

Where is Waldo? Uncovering the role and profiling a **tourism destination manager**

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Objectives | In recent years, tourism destination management has emerged as a central issue in tourism studies and practices. Models of destination management, dimensions and functions of the Destination Management Organization (DMO) were outlined and discussed (Bieger, 2000; Jamieson, 2006; Manente, 2005; Presenza, Sheehan and Ritchie, 2005; Ritchie and Crouch, 2003; UNWTO, 2007; Valls, 2004).

Not so well documented and analyzed are the role, action and decisions of the destination manager, either theoretically or inside real organizational contexts. The pursuit of patterns and generalized statements, about what destination management is, have hidden the importance of individuals as leaders and managers inside the DMOs, i.e., the human agency dimension of individuals' action and the choices they make, as stated by Lofland *et al.* (2006).

In the context of a recent wider research inside a portuguese local destination, the role and profile of the destination manager has come up as a strategic function inside the local DMO. What role and what profile of the destination manager does the study reveal? How does his action frame the activities and restructuring of the DMO itself?

Methodology | A qualitative approach was followed and a case study was designed as a strategy of research. The absence of an explicit profile and formalized role of the destination manager in the DMO structure and hierarchy has somehow imposed on the researcher an "archaeological" path, digging several types of documents and interviewing different local actors of the destination. Consequently, conceptual maps and qualitative content analysis were used as main techniques for analyzing data.

Main results and contributions | The research reveals the key role of the destination manager in conceiving the local tourism rejuvenation strategy; in the design and restructuring of the DMO; in the implementation of the aforementioned strategy; in recruiting and piloting the evolution of the human resources structure of the DMO; and in managing the delicate political balance between the managing board and the political instance of the municipality.

All these actions of the destination manager are based on a set of skills and capacities that may figure as a possible benchmark profile of what a destination manager should be – have adequate tourism training, experience of working in public and tourism sectors, leadership capacity and relational and negotiation skills.

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Limitations | This study would need to be replicated in order to get other approaches about the profile and role of the destination manager. Nevertheless, this replication strategy, as a mean to get external validity for the main conclusions of the study, cannot forget that tourism managers in public settings are strongly bounded by laws, public administration traditions, conceptual models and the very own dynamics of building local destinations, in the sense that local destinations are what the stakeholders of the destination may be able to share, project and consensualise to develop tourism.

Conclusions | There is no Destination Management Organization and development without key actors that may have the vision, the leadership and the skills and abilities to implement common goals to the tourism destination. The role of individuals may be under-evaluated and needs to be set again as a key driver for tourism organizations' management and functioning.

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