The importance of brand architecture in business networks.
The case of tourist network contracts in Italy

Author 1 Name: Selena Aureli
Department: Department of Business Studies
University/Institution: University of Bologna
Town/City: Bologna
Country: Italy

Author 2 Name: Fabio Forlani
Department: Department of Economics, Society, Politics
University/Institution: University of Urbino
Town/City: Urbino
Country: Italy

Corresponding author: Selena Aureli
Email: selena.aureli@unibo.it

Biographical Details
Selena Aureli, PhD, is Assistant professor at the Rimini Campus of Bologna University. She currently teaches Financial accounting for tourism enterprises and planning and control systems. Her research areas include: management accounting and control, risk management, entrepreneurship and small and medium-sized businesses. Since the introduction of the network contract in Italy in 2009, she has published several articles on the contribution of network agreements to small firms' internationalization in collaboration with Prof. Mara Del Baldo.

Fabio Forlani, PhD, is an Adjunct professor at The University of Urbino "Carlo Bo." He currently teaches Marketing and Management of tourism organizations. He has extensive experience in supporting tourism promotion for agencies and private and public organizations devoted to developing local territories. His research interests are: destination management, event management, and experiential marketing. He also works as an independent consultant for tourism organizations.

The importance of brand architecture in business networks. The case of tourist network contracts in Italy

Introduction and background of the study

Academics have already acknowledged the increasing importance of intangible resources and more specifically of brands (Aaker, 1991, 2004; Keller, 1998; Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Morgan et al., 2002; Bailey and Ball, 2006; Chailan, 2008, 2013), with a particular emphasis on brands in the tourism sector (Buhalis, 2000; Gnoth, 2002; Hankinson, 2007; Baker and Cameron, 2008). Brand is a key success factor and source of competitive advantage, which impacts customer satisfaction and leads to revenue (O'Neill and Mattila, 2004; Kim and Kim, 2005; O'Neill and Carlback, 2011; Magablih and Muheisen, 2013). Despite its relevance, in Italy many tourist companies and many territories do not properly manage this critical success factor (Pencarelli and Gregori, 2009).

The Italian tourism industry is made up of various actors (i.e. hotels, restaurants, service providers, private and public promotion agencies, tour operators, etc.), which usually design their own offer independently and do not coordinate their actions (OECD, 2011). These actors are mainly small-sized businesses (SMEs), which seem to have difficulties in building a proper marketing strategy and carefully defining a brand to increase customer loyalty and sales. Gaining brand value requires a comprehensive understanding of the brand, its target and the company's overall vision. In other terms, it involves the development of a strategic plan (Aaker, 1991). Thus, brand management may appear to be an activity too complex for the SMEs to accomplish. Moreover, like SMEs operating in other sectors, they may perceive brand building as a large-scale effort with massive investments which they cannot afford (Ojasalo et al., 2008); they may also lack cultural readiness in conceiving brand management as a priority (Krake, 2005).

To overcome this issue, several forms of collaboration have already been experimented with and critically analyzed by academic research. Past Italian tourism literature has mainly focused on territorial local systems and destination management issues (Franch, 2002; Bonetti et al., 2006; Sciarelli, 2007), emphasizing benefits of alliance creation between public and private entities devoted to promoting places like regions and cities, and destination brands (Pencarelli and Gregori, 2009). As experienced in other countries (Prideaux and Cooper, 2003), the benefits can be great, especially when there is a collaborative effort in destination marketing (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2007; Wang, 2008).

On the contrary, contract-based business networks, created by equal allies without partnering with public actors, have not received the same attention. These networks represent an interesting area of research because, on one hand, network members are companies with their own identity and corporate brand willing to preserve their decision autonomy (Argenti and Druckenmiller, 2004; Kay, 2006), while, on the other hand, they need to define a common brand for the alliance created, to clearly identify it and convey the tourism offer to external subjects. Compared to other forms of networking, contractual networks designed to create a tourism offer are probably more interested in having a common brand. They could aim to achieve the same brand-related benefits that independent hotels search when approaching a national or international franchiser (Vaishnav and Altinay, 2009). However, we did not find studies investigating how the network brand is built and managed in such a specific context.

With reference to contract-based business networks, we noticed that, in the last few years, Italy has been recording a steady increase in the creation of networks through a legal agreement called "network contract". SMEs seem to prefer it instead of cooperation and consortia, because it is a flexible and dynamic instrument, which can be used to undertake a plurality of common strategic objectives while preserving members autonomy (Aureli and Del Baldo, 2012). Related studies

mainly analyze motivations for networking, governance and control issues, while network brand is an underdeveloped topic.

We believe that when network contracts involve tourism businesses, they should be carefully analyzed in relation to brand management. As demonstrated by the experience of hotel and restaurant chains, the topic is relevant, because building a strong network brand (Kay, 2006) can contribute to the success of the network (Kim and Kim, 2005; O'Neill and Xiao, 2006). In addition, having emerged from the studies of some Italian network contracts (Aureli and Forlani, 2015), network brands have the peculiarity of being linked to the brand of the territories where businesses are located. For example, a network can sustain an existing territorial brand - usually named as place brand - by adopting or integrating it into the network brand, thus reinforcing and leveraging the positive image of the place at the same time.

Coherently, this paper aims to answer to the following research questions:

RQ1 – Is the management of the network brand a key activity in tourism network contracts created by private entities?
RQ2 – How does a network brand relate to the place brand?
RQ3 – How does a network brand relate to the brands of network members?

Using four case studies, we aim to verify if brand management is planned and implemented inside networks, bearing in mind that tourism organizations are always embedded in a specific place. In detail, we analyze the relevance of the brand in network strategies, the identity of the network brand created and brand-related activities to identify current practices of network brand management. Subsequently, we examine the presence of relationships between the network brand and the individual brands of network members as well as between the network brand and place brands. Relationships are measured in terms of online linkages and thematic coherence among brands. Their presence indicates that it is possible to achieve consonance among brands at different levels – corporate, network and territory - leading to positive reciprocal impacts.

The novelty of this study is that it explores the role of brand management in tourism business networks using the example of network contracts created by Italian SMEs. It contributes to existing tourism and marketing literature by using the concept of brand consonance to evaluate if networks will succeed in the long term thanks to a proper management of the network brand. The focus on consonance (between the network, its members and the place) differentiates this study from previous streams of research that study other factors associated with successful and long-lasting relationships (Hill and Shaw, 1995; Medina-Munoz and Garcia-Falcon, 2000; Pansiri, 2008; Lemmetyinen and Go, 2009). In addition, this study enriches the literature on brand management in SMEs, which is an area rarely ever studied. There is a significant gap of knowledge on branding in SMEs (Ojasalo et al., 2008) and a scarce attention to small firms in tourism (Ateljevic, 2007), in spite of the fact that these businesses represent the backbone of the European economy and significantly contribute to the tourism sector (Rhodri et al., 2011).

The present contribution proceeds as follows. In section 2, the literature on brand management, networking and place brand is presented in order to define our theoretical framework. Section 3 outlines the research methodology, whereas the findings of the analysis are presented in section 4. Finally, conclusions and implications for managerial practice follow in section 5.

Literature review: in search for brand consonance

An effective and efficient management of corporate brands and product brands is important for tourism businesses in the same manner that it is for every other organization (Aaker, 2004; Chailan, 2008 and 2013). However, when we focus on the tourism sector, there are some specific aspects to consider. First, we have to remember that customers develop corporate or company brand associations rather than the brand association of product items. Thus, the corporate brand is fundamental, while the product brand is to all intents and purposes irrelevant (Kim and Kim, 2005).

Second, following the tourism experience economy literature (Pine e Gilmore, 1999; Pencarelli and Forlani, 2002; Forlani, 2005; Andersson, 2007; Jennings et al. 2009; Morgan et al. 2009; Rageh et al., 2013), we must remember that a firm operating in the tourism industry is a system which always works within two types of 'supra-systems':

-   the network of tourism organizations (Pencarelli and Forlani, 2002; Bonetti et al., 2006; Morgan et al., 2009; Neuhofer et al., 2012; 2014) which jointly co-produce travel and leisure experiences (the touristic product);
-   the system of the geographical area in which it is located, also called the territorial system, which can be associated to a city, district, province, region, country, etc. (Kotler et al., 1999; Buhalis, 2000; Hankinson, 2007).

This means that each tourism organization is embedded into a system made by actors, which produce the products/services a tourist consumes during his/her stay. At the same time, this organization and the other actors are all associated to the specific territory where the tourist sojourns. The tourist purchases and experiences a packaging of products and services created by private and public operators or assembles different components, which are offered within the territory according to his/her preferences, motivations and expectations (Hu and Richie, 1993). Thus, even if organizations do not intentionally establish relationships with other actors, associations among their products and different corporate brands are activated by the individual choices made by the customers.

Because of these specific characteristics of the tourism sector, a tourism organization and its corporate brand should never be considered in isolation, but within the existing complex framework made by the two aforementioned supra-systems (Morgan et al., 2002; Hankinson, 2007; Neuhofer et al., 2012).

Tourism networks and network brand management

Hotels, travel agents, tour operators and also restaurants, wineries and other tourism operators often activate formal and informal relationships (Telfer, 2001; Bastakis et al., 2004; Guo and He, 2012) to achieve shared objectives and to create positive tourism experiences (the product), because they are aware of the benefits of staying linked together and providing attractive and high quality services to increasingly sophisticated customers (Bullock, 1998; Pansiri, 2008). These are intentional networks or alliances which may be based on either informal, trust-based relationships or formal relationships which are regulated by written rules and codes of conduct. In the first case, companies create an informal network, whereas in the second case, the network is ruled by a legal contract and thus labeled as a formal agreement (Chathoth and Olsen, 2003; Ahmad, 2005). In this perspective, the tourist company can decide whether to remain isolated, join to a formal network (consortia, cooperatives, franchising chains, network contracts, etc.) or participate in informal networks like local tourism systems.

Alliance creation can help small businesses to face increasing competition and to avoid inefficient management practices usually associated to power and knowledge concentration in the owners/proprietorship hands (Schulze et al., 2001). Benefits range from the attainment of purchasing discounts to more efficient and effective marketing activities, more bargain power toward the government and access to services that independent operators might not be able to match (Telfer, 2001; Ahmad, 2005). When these small tourist businesses collaborate, they usually opt for informal collaborations (Ahmad, 2005) or prefer specific types of contractual cooperation, like associations, which are characterized by loosely ties and can be labeled as 'equal-partner networks,' because they are not dominated by a governing company (Dennis, 2000).

However, the experience of franchising chains has demonstrated high relevant benefits associated to formal cooperation based on a set of defined rules. Among others, the usage of a common brand brings important advantages to all members, such as a well known name and high

brand awareness, which increase the number of customers attracted to the brand's promises of experiencing a certain quality and emotion (Kim and Kim, 2005). With particular reference to hotels, guests rely on brand names to reduce the risks associated with staying at an otherwise unknown propriety (O'Neil and Xiao, 2006). That's why, at the international level, independent, privately owned, small-sized hotels seem to have given way to larger multinationals and multiple brand affiliations (Cai and Hobson, 2004; Bailey and Ball, 2006; Vaishnav and Altinay, 2009; Lomanno, 2010).

When a formal network is built, a common name is defined to identify the new entity and its associated members. The network name is often transformed into a brand and exploited within marketing activities. The presence of a brand can be indicative of the intentional nature of the system. The brand generally represents the catalyzing element of all actors involved. «The concept of branding in the tourism business network could be seen as a symbolic-level mechanism (Gnoth, 2002) for facilitating the coordination of cooperative activities among network members» (Lemmetyinen and Go, 2009, pag. 33). However, a network brand must be consciously managed in order to achieve and maintain this aggregating role.

Network brand management in the tourism sector cannot rely on the traditional branding theory developed from the experience of big corporations selling large-scale consumer goods. First, we have to consider that differences emerge when dealing with services instead of goods (de Chernatony et al., 2003). Second, network brands call for differences in the way they are created and maintained because in complex systems like business networks, there isn't a single organization which quickly decides the corporate brand and its brand portfolio; nor does it control the implementation process. Network brand management may appear similar to destination brand management because in both situations there are several actors with goals that are different at the time (Hankinson, 2007; Moilanen, 2008). Thus, it is necessary for a leading actor or entity to act as a strategic guide and to be capable to engage all members (Lemmetyinen and Go, 2010; Della Corte and Aria, 2014). As a consequence, in the context of networks, brand building should consider both traditional brand elements, like the definition of a brand identity, that lead to value creation for external stakeholders and specific elements designed to sustain the brand's aggregating role.

Focusing on tourism business network, four key elements seem to be relevant when trying to properly manage a network brand:

a) the definition of a clear network brand mission, core brand value and a brand identification system (name, logo, slogan or pay-off), which can ensure consistent communications and delivery of related services;

b) the creation of a mechanism for the selection of affiliates (such as quality charter or membership requirements) and a control mechanism (like certifications or monitoring activities) allowing the adjustment of the network's composition;

c) a strong leadership to implement common strategies and instill commitment into all of the network members for the network's brand, which replaces the absence of a hierarchical authority;

d) resources to build and maintain the brand, especially in terms of marketing and promotion activities.

The first elements are the essential starting elements for building a hotel brand (Cai and Hobson, 2004), which are also necessary when trying to build the brand identity of a tourism network. The core brand identity of a small-sized hotel is delineated around corporate values, while hotel services do not have their own brand. The services offered are part of the extended identity. Similarly, the network brand identity takes form from its mission and values. The difference is that there are network members which voluntary agree on the network brand identity. A strong agreement can be achieved when members are involved in the specification of network brand values and mission, i.e. through the creation of committees and communication instruments facilitating the dialogue among members (Hankinson, 2007). Elements from the second and third group are necessary in sustaining the functions of the business alliance. Like DMOs in tourism destinations, the leading actor should

be able to manage the conflicting interests of network members and favor the adoption of the network brand by all members. Lastly, resources are necessary to nurture and promote the brand.

The relevance of the place brand

Since every tourism company is inserted into a specific geographical area, the brand of the tourism destination or the brand of the geographical area where it is located, should also be considered. Both of them can strongly impact the perceived value of the company's offer (Ritchie and Ritchie, 1998; Buhalis, 2000; Gnoth, 2002; Morgan et al., 2002; Hankinson, 2007; Baker and Cameron, 2008). Destination brand is a name, symbol or logo that identifies the destination and conveys the promise of a memorable travel experience associated with the destination (Ritchie and Richie, 1998), while the brand of a geographical area, usually defined as a place brand, is a promise to all of the potential users of the area, from citizens, to travelers, investors, companies and public bodies (Kavaratzis, 2004; Dooley and Bowie, 2005; Kerr, 2006; Hanna and Rowley, 2011; 2015).

Place brand is a more comprehensive concept, but it is also more complicated to manage. The critical factors that must be considered in order to manage a brand of geographical area mainly relate to (Betti et al., 2009):
- the difficulty in establishing precise boundaries for the area to which the brand refers;
- the difficulty in identifying the governing body responsible for place branding;
- the co-existence of different levels of government in the area (i.e. provincial, city, district level), each with different goals and philosophies of branding;
- the difficulty with the co-existence of a portfolio of widely varying products and services by means of a single brand;
- the different degrees of importance in the various features of the area in defining the place brand;
- the presence of multiple stakeholders, with expectations that are not always compatible, who do not necessarily see the tourist development of the area as a priority;
- the pre-existence of geographical and historical brands;
- the need for coexistence between public and private brands.

In addition, place brand management models (Hanna and Rowley, 2011; 2015) suggest that brands of different places, like brands of different objects, can be intentionally managed to link individual brands together and generate strong associations capable of influencing consumer purchase intentions (Dooley and Bowie, 2005; Kavaratzis, 2004 and 2012; Hanna and Rowley, 2011).

Assuming the perspective of the network, the place brand represents an additional factor that should be considered when managing the network brand. For example, the network can decide to associate its name to those of the local geographical area in order to benefit from the attractiveness of the place brand.

The web of possible relationships among brands

The search for associations or relationships between the network brand and the brand of the territory where it is located can be interpreted as a problem of external brand consonance. However, there is also a problem of brand consonance within the network owing to the fact that the network groups independent brands of tourism organizations with different identities dating back to several years before the creation of the alliance.

The 'brand-web model' (Leitch and Richardson, 2003) or the 'corporate brand association base model' (Uggla, 2006) developed to capture relationships among brands of different companies cannot be directly applied to solve this problem of internal consonance. Both models embed the concept of co-branding, which is an association between two independent corporate brands (Kahuni and Rowley, 2013). On the contrary, in a network contract we deal with a new common brand that

occupies a higher position in respect to the individual brands of the network members. When a company belongs to a group of firms trying to achieve common strategic goals, a multilevel or hierarchical structure exists (Pereira-Moliner et al., 2011). Thus, we expect that companies contribute to the implementation of the network strategy and support the creation of a strong network brand and its diffusion.

A similar problem has been analyzed by the mainstream literature which uses the concepts of brand portfolio and brand architecture to improve the brand management of large corporations involved in several businesses and grouping multiple product brands and line brands.

Brand portfolio management (Aaker, 2004) means that a corporation must decide the brand mix (which brands to use), the interrelationships among its several brands, the role of each brand and the products to which it will be applied. The main purpose of a brand portfolio strategy is to improve the market coverage, avoid possible overlaps among brands and distribute resources among brands. As stated by Chailan (2013, p. 195), we should not confuse brand accumulation with brand portfolios: creating a good brand portfolio is a matter of developing an efficient brand ensemble where "every brand must simultaneously have a clearly defined function inside the company's strategy". This implies that different brands co-exist in harmony. However, the creation and implementation of such harmony requires time.

When creating a brand portfolio, corporations also consider the architecture governing the brands (Aaker, 2004 and Chailan, 2008). "Brand architecture is an organizing structure of the brand portfolio that specifies brand roles and the nature of relationships between brands" (Aaker and Joachimstahler, 2000, p. 8). For example, a company can opt for a *mixed brand strategy*, which involves the creation of sub-brands (such as Hewlett Packard's Laser Jet) or endorsed brands (Courtyard by Mariott) (Uggla, 2006). Brands from different levels (i.e. a product brand and a line brand) are related, thus two brands can be associated with one product. A company can also adopt a *brand dominant strategy*, which means creating a house of brands where each product has its own brand. In this case, hierarchical associations among brands are not created, but boundaries for each brand of the portfolio should be set. Only when a company follows a *corporate dominant strategy*, issue of brand portfolio cease to exist. In the last case, the corporation creates a monolithic identity and uses solely one brand - the company name - for all products (Keller, 1998; Aaker and Joachimstahler; 2000).

The concepts of brand portfolio and brand architecture cannot be directly transferred to the status of networks contracts. A network is not a corporation with the power to create and structure sub-brands. Nor does it have the power to define the relationships among the individual brands of network members. Yet, consonance of brands is still important because it can enhance the efficacy of communications through mutual support and enhance the competitiveness of the network and its associated companies. Instead, the lack of consonance can generate confusion and uncertainty on the positioning of the network in the territory or the presence of a company inside the network. Therefore, it can negatively impact its offer and competitiveness. For this reason, it is very important to verify that the network and its members are not communicating a contrasting image to travelers.

The empirical process

Methods and collection of data

The present study assumes that the network brand represents a key strategic asset - like a corporate brand - that can lead to relevant benefits if properly managed. It assumes that network brand management means building and maintaining a network brand identity (as explained in section 2.1.) and defining its interrelationships with the brand of the territory and the brand of all network members (see section 2.3.). In other words, the business networks studied here do not coincide with

the tourist destinations, but are embedded in places with which the brand of the network should be coherent.

In order to verify whether business networks manage their brand and search for brand consonance at the different levels, we opted for a qualitative approach by adopting case study methodology. We agree with Rahman et al (2014) who suggest a qualitative approach when the research objective is to understand phenomena or to interpret the uniqueness of an event. Case studies were investigated following Yin's (2003) suggestions. Case study research is largely used in branding and place branding (Moilanen, 2008; Lemmetyinen and Go, 2010; Hanna and Rowley, 2015). Furthermore, it is a common fieldwork strategy in small business research (Ahmad, 2005). Each case was analyzed separately and we searched for cross-case patterns (Eisenhardt, 1989). We opted for this approach for the reason that it is more appropriate in new topic areas.

Case studies were not randomly selected. We searched for a specific population and theoretically useful cases. We selected networks aiming to develop a territorial tourism offer (thus, networks focusing on other goals were excluded) and chose not to analyze network contracts without an official website, given that it indicates a very low attention toward external communication. Case study selection was also driven by the determination to include both horizontal and vertical networks. This dimension or category allows us to compare horizontal networks made by similar businesses working in the same market segment, which compete and collaborate at the same time, to vertical networks whose members provide complementary services, which jointly contribute to create the so-called tourism offer. Thus, we can theoretically account for different coordination problems and different motives when creating a network brand connecting all members.

Data was collected from 4 network contracts created in the last three years. We used multiple sources: in-depth interviews, document analysis and website analysis. Both authors were involved in every step of the research process and used the same protocols to analyze websites in order to strengthen research results.

Direct interviews with each network's President helped to identify the motives that led network participants to collaborate, the mission and core values of the network related to the network brand identity, the process of brand building and related marketing activities. The President formally represents the network and acts as the network leader. Similar to other studies on tourism business networks (Lemmetyinen and Go, 2009), we interviewed this subject because of its coordination role.

Strategies, programs and governance rules described in each network contract revealed whether partnering actors had already defined a brand strategy and the policy of network brand usage from the first day of life of the alliance. The text from written network contracts was analyzed using systematic manual coding and categorization of qualitative evidence.

All the websites of the members were examined in order to identify the presence of recalls to the network brand. Following Hanna and Rowley (2015), we tracked whenever network members used the network logo, the network brand or simply the name of the network on their websites to assess the network's internal coherence. Similarly, we documented the presence of recalls to place brands on the website of the network. We searched for acknowledgements of the city or region where networks are located, and if there were some references to elements and characteristic values of the local area.

It is possible that common elements in the logos of network members and the network itself (i.e. the same visual template, design and/or colors) exist. This would signal the presence of a *mixed brand strategy* aiming to create reciprocal brand support or even greater affiliation between the network brand and its sub-brands represented by members (Dooley and Bowie, 2005).

Websites have already been used to search for brand associations, especially with reference to place brands (Trueman et al., 2012; Hanna and Rowley, 2015). We decided to rely on information stemming from the Internet because it is an important medium through which tourists encounter corporate and network branding. Today, an increasing amount of tourists search and buy services

from hotels, restaurants, transport and other tourism companies through the Internet. Moreover, websites offer an easy identification of brands and representations associated with each entity.

Case studies

In this section we provide a brief description of the four case studies analyzed.

- *Rete imprese balneari Viareggio*. This network is a groups of 85 members, which are all beach establishments except one hotel. All members are located in the city of Viareggio in Tuscany. They started this new alliance because joint development projects were not feasible through the pre-existing 'Association of Beach Establishments.' They aim to use this flexible collaborative instrument to fill a gap in the governance of the territory left by public entities. In the region, all local promotion agencies, formerly acting as DMOs at the provincial level, have been closed. This network is trying to collaborate a local hotel network and a trade association to create a local cluster in the tourism sector.
- *Illasi Valleys*. Today, about 50 members including hotels, B&Bs, travel agencies, farms, wine and spirits producers, etc. belong to the network. They are located in some small cities of the Veneto region, in the North of Italy. They aim to create a system of private businesses capable of offering different tourist packages and assuring a rewarding tourist experience. Their reference model is the wine region of California in the USA. Since public entities lack interest in the management of the territory and do not sustain tourism activities, network members decided to join together to transform the territory traditionally dedicated to agriculture into a tourist destination.
- *Rete imprese delle marine del levante e del parco*. The network members are mainly beach establishments (16 in total), including a restaurant and a hotel. The network aims to increase the attractiveness, visibility and viability of the local coast, located south of the marina in the city of Viareggio, which suffers a shortage of tourists, even though it located in the famous Tuscany. The usage of this legal instrument was suggested by the local Chamber of Commerce and depicted as being more flexible compared to consortia and other formal agreements.
- *Made in Rimini – Holidays*. Formed in 2013, the network groups four consortia together to make a total of 100 hotels, which represent about 10% of the total lodging offer in the city of Rimini, a quite famous beach resort located in the Emilia Romagna region. The network also includes restaurants and shops. It has several objectives that range from developing members' internationalization to creating an integrated tourism offer and promoting the territory where hotels are located.

Findings

To answer our first research question, we used both document analysis and interviews. Strategic objectives, governance structure, voting rights and other aspects relevant for the undertaking of the business alliance were extracted from the written contracts that network members agreed to sign. Interviews were fundamental in understanding how networks maintain their common brand.

Table 1 shows that the networks' mission is related to the local territory in the all four cases. Thus, network brand values are often defined from pre-existing values, which are commonly attributed to the place. We notice that a brand identification system is always present, while investments made to communicate and maintain the brand differ from case to case. Elements that usually support the function of alliances, like selection and control mechanisms of the affiliates and the presence of a strong leader, are absent or weak in the two cases of 'Rete imprese balneari Viareggio' and 'Rete imprese delle marine del levante e del parco'. These are also horizontal networks.

Table 1. **Management of the network brand**

Elements analyzed	Rete imprese balneari Viareggio
Network brand mission and core brand value	"The network was created to deal with common problems and promote the coast of Viareggio as a tourist destination….. to provide organizational and administrative support to the beach establishments… in addition to ensuring a strong tourism promotion at the national and international level." The network emphasizes the long tradition of the city of Viareggio as a beach resort and the high quality service of the its members. Safety is presented as a distinguishing element in the network members' tourism offer.
Brand identification system (name, logo, slogan or pay-off)	http://www.reteimpresebalneariviareggio.it "Friendly and safe beaches"
Selection and control mechanisms	The network is open. No specific requirements to join the network. No rules set for the usage of the network brand. No monitoring on brand usage by network members.
Leadership	There is a Board made of 9 elected members and headed by a President, but strategic decisions are made by all of the members who compose the network Assembly. The Board proposes projects but the Assembly has the power to change them. Each member has equal weight in the decision-making process (one person-one vote). The leadership is weak because the network is guided by a concept of social inclusion.
Resources invested and activities performed to build and maintain the brand	Creation of the network website. Adoption of the slogan "friendly and safe beaches" to improve the image of the local beaches (which translates into the presence of defibrillators and medical facilities). Application for the attainment of the environmental certification is in progress. Organization of a conference on the topic of tourist districts. The brand is not legally protected.
Elements analyzed	Illasi Valleys
Network brand mission and core brand value	"The network groups organizations which excel in the goods and service offered…organizations positioned between the valleys of Illasi, Mezzane, Tramigna and Monti Lessini". Members aim to "transform these beautiful valleys traditionally dedicated to agriculture" (i.e. cultivation of wine) into a tourist destination. The network emphasizes the extraordinary local nature, the excellence of local food and wine, the quality of reception and the central role that operators play in make the network functioning.
Brand identification system (name, logo, slogan or pay-off)	www.visitillasivalleys.com "Illasi Valleys: beautiful land!"
Selection and control mechanisms	The network is open but members' access requires the possession of certain organizational characteristics and quality service standards. There is an internal regulation for the entry of new members in the network. Brand usage is set by written rules, which describe how network members can insert the network brand into their websites and to market their touristic offer. Authorization for brand usage is always necessary. Monitoring of members' activities is regularly planned.
Leadership	The network is led by an Executive Committee composed of 3 people salaried by the network (the President and two professionals) and 2 network member representatives, who are elected every six months. There is also a Scientific Committee made of a representative for each product category in the network. The presence of external professionals and a clear definition of the Board's tasks give it great authority in decision

	making and make it an influential role.
Resources invested and activities performed to build and maintain the brand	Several common activities aiming to promote the territory and the network members: the creation of the network website in different languages (ENG, D, RUS, FR); participation in international trade fairs; creation of brochures and photos; creation of thematic routes and tourist packages (i.e. for bikers, for wine tasters) sold through the official network website and by the travel agencies participating in the network. The network has legally protected its brand (registered trademark).
Elements analyzed	**Rete imprese delle marine del levante e del parco**
Network brand mission and core brand value	"Stimulating the promotion of the local area and the development of eco-tourism to boost the business of accommodation and commercial facilities located in the Natural Park of Migliarino San Rossore Massaciuccoli." The network emphasizes the location: in the city of Viareggio and the Natural Park, which means combining the beach lifestyle (services and entertainment) with the respect for nature and the principles of eco-sustainability.
Brand identification system (name, logo, slogan or pay-off)	www.marinedelparcoviareggio.com No slogan or pay-off
Selection and control mechanisms	The network is open, but access is linked to quality standards established by the Natural Park Authority. The network is designed to group organizations whose facilities insist on government land ruled by the Park Authority. No monitoring of the use of network brand, no internal regulations. There has already been an informal control, based on personal relationships, direct knowledge and reciprocal trust, established for many years.
Leadership	The network is run by a Board composed of 3 subjects. Its role is to submit projects and proposals to the Assembly, which includes all of the network members who decide what to implement (one company - one vote). The predominant managerial approach consists in preserving associative ties and a sense of community.
Resources invested and activities performed to build and maintain the brand	Creation of the network website and facebook page. The network provided training to the staff and employees of local tour operators and travel agencies to increase their knowledge on the Natural Park. Guides from the Natural Park were hosted at bath establishments to increase tourists' awareness of what the local territory offers. They entrusted a marketing company to take care of the network's image. They signed agreements with local farmers, to offer fresh fruit and vegetables to tourist, and with a nearby association of guesthouses and cottages to promote the inland area. They are trying to obtain an environmental certification. There is no registered trademark.
Elements analyzed	**Made in Rimini Holidays**
Network brand mission and core brand value	"The network groups tourism businesses that can make you live a customized holiday… Our beaches, hotels and restaurants will guide you through a special trip, a unique blend of flavors, attractions, recreation, sport and wellness …. which characterized the land of Romagna" [Romagna is a historical region, which is now included in the administrative region of Emilia Romagna]. "The network aims to affirm a model of seaside tourism offer that integrates the typical hospitality of the city of Rimini, made by genuine people and hoteliers capable to offer good quality and a personalized welcome, and tourists' vocations for sport and wellness, culture, food and wine, entertainment and events. " The network emphasizes the values of the Romagna land: sea, sun, hospitality of the people, quality food, fun and well-being in addition to referencing the history of the Malatesta family that ruled over Rimini in the Middle Age.
Brand identification system (name, logo, slogan or pay-off)	www.madeinriminiholidays.com

	"Incoming tour operator for Romagna"
Selection and control mechanisms	The network is open. There is a regulation on the use of the network brand by its members. The network is defining standards and specifications of behavior that network members must follow when collaborating to co-produce services and other common projects.
Leadership	There is a Board called the Management Committee made of two representative elected by each founding member of the network for a total of six people. It is forbidden to enroll external subjects who do not belong to any participating member. The Board has the power to decide the network's projects and programs but it must obtain budget approval from the Assembly, which is made of all of the participants.
Resources invested and activities performed to build and maintain the brand	Creation of a website for promotional marketing. The website's core activity is the advertise and sell tourist packages, which are customizable by customers. The website aggregates the services offered by the network members through four themes: 'sea', 'history', 'tasting', 'sport and wellness'. Workshops have been organized to present the tourist packages to foreign tour operators. In addition, the network organized meetings between operators in the form of business matching.

In order to answer our second research question, we investigated whether the networks associate their name to one or more place brands in the geographical area where the network members are located. Table 2 indicates that all networks recall at least one place brand but, two main weaknesses in their communication emerge. First, the relationship established with the place brand is weak because a description of the territory lacks; and neither recalls nor direct links to institutional websites are created. Second, at times several different places are illustrated, which may generate confusion for tourists, and hinder the possibility of leveraging a positive image and attractiveness of the place.

Table 2. Relationships with the place brand

Elements analyzed	Rete imprese balneari Viareggio
Links to the place brand in the network brand	There is a reference to a specific place: the city of Viareggio in the brand name, logo and website, but not in the slogan.
Links to the place brand in the website content	On the network website, there is no section or page dedicated to the territory, nor a description of it in other sections or paragraphs. There is no link to local institutional entities like municipalities, DMOs or other public bodies. The link to the place is only conveyed by the name of the website and not by its content.
Clarity of the relationship	The network only refers to one place: Viareggio
Elements analyzed	**Illasi Valleys**
Links to the place brand in the network brand	There is a reference to a specific place in all of the elements of the brand identification system: the Valley of Illasi (which is also a city).
Links to the place brand in the website content	There is a section for the presentation of the territory, its peculiarities and excellences, which occupies a central role in the network website. The territory is described as a sum of several small areas with their own history: the valleys of Mezzane, Illasi, etc. There are hyperlinks to official websites of local authorities.
Clarity of the relationship	The reference to the territory is clear: the valley of Illasi and the nearby valleys which are geo-located on the website through the tool Google maps.
Elements analyzed	**Rete imprese delle Marine del Levante e del Parco**
Links to the place brand in the network brand	There is a reference to a place which is not clearly identifiable: the Natural Park of Migliarino San Rossore Massaciucoli, because the name of the Park is not included in the network brand. Network members are close to the city of Viareggio, which is not included in the network's name yet.

Links to the place brand in the website content	There is no section or page dedicated to the territory, not even to the Natural Park. The local territory is never mentioned or described. There are no direct links to the website of the Natural Park nor to local public entities.
Clarity of the relationship	The network aimed to refer to both Viareggio and the Natural Park. However, neither of these locations are described and no clear association can be established.
Elements analyzed	**Made in Rimini Holidays**
Links to the place brand in the network brand	The brand name and logo are connected to the city of Rimini, while the slogan recalls the historical region of Romagna.
Links to the place brand in the website content	There is no ad hoc section dedicated to the presentation of the territory within the network website. However, there are pages and long paragraphs describing the city of Rimini and the wider local territory (its history, art, local products, the sea and the inland), which are used to describe the tourism packages. There are no links to local authority websites.
Clarity of the relationship	Reference to different places are made: from the city of Rimini, to the historical region of Romagna and the Adriatic see – which also refers to the Adriatic macro-region. Therefore, linkages are unclear.

Lastly, we searched for the company websites of all network members to identify linkages with the official website of the network and to assess the presence of internal brand consonance. Consonance helps us to understand how the network brand has been managed inside of the network, and can represent a proxy of the definition of a brand architecture when, for example, a single member presents himself and his offer on the Internet with both the company brand and the network brand. Unfortunately, associations with the network brand are never made by individual members.

Table 3. Brand internal consonance

Elements analyzed	Rete imprese balneari Viareggio
Linkages toward individual websites of network members	The network website has a specific section called "Companies" where all of the names of the members are listed. However, there are no active links to their individual websites.
Linkages in members' websites toward the network	There are no active links to the network in members' websites, nor are there textual references in the websites of the members.
Coherence in terms of brand values between members and the network	Most of members' website provide details on the quality and long tradition of Viareggio's seaside. Most of their corporate brand values rely on the quality of hospitality and attention to customers. Members' websites do not emphasize the concept of a "safe beach" which stands out in the website of the network
Elements analyzed	**Illasi Valleys**
Linkages toward individual websites of network members	The network website has a special section named "Companies". Every company participating in the network has its own page where owners and company staff are presented, and the products or services offered are described. Every company page includes numerous photos, contacts and a direct link to the websites of individual network nodes.
Linkages in members' websites toward the network	There are no direct links to the network made by individual companies. There are no textual references. Individual companies usually refer to the specific sub-area (valley) where they are located.
Coherence in terms of brand values between members and the network	Members stress the same values of the network including high quality, excellence in services, wine and food and tradition.

Elements analyzed	Rete imprese delle marine del levante e del parco
Linkages toward individual websites of network members	There is a specific section named "Participants" in which all network members are listed. Each member has its own page with a short description, a photo, business contacts and also the web address of the website.
Linkages in members' websites toward the network	There are neither direct links nor any other type of reference to the network made by individual companies.
Coherence in terms of brand values between members and the network	Both the network and the members refer to the exclusivity of the location: within a natural park and on the seaside of Viareggio. The long bathing tradition of Viareggio and the richness of the services offered are also emphasized.
Elements analyzed	Made in Rimini Holidays
Linkages toward individual websites of network members	All four consortia that created the network are reported. Both the name and logo from each consortium is inserted and are active links leading to the consortium's homepage. There are also two sections "Hotel" and "Beach" in which single businesses are listed (businesses that adhere to the network through the four consortia). Each company has an individual page with a brief description, a photo and contacts. The web address is also indicated. It can be opened within the website structure of the network, so that the logo "Made in Rimini Holidays" continues to remain visible.
Linkages in members' websites toward the network	3 out of 4 members have no links to the website of the network. The consortium which links the website "Made in Rimini Holidays" does this because the network is the booking portal for its website users.
Coherence in terms of brand values between members and the network	Both the network and its members emphasize values generally associated to the tourism offer in the city of Rimini and the region of Romagna: warm hospitality, good food, full equipped beaches, a lot of entertainment and fun for all ages.

Discussions and conclusions

The four case studies suggest that network brand management consists in creating a brand identity, which is based on the mission and core values of the alliance created. At times, the elements and activities that should support the function of the alliance and divulge the brand identity to external subjects are missing. On one hand, we find situations like Illasi Valleys, where the brand identity is supported by selection and control mechanisms, and the network is lead by an independent group of managers that enable a more effective brand management. This is linked to the accomplishment of several branding activities and a more effective brand communication and promotion designed to sell network's tourist packages. On the other hand, some networks, i.e. Rete imprese balneari di Viareggio, conceive the network brand as an instrument to aggregate all businesses located in the area – selection mechanisms do not exist – and to create a common identity. Pervasive communication activities are not performed. The different significance and goals associated with the network brand are signaled by the fact that the brand is legally protected in the former circumstance. On the contrary, a trademark hasn't been registered in the second one.

This leads us to conclude that the network brand identity is a pre-requisite for all alliances, thus confirming the aggregating role of the brand in network contracts. However, the network brand is not always exploited for commercial reasons as signaled by the few efforts in communication activities. Differences in network brand management are probably related to the different vision and mission of the alliance or to the difficulty of the network leader to propose and implement a shared network brand strategy.

Another important aspect that emerged from case study analysis is the strong connection between the networks and the place. The network contracts analyzed insert the place in the name and logo. This confirms that tourism businesses and networks are intertwined on a local context and cannot avoid citing the place where they operate.

However, this association with the territory differs. Website content indicates that in some cases, i.e. Rete imprese balneari di Viareggio, the place in which the network refers to is taken for granted, thus no information on the territory is disclosed. The network may aim to leverage the attractiveness of the city of Viareggio, but it does not convey it to the public. The network website does not describe the city, region or territory, and links to institutional websites of the city, coast or area are created. On the contrary, the case of Illasi Valleys shows a great attention to the territory. This communication effort is in all likelihood due to the fact that the network wants to create a specific image of the area. "Made in Rimini" also wants to leverage the existing territory and does it by placing the values of the territory that already exist, i.e. hospitality and friendliness, into their communication.

From a managerial point of view, we found that networks do not properly leverage the place brand. For example, some networks do not clearly refer to one single territory. More than one place is included in the communication, which may create confusion for tourists, especially travelers from other countries. Moreover, there isn't one network that is directly linked to the institutional websites of the local municipality, province or DMO, signaling some difficulties in collaborating with public entities.

The last result of our research indicates that individual members do not recall the network to which they belong in their Internet communication. We did not find links or the name of the network in the website of the members. Absence of an association between the network brand and the corporate brand of each member on the websites indicates that members do not aim to leverage the brand network or still do not understand that it can be done. Nevertheless, we found the description of similar values, which indicates that the network and its members are related by the same ideas and are attached to specific principles and beliefs. In addition, these pre-existing shared-values are probably the elements that favored the alliance creation. Conversely, we noticed that network websites recall participating members, although giving different importance. In some cases, there is a simple list of members' names, while in other cases there is a section for members and each member has a descriptive linked to its website.

Doubts about brand management within the network emerge. The absence of references to the network brand may be due to the fact that this common brand is too new or still weak, and is not able to bring value to customer communication. Another explanation is that network members conceive the network brand as if it were the brand of any partner which can be used or not in association with their own company brand, depending on the objectives. In other terms, they do not understand that the network brand represents a system to which each member belongs and therefore it is also an element of their corporate communication willing or not.

In conclusion, internal coherence is due to common values shared by members. However, it clearly does not emerge from Internet communication, which lacks formal and explicit references, nor does it attempt to structure the brands of different levels. Brand architecture is far from being applied.

Poor brand management within the examined networks suggest that managers sitting in the Board of network contracts should have more decision making power, thus being able to influence brand strategies of individual network members. The model that networks may try to apply is those of a franchising chains where one subject has power to control brand usage of all network participants. Another way is to create structures and processes that help the network leader to engage all members in network brand management like for DMOs which have to increase participation of all stakeholders.

Several aspects limit the generalizability of our study. Firstly, the empirical evidence is limited to four case studies and refers to only one country. Future work should broaden the study context by including the analysis of other networks and foreign countries. Furthermore, we did not interview the individual members of the network who may have contrasting views from that of the network's President.

References

Aaker, D.A., (1991), *Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name*, The Free Press, New York.

Aaker, D.A. (2004), *Brand portfolio strategy: creating relevance, differentiation, energy, leverage and clarity*, The Free Press,New York.

Aaker, D. A., and Joachimsthaler, E., (2000), "The brand relationship spectrum", *California Management Review*, Vol. 42 No 4, pp. 8-23.

Ahmad, G. (2005), "Small firm owner-managers' networks in tourism and hospitality", *International Journal of Business and Society*, Vol. 6 No 2, pp. 37-54.

Andersson, T. D. (2007), "The Tourist in the Experience Economy", *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol. 7 No 1, pp. 46-58.

Argenti, P.A. and Druckenmiller, B. (2004), "Reputation and the corporate brand", *Corporate Reputation Review*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 368-374.

Ateljevic, J. (2007), "Small tourism firms and management practices in New Zealand: The Centre Stage Macro Region", *Tourism Management*, Vol 28 No. 1, pp. 307–316.

Aureli, S. and Del Baldo, M. (2012), "Networks' Contribution to Small-Sized Firms' Internationalization", *International Journal of Economic Behavior*, Vol. 2, pp. 47-66.

Aureli, S. and Forlani, F. (2015), "The effects of formal networks on territorial tourism offers. Current usage of network contracts in Italy", *The European Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 10 (forthcoming).

Bailey, R. and Ball, S. (2006), "An exploration of the meanings of hotel brand equity", *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 26 No 1, pp. 15-38.

Baker, M. J. and Cameron, E. (2008), "Critical success factors in destination marketing", *Tourism and hospitality research*, Vol *8 No* 2, pp. 79-97.

Bastakis, C., Buhalis, D., and Butler, R. (2004), "The perception of small and medium sized tourism accommodation providers on the impacts of the tour operators' power in eastern mediterranean", *Tourism Management, Vol. 25 No.* 2, pp 151-170.

Betti, D., Forlani, F. and Pencarelli, T. (2009), "La marca turistica e territoriale", in Pencarelli, T. and Gregori, G.L. (Eds.), *Comunicazione e branding delle destinazioni turistiche*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.

Bonetti, E., Petrillo, C. and Simoni, M. (2006), "Tourism System Dynamics: a Multilevel Destination Approach", In Lazzaretti, L. and Petrillo, C. (Eds), *Tourism Local Systems and Networking*, Elsevier, London.

Buhalis, D. (2000), "Marketing the competitive destination of the future", *Tourism management*, Vol 21 No 1, pp. 97-116.

Bullock, G.K. (1998), "The UK package holiday industry", *Management accounting: Magazine for chartered management accountants*, Vol. 76 no 4, pp. 36-38.

Cai, L. and Hobson, P.J.S. (2004), "Making hotel brands work in a competitive environment", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol 10 No 3, pp. 197-208.

Chailan, C. (2008) "Brands portfolios and competitive advantage: an empirical study", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 17 No 4, pp. 254-264.

Chailan, C. (2013) "The influence of key capabilities on brand portfolio-based competitive advantage", *International Journal of Trade and Global Markets*, *Vol.* 6 No 2, pp. 182-201.

Chathoth, P.K. and Olsen M.D. (2003), "Strategic alliances: a hospitality industry perspective", *Hospitality Management*, Vol. 22 No 4, pp. 419-434.

De Chernatony, L., Drury, S. and Segal-Horn, S. (2003), "Building a services brand: stages, people and orientations", *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 1-21.

Della Corte, V. and Aria, M. (2014), "Why strategic networks often fail: Some empirical evidence from the area of Naples", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 45, pp. 3- 15.

Dennis, C. (2000), "Networking for marketing advantage", *Management Decision*, Vol. 38 No 4, pp. 287-292.

Dooley, G. and Bowie, D. (2005), "Place brand architecture: strategic management of the brand portfolio", *Place branding*, Vol. 1 No. 4, pp. 402-419.

Eisenhardt, K.M. (1989), "Building Theories from Case Study Research", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 14 No 4, pp. 532-550.

Forlani, F. (2005), Esperienze, Marketing e Territorio, PhD thesis in Business and Market, University of Genova. DOI: 10.13140/2.1.4550.3686

Franch, M., (Eds.) (2002), *Destination management. Governare il tuirsmo fra locale e globale*. Giappichelli, Torino.

Gnoth, J. (2002), "Leveraging export brands through a tourism destination brand", *The Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. *9 No* 4, pp. 262-280.

Guo, X. and He, L. (2012), "Tourism supply-chain coordination: The cooperation between tourism hotel and tour operator", *Tourism Economics, Vol.* 18 No 6, pp. 1361-1376.

Hankinson, G. (2007), "The management of destination brands: Five guiding principles based on recent developments in corporate branding theory", *Brand Management*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 240-254.

Hanna, S. and Rowley, J. (2011), "Towards a strategic place brand-management model", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 27 No 5-6, pp. 458-476

Hanna, S., and Rowley, J. (2015), "Towards a model of the Place Brand Web", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 48, pp. 100-112.

Hill, T. and Shaw, R. (1995), "Co-marketing tourism internationally: bases for strategic alliances", *Journal of travel research*, Vol 34 No 1, pp. 25-32.

Hu, Y., and Ritchie J.R.B. (1993) "Measuring destination attractiveness: A contextual approach", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 32 No 2, pp. 25-34.

Jennings, G., Lee, Y. S., Ayling, A., Lunny, B., Cater, C. and Ollenburg, C. (2009), "Quality Tourism Experiences: Reviews, Reflections, Research Agendas", *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management, Vol.* 18 No 2-3, pp. 294-310.

Kahuni, A.T. and Rowley, J. (2013), "Corporate brand relationships: the case of Toyota F1 Racing Team", *Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal*, Vol. 3 No 1, pp. 8-18.

Kavaratzis, M. (2004), "From city marketing to city branding: towards a theoretical framework for developing city brands", *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, Vol. 1 No 1, pp. 158-73.

Kavaratzis, M. (2012), "From 'necessary evil' to necessity: stakeholders' involvement in place. Branding", *Journal of Place Management and Development*, Vol. 5 No 1, pp. 7-19.

Kay, M.J. (2006), "Strong brands and corporate brands", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 40 No 7/8, pp. 742-760.

Keller, K.L. (1998), *Strategic Brand Management: Building, Measuring and Managing Brand Equity*, Prentice-Hall, Englewoods Cliffs, New Jersey .

Kerr, G. (2006), "From destination brand to location brand", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 13 No 4-5, pp. 276–283.

Kim, H.b. and Kim, W.G. (2005), "The relationship between brand equity and firms' performance in luxury hotels and chain restaurants", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 26, pp. 549–560.

Kotler, P., Asplund, C., Rein, I. and Heider, D. (1999), *Marketing places Europe: Attracting investments, industries, residents and visitors to European cities, communities, regions and nations*, Financial Times Prentice-Hall, Harlow.

Krake, F.B.G.J.M. (2005), "Successful brand management in SMEs: a new theory and practical hints", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 14 No. 4, pp. 228-38.

Leitch, S. and Richardson, N. (2003), "Corporate branding in the new economy", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 37 No 7/8, pp. 1065 – 1079.

Lemmetyinen, A. and Go, F.M. (2009), "The key capabilities required for managing tourism business networks", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 30 No 1, pp. 31-40.

Lemmetyinen, A. and Go, F.M. (2010), "Building a brand identity in a network of Cruise Baltic ' s destinations: A multi-authoring approach", *Brand management*, Vol. 17, No. 7, 519–531.

Lomanno, M.V. (2010), "The continuing evolution of the U.S. lodging industry: a twenty-year view", *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly,* Vol. 51 No 15, pp. 15–19.

Magablih, K. and Muheisen, F. (2013), "How Hotel Management Perceive the Relationship Between Branding and Hotel Performance?", in Proceedings of the 5th Advances in Tourism Marketing Conference, Faculty of Economics of University of Algarve, Vilamoura, Portugal, 2-4 October 2013.

Medina-Munoz, D. and Garcia-Falcon, J.M. (2000), "Successful relationships between hotel and agencies", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 27 No 3, pp. 737-762.

Moilanen, T. (2008), "Network brand management: Study of competencies of place branding ski destinations", Helsinki School of Economics: Acta Universitatis Oeconomicae Helsingiensis, HSE Print, Helsinki.

Morgan, M., Elbe, J., and de Esteban Curiel, J. (2009), "Has the experience economy arrived? The views of destination managers in three visitor-dependent areas", *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 11, pp. 201–216.

Morgan, N., Pritchard, A. and Pride, R. (2002), *Destination branding: creating the unique destination proposition,* Butterworth-Heinemann Ltd, Oxford.

Neuhofer, B., Buhalis, D., and Ladkin, A. (2012), "Conceptualising technology enhanced destination experiences", *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management,* Vol *1 No* 1, pp 36-46.

Neuhofer, B., Buhalis, D., and Ladkin, A. (2014), A Typology of technology-enhanced tourism experiences, *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol *16* (4),pp 340-350.

O'Neill, J.W. and Mattila, A.S. (2004), "Hotel branding strategy: its relationship to guest satisfaction and room revenue", *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, Vol. 28, pp. 156-165.

O'Neill, J.W. and Xiao, Q. (2006), "The Role of Brand Affiliation in Hotel Market Value", *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly,* Vol. 47 No. 3, pp. 210-223.

O'Neill, J.W. and Carlback, M. (2011), "Do brands matter? A comparison of branded and independent hotels' performance during a full economic cycle", *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, Vol 30, pp. 515-521.

OECD (2011), *OECD Studies on Tourism: Italy, Review of Issues and Policies*, OECD Publishing.

Ojasalo, J., Nätti, S. and Olkkonen, R. (2008), "Brand building in software SMEs: an empirical study", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 17 No. 2, pp. 92 – 107.

Pansiri, J. (2008), "The effects of characteristics of partners on strategic alliances performance in the SME dominated travel sector", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 29, pp. 101-115.

Pencarelli, T. and Forlani, F. (2002), "Il marketing dei distretti turistici – sistemi vitali nell'economia delle esperienze", *Sinergie*, Vol. 58, pp. 231-277.

Pencarelli, T. and Gregori, G.L. (Eds.) (2009), *Comunicazione e branding delle destinazioni turistiche*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.

Pereira-Moliner, J., Claver-Cortés, E., and Molina-Azorín, J.,F. (2011), "Explaining the strategic groups-firm performance relationship: A multilevel approach applied to small and medium-sized hotel companies in Spain", *Journal of Small Business Management*, Vol. 49 No 3, pp. 411-437.

Pine, B. J. and Gilmore, J. H. (1999), *The experience economy: work is theatre & every business a stage,* Harvard Business Press.

Prideaux, B. and Cooper, C. (2003), "Marketing and destination growth: a symbiotic relationship or simple coincidence?", *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 9 No 1, pp. 35-51.

Rageh, A., Melewar, T. C. and Woodside, A. (2013), "Using netnography research method to reveal the underlying dimensions of the customer/tourist experience", *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal, Vol.* 16 No 2, pp. 126-149.

Rahman, N., Melewar, T.C., Sharif, A.M. (2014), "The establishment of industrial branding through dyadic logistics partnership success (LPS): The case of the Malaysian automotive and logistics industry", *Industrial Marketing Management*, Vol. 43, No. 1, pp. 67-76.

Rhodri, T., Shaw, G. and Page, S.J. (2011), "Understanding small firms in tourism: A perspective on research trends and challenges", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 32 No 5, pp. 963-976.

Ritchie, J.R.B., and Ritchie R.J.B. (1998), "The Branding of Tourism Destinations: Past Achievements and Future Challenges", in Keller, P. (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 1998 Annual Congress of the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism: 'Destination Marketing: Scopes and Limitations'*, Marrakech, Marocco, pp. 89–116.

Schulze, W.S., Lubatkin, M.H., Dino, R.N., and Buchholtz, A.K. (2001), "Agency relationships in family firms: theory and evidence", *Organizational Science*, Vol. 12 No 2, pp. 99–116.

Sciarelli, S. (Eds.) (2007), *Il Management dei Sistemi Turistici Locali. Strategie e strumenti per la governance*, Giappichelli, Torino.

Telfer, D. J. (2001), "Strategic alliances along the Niagara Wine Route", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 22, No 1, pp. 21-30.

Trueman, M., Cornelius, N. and Wallace, J. (2012), "Building brand value online: exploring relationships between company and city brands", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 47, pp. 1013-1031.

Uggla, H. (2006), "The corporate association base: a conceptual model for the creation of inclusive brand architecture", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 40 No 7/8, pp. 785-802.

Vaishnav, T. and Altinay, L. (2009), "The franchise partner selection process and implications for India", *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes*, Vol. 1 No 1, pp. 52-65.

Wang, Y. and Fesenmaier, D.R. (2007), "Collaborative destination marketing: case study of Elkhart county, Indiana", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 28, pp. 863–875.

Wang, Y., (2008), "Collaborative destination marketing: Understanding the dynamic process", *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 47 No 2, pp. 151-166.

Yin, R.K. (2003), *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (3rd Edition), Sage Publishing, Newbury Park, CA.