesses who have a similar quality-price ratio as mine in order to avoid to loose that client. This will happen the other way round next time (W06).

With regards to lateral relationships (i.e., among businesses working in different industries), they developed where trust among businesses existed and when there was also willingness to collaborate. Indeed, as one interviewee stated:

Collaboration exists but it is not well developed because the network is developing and it needs time to grow. However, there is willingness to collaborate. For instance, if an hotelier sees professionalism in a winery, he will suggest the winery to his guests and he will have a benefit because those guests will stay longer at the hotel (F09).

The aforementioned considerations and quotes seem to suggest that one important element in the development of inter-organizational relationships is the degree of commitment that parties have within the wine route (De La Sierra, and Cauley, 1995) and that develops over time based on the prior experience in collaborating, and in sharing common knowledge and languages (Levinthal & Fichman, 1988). Hence, the knowledge accumulated and assimilated thanks to prior collaboration and interaction among stakeholders would, in turn, allow them to progressively increase their ability “to recognize the value of new information, assimilate it, and apply it to commercial ends” (Cohen, Wesley and Levinthal, 1990, p. 128). That said, it could be argued that when a wine route is developing, stakeholders might tend:

1. To express a low degree of commitment (Levinthal and Fichman, 1988), which could be demonstrated in simple activities, such as suggesting a trusted business to consumers, or including the products of other businesses into a company’s own offer;
2. To work with similar stakeholders (owning similar knowledge, languages, expertise, etc.), with the aim of gaining information and knowledge that is new to them but, at the same time, not so different that they become difficult to assimilate and integrate with what they already know (e.g. Nooteboom, 2000).

Hence, our findings deepen the scientific debate on the reasons why wine routes, as an inter-organizational network, follow a dynamic development path (as previous research suggests). According to this view, stakeholders interact, firstly, through horizontal relationships, and then move to vertical and lastly to lateral relationships (Mitchell & Schreiber, 2007) as the wine route evolves from the early stage, to the development and mature stage of its life cycle.

Barriers to the creation of Boundary Objects

Our data analysis also aimed at identifying what the factors were that hinder the development of a unique Boundary Object. In so doing, we identified two sets of barriers to the wine route: external and internal.

With reference to the external barriers, these were mainly related to political problems. For instance, the private sector felt that public and private organizations were working at different speeds, with the public sector being slower than the private one; this was due, for example, to the fact that public administrations changed from one election to the other. Moreover, some of the interviewees noted that political choices were affecting the management of the wine route, and, for instance, decisions were not taken efficiently. On this point, one interviewee stated:

In the past the decision-making process was not fair. [...] Financial resources were used in a very ineffective and unfair way especially by the public sector and the province. For example, the development of our official website was given directly to a private company without any public tender and we paid for it 8,000 Euro. Instead, I was proposing the board of directors quotes of €2,000 for a website with the same features, but I was said that they were forced to use one of the suppliers working in the province and the one I suggested was not [...] They wasted lots of money without doing anything (A05).

As previous research demonstrated (Weitz & Jap, 1995; Osborn & Hagedoorn, 1997) the different speed of operation is one of the factors that can affect the development of an inter-organizational partnership (as it is a wine route). Hence, our study supports the results of previous research and highlights that the differences in the speed of operation can be due to the extent of bureaucracy within an organization which, in turn, could affect the speed with which other stakeholders in the inter-organizational network (i.e. the wine route) can work in an attempt to provide their individual contribution to achieve the goals that the network as a whole intends to achieve.

As far as the internal problems were concerned, we identified managerial issues and culture-related issues. With regards to the first type of problems, it was evident that in the management of the wine route there were no rewards and penalties systems towards members; for instance, one of the interviewees highlighted:

[...] The previous president of the wine route allowed all wineries to become members of the wine route without respecting the rules of the statute in which it was stated that every member had to pay a membership fee. The money collected had to be used for organizing events, but at that time nothing was organized. In 2009 or 2008 there was only a membership fee that had been paid, the one of my business (A05).

The aforementioned example shows that there was no attention with regards to the internal financial situation of the wine route, with consequences affecting the operation of the wine route as well as the perceptions of members with reference to the usefulness of the wine route. Another concern arising from our interviews is related to the lack of leadership within the wine route; for instance, some interviewees stated that the previous managers did not believe in the project that they were considering as a way to get public funds. For instance, one interviewee illustrated this point by saying:

We had problems because the people who were in charge of the wine route did not fully share this project. The wine route was seen as a way to get external resources, this was the reason why the project was not developing. However, when we started meeting and training activities, we tried to involve young wine makers who understood that the wine route can be a powerful tool of place marketing if it used correctly (VA08).

This last issue of leadership could be associated with the second problem that we identified, i.e., a culture-related difficulty, because there were stakeholders who were struggling to collaborate with other businesses, due to the fact that competitive behaviors were far more developed. For example, an interviewee stated:

Problems are a bit related to the newness of these organizations, in addition we come from a culture in which we look at each other with suspicion rather than being in harmony with the work of our neighbors. Trust does not develop spontaneously, however we already see the effects of discussing problems and trying to identifying solutions (W04).

In line with this further evidence, our findings provide support to previous studies in the field of strategic management that highlights how managerial and cultural issues can make a wine route fail. Indeed, a certain degree of similarity in the reward systems, leadership styles, and decision-making processes is among the pre-conditions that allow an inter-organizational relationship to develop (Dyer et al, 2001).

Benefits deriving from Boundary Objects

The last sets of elements that we identified are related to the perceived benefits coming from the wine route. These benefits can be economic, socio-cultural, and organizational, and they can be distinguished in macro-benefits (i.e., referring to the overall place) and micro-benefits (i.e., at the level of single business).

From an economic point of view, different interviewees acknowledged that the wine route brings about benefits for both the place and the single business, in the sense that if the wine route grows, then also organizations can benefit, as one interviewee stated:

Rather than talking about benefits, it is better to talk about a growth of the place. [...] If there is a growth of the place and everybody knows that you can contribute to the growth of the place and of the wine route, you can get a personal benefit because you work in the place (WS01).

At the same time, the fact that a business is operating within a wine route allows it to work collaboratively with other businesses; thus, they can achieve economies of scales, such as in promotion. Indeed, as several interviewees highlighted, many of the businesses involved in the wine route do not have marketing expertise; hence, they tend to be more focused on their

own product at the expense of marketing (with particular reference to promotion). However, the fact that the wine route promotion is carried out on behalf of members, having a working wine route is seen as a good way to overcome the businesses' promotional problems. Furthermore, another economic benefit refers to the chance of developing new products, thanks to the combination of work from different businesses.

This latter benefit is linked to the organizational benefits as well. Indeed, by working actively in the wine route, businesses can network, and the more they work together, the more they can share know-how and skills and learn from each other, and they can also learn through the training activities organized by the wine route. This means that the overall knowledge is spread across the destination. For instance, one interviewee stated:

Another benefit refers to the fact that the single member can take advantage of training opportunities because the wine route has agreements with farmers associations, the university [...] and it can organize training events that would be very expensive [if paid by members by themselves], but if they are done through the organization they are for free [...] (F09).

In addition, another interviewee clearly highlighted the importance of meetings as a tool to increase the level of knowledge:

Meetings allow us to know each other and to sort out problems. When a winery has a problem it could happen that another winery does not have it, but by talking to each other a wine producer can understand what the other winery did in order to avoid the problem that he is dealing with (WS01).

These two examples show how important internal marketing is for both knowledge sharing as well as for developing a unique Boundary Object. However, by looking at the last quotes from interview WS01, it is possible to note how information sharing within the wine route happens mainly between similar businesses belonging to the same industry. Although, this is beneficial for the single business, at the same time it does not allow a full exploitation of the

benefits arising when information is exchanged. Indeed, these businesses have a very similar knowledge base and this means that they cannot really acquire innovative knowledge that they might use in their business (see also the previous section devoted to “inter-organizational partnerships and boundary objects”). This is particularly important when this result is read in the light of strategic management literature in which it has been shown how cognitive distance and cognitive proximity are important factors that allow businesses to fully benefit from an inter-organizational partnership (Nooteboom, 2000). This means that when companies are similar they can collaborate quite easily, but the level of new knowledge that is originated and that can benefit them is limited. This is not the case when different companies, operating in different industries work together because they possess different knowledge and skills. Indeed, although the development of the relationship itself will be slow, these actors will be able to exchange new innovative information that might be fully exploited in their day-to-day operations. As a result, it is possible to state that lateral relationships are those that are the most beneficial for a wine route and its stakeholders and this was somehow shown in previous research on boundary objects in wine routes (Bregoli et al., 2016).

Finally, there are also socio-cultural benefits that, again, are quite linked to the previous benefits. Indeed, by joining the wine route and working actively in it, there is a chance to change the business culture and to move from a situation in which businesses work independently from each other to a situation in which businesses collaborate. Thus, organizations move from competition to coopetition. This change in attitude and behavior was particularly experienced in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008. For example, several interviewees stressed the need to work together in order to survive in the new environment in which they work.

Finally, the emergence of the local identity was also another socio-cultural benefit that was assigned to the wine route. Several interviewees highlighted how wine is an important

element on which the local identity is based, and for this reason, they stressed how it should be used more extensively in order to promote the overall place. Relying on the academic research devoted to community-based tourism, it could be argued that respondents seem to favor strategies aimed at further developing wine tourism in their region as a way to better communicate the identity and cultural elements of their area; this would further reduce the perceptual distance between local stakeholders and heritage promotion in the area, thus allowing achieving a higher level of the so-called heritage proximity (Del Chiappa & Atzeni, 2015; Uriely, Israeli, & Reichel, 2009).

A theoretical framework on wine route development

Based on our initial review of literature, a preliminary framework to interpret wine route development was identified (Figure 1) which can be re-defined and integrated based on findings of our empirical study (Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 about here

According to our re-defined framework, a wine route can be successfully developed when wine-related and non-wine-related businesses interact and collaborate expressing a shared and unique understanding of what a wine route is (i.e., it is essential that the wine route is a Boundary Object). This would, in turn, allow them to increase the effectiveness with which they share information and knowledge that allows them to stimulate innovation at both individual and collective levels with the aim of making the visitors' experience in their geographical area more enjoyable and satisfactory. However, to achieve this goal, it is important that horizontal, vertical, and lateral relationships among all stakeholders involved are developed, and this means that the wine route managers pay attention to internal marketing so that communication develops among members. However, this process can be affected by external and internal factors. Obviously, the latter could be managed by the wine

route managers who can carefully use internal marketing with the aim of increasing the stakeholders' commitment to the wine route and their understanding of the benefits arising if they actively participate in the wine route. Of course, external factors are more difficult to be managed, because wine route managers cannot control them; however, they can, for instance, use lobbying in order to minimize the negative effects of these external factors. If a wine route becomes a Boundary Object, and all members involved agree on what the wine route is, then the destinations and the different businesses have the chance to maximize the benefits arising from the wine route.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to understand the relationships among the development of a wine route as a Boundary Object, issues that hinder the development of a wine route and benefits arising when a wine route is developed, and to identify the factors that are crucial in the creation of a Boundary Object. To achieve this aim, a preliminary theoretical framework was developed based on the analysis of the literature (Figure 1). The interpretative power of this framework was then "tested", and the framework was re-defined in light of an exploratory and qualitative study applied to an Italian Wine Route (i.e. *Cannonau* Wine Route, Sardinia, Italy) (Figure 2).

When compared to the preliminary framework that emerged from the review of existing literature (Figure 1), our re-defined theoretical framework included a section (preconditions to relationship development) that explicitly recognizes and visualizes the elements that favor the development of inter-organizational relationships (horizontal, vertical and lateral) and which would impact on the creation of a Boundary Object. Not only would these factors affect the relationships among stakeholders, but they would also mitigate some of the issues that can negatively affect the creation of a Boundary Object. Hence, it could be argued that the overall interpretative power of our conceptual framework is wider than the one that seems to emerge

from the review of the current body of literature around wine route development (Figure 1). More precisely, the main theoretical contribution of this study relies on the fact that it provides a framework that attempts to put together elements that so far have been studied in isolation, but that are interconnected. Hence, our framework suggests that these elements deserve to be studied in conjunction, especially if academics intend to deepen their understanding on how some critical factors, which currently seem to be somewhat under-investigated in wine tourism-related literature (e.g. absorptive capacity), can affect the effectiveness which wine tourism development can occur in a certain geographical area. In addition to this, this research has contributed to further advance the theory of Boundary Objects suggesting it as a useful theoretical lens to be used to study networks within tourism. Indeed, when compared to previous studies that applied this concept to wine routes (Bregoli et al., 2016), this research has explicitly considered some essential aspects of the construct such as the “interpretive flexibility” and the idea of “coincident boundaries”, which is one of the types of Boundary Objects theorised by Leigh Star (1989). In particular, it has demonstrated that to some extent a wine route can work even if stakeholders hold different views about what a wine route is. However, for this to occur it is necessary that: 1) at least a shared understanding of the common goals that the wine route should achieve exist; 2) a common agreement about the geographical area that the wine route should cover is reached. Both these elements should be developed from a bottom-up approach which was not the case in the Cannonau wine route since it was developed from a top-down approach by policy makers. Hence, this further confirms that the development of a clear Boundary Object can be effectively achieved just when communication and commitment are developed among stakeholders, thus engaging them in a common strategic planning aimed at further favouring wine tourism development in their region; this in turn, contributes to confirm the validity of our suggested framework and the opportunity to read it through the lens of Boundary Objects.

From a managerial point of view, our framework could be useful for wine route managers when they are developing and managing their own wine route, because they can easily visualize elements that they should pay attention to in order to set up a successful wine route (i.e., internal marketing in order to facilitate horizontal, vertical, and lateral relationships). Most importantly, by highlighting the pre-conditions necessary for developing relationships, wine route managers can clearly understand what are the factors that they should carefully manage so that the benefits for stakeholders can be maximized. Moreover, our model could be used to easily highlight what the benefits of joining the wine route are for stakeholders; hence, this framework could be used as an information tool that allows managers to identify the benefits that they can stress to their members. In addition to this, our research has shown the need that the boundaries of the wine route, as well as its goal are decided bottom-up from the stakeholders that should be involved in any wine route. By so doing, they should feel a sense of belonging to the wine route itself that should result in a higher level of commitment to the wine route. This means that policy makers and destination marketers should, at best, play the role of conveners to initiate and to facilitate networking and collaboration, as well as the role of leaders to provide vision and strategic direction. Meanwhile they should fully recognise the value of any contribution coming from the stakeholders, thus developing a bottom-up approach. This in turn, suggests that wine routes should be created and dynamically developed based on public-private partnerships, one of the types of networks studied in previous research (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010).

Nevertheless, as with all researches, this study is not free of limitations. First, the empirical study is based on a qualitative approach that, despite providing the authors with in-depth information, could have been complemented with the use of quantitative data. Second, in our work we were only able to interview nine stakeholders of the Cannonau wine route. This circumstance renders our results not generalizable neither at the specific wine route level (i.e.

the Cannonau wine route), nor at all wine routes. On the whole, the possibility to extend the interpretative power of our study and related findings exist just for those wine routes that share similar characteristics as the one studied here: i.e. wine routes that have been recently developed and that have been set-up by policy makers through a top-down approach. Indeed, these wine routes that have been created on the basis of external factors (intervention from policy makers) tend to be more fragile due to the low level of commitment displayed by its members. While wine routes that have been developed using a bottom-up approach are more likely to succeed in the long-term thanks to the commitment of its stakeholders. In other words, our framework might be affected by the cultural specificities in which different wine routes operate, thus limiting the applicability of it to a particular type of wine route. Third, our framework joins together elements from different theories, this requires attention in the interpretation of results. In particular the concept of Boundary Object has been applied only once to the study of wine routes (Bregoli et al., 2016) and, more broadly to networks, thus it is necessary to further study the conjoint application of these elements in order to make sure that network theories do not violate the assumptions at the basis of the Boundary Object theory.

Interesting suggestions for future research stand from the limitations pertaining to this study. First, the fact that the study is based just on an Italian wine route with a specific genesis (i.e. top down), it would be worth repeating this research on other wine routes located in other countries characterized by a different cultural context, genesis, social norms and levels of cooperation among stakeholders. In this way it will be possible to further assess the interpretative power of our model and to verify whether there might be other factors affecting the development of a Boundary Object that were not included in our theoretical framework because of the site-specific nature of our study. Furthermore, since in this research we started, only partially, deepening our understanding on different aspects of the theory of Boundary Objects, future research should be aimed at understanding whether the different types of

Boundary Objects identified by Leigh Star and Griesemer (1989) can be studied within tourism networks and whether other characteristics apart from “interpretive flexibility” exist in the context of wine routes.

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Table 1: Composition of interviewee sample

Type of business	Population	Population (%)	Sample	Sample (%)
Wineries	16	32%	3	33%
Accommodation	11	22%	1	11%
Visitor attractions	3	6%	1	11%
Restaurants	8	16%	1	11%
Wine shop	3	6%	1	11%
Cheese factory	5	10%	1	11%
Farms	4	8%	1*	11%
TOTAL	50	100%	9	100%

* The person interviewed was a farmer and the president of the wine route.

Table 2: Interviewees characteristics

Id	Gender	Organisation	Interview code
1	Female	Wine shop	WS01
2	Male	Restaurant	R02
3	Male	Cheese factory	CF03
4	Male	Winery	W04
5	Male	Hotel	A05
6	Male	Winery	W06
7	Male	Winery	W07
8	Female	Visitor attraction	VA08
9	Male	Farm*	F09

- The person interviewed was a farmer and the president of the wine route.

Table 3: Code structure

Themes	Codes
Wine route as...	Openness to the place
	Visitor attraction
	A network
	Development of collaboration
	Visitors' choice
Issues	Culture
	Management
	Politics
Macro-benefits	Tourists' attraction
	Destination promotion
	Promotion of wine
	Local development
Micro-benefits	Product development
	Knowledge sharing
	Promotion of business
	Training
Relationships	Horizontal
	Lateral
	Stakeholders' attitudes

Table 4: Stakeholders' perspective on what the wine route is

Wine route as...	Example citation
Openness to the place	“[The wine route] is a way to achieve an objective, i.e. the development of an eno-gastronomy destination within Sardinia. [...] It should allow to help productions that otherwise would die, to keep jobs, to increase farmers' income when they directly sell to customers, to allow hotels not to close down, to have a social growth thanks to the exchange [you can have] with people coming from different places [...]” (F09).
Visitor attraction	“[The wine route] means to put together different business' offers, different types of hospitality in order to set up an offer that is improved” (W04).
A network	“[The wine route] means believing that we can all get benefits by working together. It is a matter of believing in networking, promoting each other and developing an information and know-how exchange” (WS01).
Development of collaboration	“I think it [the wine route] is a positive chance for the overall place, to help us in collaborating with competitors and developing new ideas” (W06).
Visitors' choice	“The wine route is a network of businesses within which our tourist or visitor can decide what to visit according to the businesses he is most interested in” (W04).

Figures details:

Figure 1: A preliminary framework on wine route development.

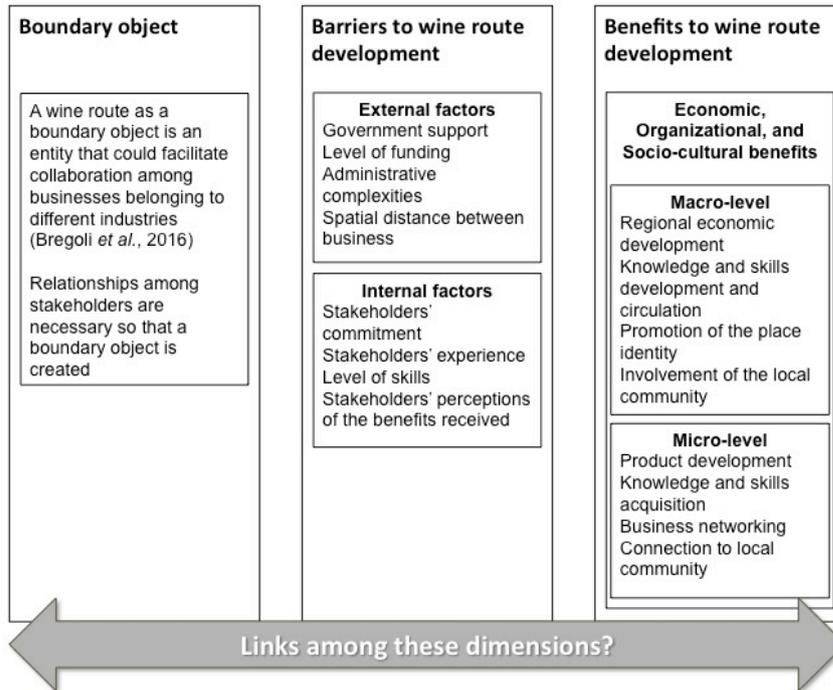


Figure 2: A final theoretical framework on wine route development

