



Progress in tourism management

## Analysing relationships in tourism: A review

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### HIGHLIGHTS

- The article reviews the contributions about the study of relationships in tourism.
- It identifies the lines of research developed, analysing the main contributions.
- Proposals are set out to guide the future research agenda regarding this field.
- The agenda should focus on a more in-depth and developed application of Social Network Analysis.
- This review lays the foundations on which to build future conceptual and empirical work in this field.

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### ABSTRACT

In recent decades, a systemic notion of tourism has been gaining ground, leading to its recognition as a set of interacting elements. From this perspective, relationships have become an important factor in research for understanding tourism, proving useful in the planning and management of tourism destinations. By means of an comprehensive review of the main contributions in the scientific literature in this regard, this paper highlights that there is no one single conception or theoretical-methodological approach to studying relationships, and proposes a classification of the literature on the basis of six major research lines, with a view to identifying and analysing the main advances and gaps presented by each of the research lines. In short, the article identifies the main lines of research developed in this field, analysing the main contributions and making a series of proposals to guide the future research agenda regarding the analysis of relationships in tourism.

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is a relational phenomenon. To be understood as a social phenomenon, tourism must be approached from a systemic perspective, which requires tools that are capable of analysing its different components and the relationships between them. This systemic conception of tourism requires a holistic, synergetic vision of the subject (Leiper, 1990a). This cannot occur uniformly, however; indeed, tourism is such an extraordinarily complex phenomenon that, depending on the object of study, different analytical aspects must be accentuated and the relationships between the different components and dimensions must always be

taken into account as the core elements of the analysis.

In this systemic notion, relationships (the interaction between the different components of tourism activity) are the core element for understanding the phenomenon of tourism. This therefore requires an extraordinarily broad definition of the concept of a relationship, which can be understood to be the bond between two or more components of tourism. This bond, and the components that it links, is identified differently depending on the subject being studied. Hence, the study of relationships as a fundamental element in understanding the phenomenon of tourism has been a constant in research, which has also been reflected in the scientific literature, indicating that there is an approach to, or perspective on, the study of tourism that could be termed “relational”.

However, this relational approach is not composed of a single theoretical-methodological line of research. In other words, different lines of research into relationships have been developed

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within the sphere of tourism as instruments of study and to explain the tourism phenomenon. This has been reflected in the existence of different research logics that are related to tourism from a relational perspective. These research logics have been modified and made increasingly complex as a result of the advances and improvements made to the concepts, units of analysis and instruments and research techniques used.

The aim of this paper is to conduct a critical review of the scientific literature regarding the role of relationships in the planning and management of tourist destinations. The review yields two fundamental results: first, the scientific literature has been classified into six different lines of research, which will be useful in guiding research work that uses relationships as a central element in understanding tourism, and second, Social Network Analysis is deemed to play an important role in shaping the research agenda on relationships and tourism. First, with regard to the current situation, it sheds light on the mathematical properties of tourism relationships. Second, in relation to the future research agenda, Social Network Analysis is the research line with the greatest capacity to construct new analytical proposals that enhance our understanding of the role played by relationships in shaping the phenomenon of tourism. Social Network Analysis plays a significant role in the debate surrounding the research agenda on relationships and tourism and therefore requires a comparison with the other lines of research considered in this paper with a view to understanding potential proposals for a future research agenda.

To carry out this review, it was first necessary to set out the structuring and presentation methods to be used (Webster & Watson, 2002). The analysis conducted in this research does not classify the scientific literature reviewed chronologically; rather, a methodological criterion has been used that considers the theory and research methods contributed by each line of research to systematise the literature on relationships in tourism through the use of different dimensions of analysis that will be presented in the following section. To do this, the concept of *line of research* has been used and is composed of the different aspects that allow for the type of analysis carried out to be characterised. Hence, the second section of this article sets out the different lines of research identified, presenting their main characteristics and establishing the most significant analytical advances made or, in other words, how a specific line has contributed to the analysis of relationships and improving our understanding of the phenomenon of tourism in addition to exposing their research gaps or shortfalls.

Having identified these gaps, the third section examines the main challenges in developing a future research agenda by focusing on relationships as an explanatory element of the tourism phenomenon. Consequently, the current research agenda regarding relationships in tourism must move towards analysing the management of tourist destinations, with a focus on their productive functioning, using the theoretical and methodological principles taken from Social Network Analysis as applied to case study comparisons and directly associating relationships with performance and the achievement of tourism results.

## 2. Relationships in the tourism research agenda: different approaches

The use of relationships to explain the characteristics of the tourism phenomenon has been a constant in the scientific literature since the 1970s. The treatment applied to relationships has not been uniform, however, because there have been many different authors and many different approaches used. While endeavouring to avoid reductionism, two fundamental approaches can be identified: on the one hand, there is a conceptual approach, which would include the major conceptual frameworks from Social

Sciences, including the study of tourism based on concepts, such as social capital (Jones, 2005; Macbeth, Carson, & Northcote, 2004; Zhao, Ritchie, & Echtner, 2011), the theory of the stakeholder-network (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; van der Duim, Ren & Jojannesson, 2013; Van der Duim, 2007) and governance (Bramwell, 2011; Dredge & Thomas, 2009; Hall, 2011). A second perspective revolves around the method of analysis used in research work (Michael, 2007; Pforr, 2006; Scott, Cooper, & Baggio, 2008). Taken separately, each of these approaches seems to be partial because the first focuses on the theoretical plane, whereas the second essentially examines the method of analysis.

From this perspective, our proposal is to structure the contributions to the scientific literature regarding the study of relationships in tourism using what we could call a *methodological* approach that is capable of integrating the theoretical and conceptual planes, accentuating the value of concepts and thus their operationalisation, as well as the method of analysis, by examining data-gathering and analysis techniques. For this reason, the concept of the *line of research* is proposed here as a means of structuring the scientific literature, which we consider to be a complex concept. This literature refers to different theoretical-methodological aspects in the broadest sense, from the most conceptual plane to the operationalisation of the concept of relationship; the research strategy for the area of study; and the techniques for data collection and analysis. All of these theoretical-methodological aspects are systematically reported in Table 1.

On the basis of these dimensions, the scientific literature can be classified and structured, concentrating on relationships as a source of information and for the analysis of tourism, allowing us to identify six different lines of research. As shown in Fig. 1, the first line is *Social Sciences*, the second line is the *Community Approach*, the third line is the *Tourism System*, the fourth line is the *Stakeholder Approach*, the fifth line is the *Tourism Cluster* and the final line refers to *Tourism Networks*.

The next sections (2.1–2.6) set out the fundamental analytical and methodological factors that have enabled the characterisation of each of these six lines of research. The principal authors in each line of research are presented. The first step when selecting the literature was to identify research that uses relationships in its explanation of tourism that was published in leading tourism journals, books or chapters. Given the volume of references this yielded, however, the decision was made to only include the research papers that have been most widely cited and that are thus major works of reference that contribute to characterising the analytical dimensions of each of the research lines. This list of authors is certainly not exhaustive, nor does it aim to be exclusive, as it is impossible to include all of the existing bibliography in this review.

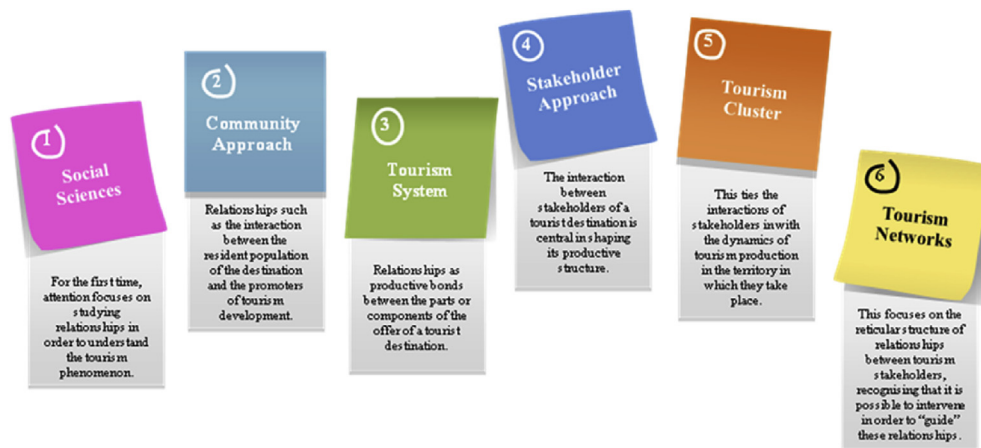
### 2.1. Social Sciences

Since the 1970s, different analyses have been proposed that take relationships as the core and the fundamental element of understanding tourism. The earliest studies (Hendee, 1975; Jafari, 1979) considered relationships as a conceptual element, with the intention of reflecting that tourism is a complex phenomenon and that it is therefore necessary to examine the relationships established between the different elements of tourism in each territory. This line of research, referred to as *Social Sciences*, encompasses the contributions made by authors from the most diverse scientific disciplines and areas of knowledge (Politics, Sociology, Economics, Geography and Anthropology), which, particularly in the early days of tourism research, attempted to justify the need to study relationships, clearly identifying the fields of analysis in which work should be carried out to improve the analytical understanding of

**Table 1**  
Dimensions for the study of lines of research into relationships in tourism.

Dimension	Characteristics
Analytical advance	Aspects contributed by the line of research that improve or perfect the analysis of relationships for the study of tourism.
Unit of analysis	This makes reference to the subject that focuses the interest of the analysis: tourism policy, tourism plan, tourism project, tourist destination, etc.
Content elements of the relationships	This refers to the aspects analysed; in other words, the relationship data used: the formation of relationships, the intensity of relationships, or the mathematical properties.
Dimensions of the analysis	This aspect comprises the elements that make up the focus of the analysis of relationships: the factors required for relationships to occur, or links in terms of the tourism production process.
Scope of the study	This attempts to find out whether the analyses are conducted in relation to a single case study or if they focus on comparing several cases.
Aim of the analysis	Finding out whether the analysis aims to demonstrate the existence of relationships in tourism activity, or whether it aims to expose a case as a good or bad practice, or if it seeks to ascertain whether relationships have an impact in terms of results or tourism performance.
Research techniques	Techniques used to obtain and analyse information.

(Source: Authors.)



**Fig. 1.** Lines of research into relationships in tourism.  
(Source: Authors.)

tourism through the study of relationships.

The name of this line of research is not due to knowledge transfer from the different disciplines of Social Sciences for the study of tourism because it is clear that any contribution to understanding the phenomenon of tourism has been the result of applying the theoretical-methodological principles of all of these disciplines. For example, the analysis of relationships has clearly derived from Anthropology and Sociology. Instead, the *Social Science* line was so named because it includes contributions by authors who have achieved advances in the understanding of tourism from the perspective of relationships within the different disciplines of the Social Sciences. Consequently, the scientific literature included in this line of research can be considered to encompass the first contributions that, from an analytical perspective, focused on relationships as a fundamental element in the understanding of tourism.

It is also true, however, that in this scientific literature no profound conceptualisations are made, nor are any clear processes identified whereby the dimensions of relationships are made operational. These papers do not even propose a basic model of analysis. What is truly important about these early studies is that they raise the idea of the relationship as an analytical object in different strands.

Hence, in the field of Political Science, particular attention is paid to the mechanisms of interactions that explain participation and the balances of power between public and private organisations in the tourism sector (Hendee, 1975; Mathews, 1975; Richter, 1983). Social Anthropology focuses on the attention that should be paid to relationships established between tourists and the local

population (Aspelin, 1977; Graburn, 1983; Nash & Smith, 1991). Sociology focuses on the links between the components of the tourism system, which are composed of different organisations that should display a certain systemic functioning (Cohen, 1984; Dann & Cohen, 1991). It is also important to highlight that within the field of Social Sciences, analytical approaches that focus on relationships are still in demand, particularly with regard to interactions between stakeholders centred on the issue of collective action (Cohen & Cohen, 2012).

As shown in Table 2, the main analytical advance contributed by the *Social Science* line of research is on a more theoretical and conceptual plane, highlighting that relationships are central to the understanding of tourism. The literature reviewed provides no explicit definition of the concept of relationship. It is therefore impossible to clearly identify a specific unit of analysis or the elements of content that would define relationships (see Table 3).

Consequently, the main value contributed by this line of research is the consideration of tourism as a complex social phenomenon that requires the examination of the bonds forged between the main components of tourism activity to be understood. This line of research does not present a precise operationalisation of the concept of relationships or a proposed research method to establish a clear analytical strategy regarding information-gathering and analysis techniques.

## 2.2. Community Approach

An early advance in tourism research from the perspective of

**Table 2**Description of the *Social Sciences* line of research.

Analytical advance	The main advance contributed by this line of research is that, for the first time, it focused attention on the study of relationships in order to understand the phenomenon of tourism.
Unit of analysis	As the seminal analytical strategy, it is not possible to identify a common analytical core. However, in each of the papers studied, the object of analysis is established (tourism policy, tourism planning, or the management of a tourist destination). These are, ultimately, the units of analysis that can be tackled by studying relationships, which depend on the methods used by each author and the aims set out.
Content elements of relationships	The same is true of the elements of relationships that can be studied. They are not analysed in depth, but these authors do indicate the aspects of relationships that can be studied in order to understand the phenomenon of tourism through an analysis of relationships: whether the relationships should be formal or informal, whether they should be intense, etc.
Dimensions of the analysis	They also establish the dimensions that can be studied, both the factors required for relationships to occur, and the links created in terms of the productive process.
Scope of the study	The papers included in this line of research either study one case in depth to ascertain its characteristics, or carry out comparative studies.
Aim of the analysis	The contributions made by this line of research show that relationships must be described in order to be understood; that they must act as mechanisms to determine whether tourism actions are adequate or not, so that they can be known and adapted, and some of them establish that the analysis of relationships should be directly linked to the improved functioning and development of tourism.
Research techniques	No single methodology in particular is used, but they do make it clear that different research methods and techniques available to researchers from the different fields of the Social Sciences should be used in order to understand tourism as a socioeconomic phenomenon.
Main authors	Jafari (1974), Hendee (1975), Butler (1974), Aspelin (1977), Graburn (1983), Mathews (1975), Richter (1983), Cohen (1984, 1988), Dann and Cohen (1991), Matthews and Richter (1991), Nash and Smith (1991), Cohen and Cohen (2012).

(Source: Authors.)

**Table 3**Description of the *Community Approach* line of research.

Analytical advance	The analytical advance contributed by this line of research is linked with the consideration of relationships as interactions that take place between the resident community of a specific territory and the authorities or leading companies promoting the development of tourism within that territory.
Unit of analysis	The units of analysis used are, almost exclusively, the tourism plans promoted in a certain territory, in which the participation of the population must be achieved in order to mitigate or limit the negative impacts of tourism development.
Content elements of relationships	The elements that define the relationships are chiefly linked to the intensity of the population's participation in decision-making and in the definition of actions and projects within the tourism plan of a territory. In other words, the extent to which the population of a certain community participates and is involved in the processes instrumented in the plan to establish the content of the plan and make decisions regarding the future development of tourism in a certain territory.
Dimensions of the analysis	The fundamental dimension of analysis in this line of research is related with the determination of factors that enable interaction between the population and the public authorities driving the tourism plan.
Scope of the study	The papers considered in this line of research focus on studying one case, setting out the characteristics of the interaction and participation that grounds a tourism plan in a specific territory.
Aim of the analysis	To identify good practices in the case study examined.
Research techniques	The methodology used in these papers is, fundamentally, qualitative, based on interviews with stakeholders, either through the use of surveys carried out with the general population, or their representatives, or through the analysis of secondary documentation.
Main authors	De Kadt (1979), Krippendorf (1982), Cooke (1982), Murphy (1985, 1988), Liu, Sheldon, & Var, 1987, Ritchie (1985), Haywood (1988), Keogh (1990), Simmons (1994), Stone and Stone (2010).

(Source: Authors.)

**Table 4**Description of the *Tourism System* line of research.

Analytical advance	The advance made in analytical terms is brought about by the conceptualisation of relationships as productive links that occur between the parts or components of the offer of a tourist destination. Tourism, as a productive activity, needs relationships, specified as links between the different parts or components of the tourism offer that need to function in an integrated way, as a whole, so that tourists can use and consume them.
Unit of analysis	The unit of analysis is made up of the destination, specifically the different elements of the tourism offer of a specific territory.
Content elements of relationships	The elements are determined by the links, or interactions, between the different parts of the system.
Dimensions of the analysis	The dimensions of analysis are the relationships or productive links between the components of the tourism offer.
Scope of the study	Predominantly the case study.
Aim of the analysis	The aim, fundamentally, is descriptive; in other words, to set out the links that exist between the different elements of the tourist destination.
Research techniques	This research line does not develop the application of information gathering and analysis techniques. However, there is an interesting use of sociograms, graphically representing the components of the tourism offer and (theoretical) bonds between them.
Main authors	Leiper (1979), Sessa (1976), Mill and Morrison (1998), Beni (1993), UNWTO (1994, 1998), Molina (1986), Gunn (1994), Osorio (2000), Santana (1997), Schulte (2003).

(Source: Authors.)

relationships occurred in the 1980s with the *Community Approach*, which was based on considering the negative effects of tourism on the resident population of tourist destinations. Consequently, these studies suggest that the resident population must be involved and participate in defining the tourism interventions and proposals to be developed in the territories they inhabit as a basic mechanism to ensure the community's social and cultural preservation. In this case, relationships are instrumentalised analytically to study the

interaction between the local population and the elements that drive tourism activity in a specific territory (Murphy, 1985).

The *Community Approach* line of research represents a significant analytical advance in the study of relationships as a mechanism to explain the phenomenon of tourism as it provides an initial conceptualisation of relationships, in this case as the interaction that occurs between the resident population of a specific territory and the drivers (public or private) of tourism development



(Blank, 1989). This interaction is specified by the participation of the resident population (citizens) in the tourism development plans that are promoted or undertaken by tourism businesses or public administrations (Loukissas, 1983). The fundamental dimensions used to articulate these types of studies are grounded by the identification of factors that are considered to be central in facilitating or inhibiting the involvement of citizens in tourism plans (Taylor, 1995). Furthermore, this line of research also contributes what is known as “analytical territorialisation”; in other words, an analysis is carried out considering a specific case study, usually a specific territory, that is promoting or wishes to promote a plan to develop tourism (Van Doorn, 1984).

The major analytical advance contributed by the *Community Approach* line of research is a holistic research methodology. From a theoretical perspective, it provides an operationalisation of relationships using the bonds established between the different tourism stakeholders in a territory, which it does by establishing a precise unit of analysis: tourism planning. It also identifies the elements that are inherent to relationships, which are measured via the intensity of specific bonds between stakeholders in the territorial tourism planning process and by focussing this analysis on factors that enable interactions to occur between tourism stakeholders. On the more analytical plane, they obtain information through interviews and questionnaires to analyse the content of these relationships.

This line of research does not provide a holistic perspective of the tourist destination management process, however, because it focuses exclusively on the planning stage. Furthermore, by presenting an objective centred on the description of relationships, it is not possible to ascertain the results or impact of relationships on tourism planning. Moreover, because the majority of the papers examine just one case study, it is not possible to draw any comparisons to see how different characteristics of relationships have different effects on tourist destination planning processes.

### 2.3. *Tourism System*

One significant advance made by the relational approach to the analysis of tourism stemmed from applying the principles of General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1973) to the study of social phenomena. On the basis of this trend, the idea began to take shape that tourism functioned as a system, namely, as a series of parts that were reticulated as a whole on the basis of the interactions between those parts (Leiper, 1979). Therefore, the scientific literature incorporated the concept of the *Tourism System*, which maintained that tourism as a productive activity was the result of interactions and combinations produced among the different components of the tourism product on the one hand and between these components and tourists on the other (Beni, 1993; UNWTO, 1994).

This line of research is derived from the application of General Systems Theory to the study and conceptualisation of tourism. The aim is to specify the components of tourism in a specific territory, identifying them as the different elements that make up the tourism offer of a tourist destination. This approach shows that tourism, defined as a product, is shaped by different elements of the offer that must necessarily interact with each other to function as a whole and that are acquired and consumed by tourism demand.

This advancement improved the analytical potential afforded by studying relationships, as it expanded the analytical spectrum by establishing the destination as the main unit of study, defined as a “geographical, economic and social unit consisting of all of those firms, organisations, activities, areas and installations which are intended to serve the specific needs” of the tourist (Flagestad & Hope, 2001: 449). It therefore represents a major methodological advance, improving the conceptualisation and thus the analytical

operationalisation of relationships because it focuses on the productive links that must be established between the different parts of the tourism offer in a specific territory-destination (UNWTO, 1998). The *Tourism System* line also proposes a graphic representation of productive links between the elements that make up the offer (Acerenza, 1992).

The main analytical advance made by the *Tourism System* line of research is precisely on the theoretical plane, by approaching the tourism activity that takes place in a territory as a complex system, which is defined as a set of fragmented components of the tourism offer that must be interconnected – related – to function as a tourist destination. To put it another way, for this system to function as a productive activity, there must be bonds between the components of the offer. The concept of complex system is not made operational in this line of research, however, meaning that no information-gathering or analysis methods are established.

### 2.4. *Stakeholder Approach*

This next line of research into the analysis of relationships in tourism has been termed the *Stakeholder Approach*. This line represents an important advance in terms of the depth of the analysis conducted into relationships for the understanding of tourism. In fact, in the new *Stakeholder Approach* line of research, the tourism components on offer are viewed as stakeholders. In other words, each of the components of the offer is a public or private organisation and the links between these parties are the relationships established between them.

This line of research is grounded in the consideration that as a productive activity, tourism is rooted in the need for interactions between the different components of the offer. These components depend directly on the tourism stakeholders, which are the public or private organisations that own the different tourist services, tourist facilities or tourist resources-attractions in the territory. On the basis of this configuration of different and diverse stakeholders on which the elements of the tourism offer depend, the different parts must be interlinked so that they can function as a tourist product. The focus is placed on tourism stakeholders and their interdependent relationships.

The analytical advance made from this new line of research stems from the application of theories and methods of analysis regarding inter-organisational relationships to studies of tourism (Selin, 1993). It is also extremely interesting to see how these studies operationalise relationships, particularly focussing on identifying an extraordinarily broad set of analytical dimensions that can identify factors that may condition the existence or possibility of relationships between the tourism stakeholders – interested parties – operating in a specific territory. Those dimensions are the legal framework of relationships (Selin, 1999), attitudes and perceptions held by the stakeholders about relationships (Fyall, Oakley, & Weiss, 2000; Mitchell & Reid, 2001; Reed, 1997) and the scope and intensity of collaboration (Bramwell & Rawding, 1994; Bramwell & Sharman, 1999), and together, they are used to explain the characteristics of the relationships between tourism stakeholders in a specific territory within the scope of a tourism plan or project or to characterise public policy on tourism promoted within that territory.

The main analytical advance provided by this research line is related to the research goal because it clearly posits how the characteristics of the relationships between tourist stakeholders (the different parties that make up tourism activity in a certain territory) have an effect or impact on the characteristics of tourism (in the case of this line of research, on tourism policy, as that is the fundamental unit of analysis considered).

In terms of the relationship content, these relationships are

made operational through their formalisation so that the more stable the bonds between stakeholders, the better their effects on tourism policy. However, the research papers in this line still tend to rely on a single case study (and a maximum of two), which makes it difficult to conduct comparative analyses to precisely ascertain how different characteristics of relationships generate differentiated effects on, in this case, tourism policy. Therefore, although the research method and the information-gathering and analysis techniques are adequate to study the selected case study in depth, it is not possible to apply complex analysis techniques to compare different cases and thereby ascertain how different configurations of the relationships between tourism stakeholders have different effects on tourism activity in a specific destination (see Table 4).

As shown in Table 5, the main advance made by this line of research is the integration of the concept of the stakeholder as a key element for sustaining an analytical strategy. From this perspective, and in relation with the other lines of research discussed previously (especially the *Community Approach*), the fundamental research components would comprise the stakeholders (organisations or entities), over and above the local population, and their interactions. This is because their main field of application is the design and implementation of public policies, not only the creation of plans (see Table 6).

However, this line continues to present gaps because there is no link made between relationships and the productive aspects that make up the tourism activity of a specific territory; therefore, the tourist destination cannot be dealt with analytically as a productive process. Furthermore, the research in this line tends to focus on isolated cases, making it impossible to ascertain how the factors that determine relationships might have an impact on tourism results in the territory. These papers are largely limited to describing the characteristics of relationships, but not their impact on tourism.

### 2.5. Tourism Cluster

In the first decade of the 21st century, another major analytical advance was made in the relational perspective on tourism, centring on the concept of the *Tourism Cluster*. The major contribution of this line was to consider the functioning of tourism as a productive system. Hence, multi-dimensional analyses of the relationships between tourism stakeholders in a destination are required (Michael, 2007; Richards & Hall, 2003). This surpasses the metaphorical content of the tourism system, associating the relationships between the different tourism stakeholders in the

territory with its productive function. It clearly shows that tourism is a productive activity and that as such, it represents a *partial-industrialisation*, that is, tourist activity is supported by several clearly differentiated industries (Leiper, 1990b) and therefore requires a holistic mode of functioning. In this way, as maintained by Leiper (2008: 243), “cooperation is activity that converts collections of separate business organizations into functioning industries”. This *partial-industrialisation* makes extensive cooperation in the field of tourism a fundamental variable and a basic axis for the development of tourism in a given area (Leiper, Stear, Hing, & Firth, 2008).

This line of research chiefly focuses on the idea that to ensure the optimum functioning of a productive sector that operates within a specific territory, there must be productive interactions between the different stakeholders or productive elements of the cluster. From the productive point of view, a cluster is a grouping of companies, social entities and public administrations that operate in a specific economic sector in a specific place and that must necessarily interact with each other. In other words, there must be productive links among the stakeholders-elements of the cluster.

The main scientific advance contributed by this line of research with regard to the analysis of relationships in tourism is fundamentally linked to the objects of study considered, as these authors use many of the conceptual and operational improvements incorporated by the previous line for the study of the tourist destination and apply them to the analysis of the production relationships established between tourism stakeholders.

This line is the result of the application of theories regarding production clusters to the study of tourism because tourism stakeholders and their relationships are framed within the complex theoretical-methodological framework developed by Porter (1990), which enables the focus of interest to be angled towards the bonds of complementarity between the companies and public organisations that operate in a specific geographical area and in a specific sector of production, with the clear aim of improving its productivity and competitiveness (Nordin, 2003).

Hence, new elements for the analysis of relationships appear with a clearly productionist intention: the types of interdependence emerging between organisations (Morvillo, Simeon & Vellecco, 2006), the instruments of communication and intermediation (Gorman, 2006), the institutional mechanisms that can facilitate interconnection (Breda, Costa & Costa, 2006) and even the type of members of the cluster, the type of activity they undertake and the goals they pursue (Gibson & Lynch, 2007).

The main analytical advance of the *Tourism Cluster* line of research, particularly in comparison with the *Stakeholder Approach*,

**Table 5**  
Description of the *Stakeholders Approach* line of research.

Analytical advance	The main analytical advance made by this line of research is its fundamental focus on tourism stakeholders, recognising their intervention in shaping the tourism structure of a specific territorial level. These stakeholders, private organisations and public administrations, as well as citizens, must interact, interrelate, so that tourism activity in a territory can function as a productive activity.
Unit of analysis	Analysis focuses chiefly on the territory's tourism plans, the tourism policies promoted, and, to a lesser extent, on the definition of specific tourism projects.
Content elements of relationships	Firstly, they attempt to ascertain the degree of formalisation of the relationships, and, secondly, the intensity of these relationships, which characterise the links between stakeholders.
Dimensions of the analysis	They concentrate on studying and establishing the necessary foundations for relationships to occur between tourism stakeholders.
Scope of the study	Almost exclusively they focus on one case study.
Aim of the analysis	The aim of the analysis is to establish the characteristics of the case study as good or bad practice, and, therefore, to be able to establish which characteristics relationships should have so that interactions between stakeholders can truly occur.
Research techniques	The methodology used in these papers is, fundamentally, qualitative, based on interviews with stakeholders, either through the use of surveys with the general population, or their representatives, and the analysis of secondary documentation.
Main authors	Selin & Beason (1991), Selin and Chavez (1995), Tosun and Jenkins (1996), Jamal and Getz (1995, 1999), Palmer and Bejou (1995), Reed (1997, 1999), Timothy (1998), Timothy and Tosun (2003), Tosun (1999, 2002, 2005), Bramwell and Lane (2000), Medeiros de Araujo & Bramwell, 2000, Aas, Ladkin, and Fletcher (2005), Hall (2000), Richards and Hall (2003), Jamal and Stronza (2009), Sheehan and Ritchie (2005), Dredge (2005, 2006a, 2006b), Haukland (2011), Wegner, Lee, and Weiler (2010), Graci (2013).

(Source: Authors.)

**Table 6**  
Description of the *Tourism Cluster* line of research.

Analytical advance	The main analytical advance made by this line of work has been to focus on productive relationships, in other words, on linking the interactions of stakeholders with the production dynamics in the specific sector analysed, in this case, tourism.
Unit of analysis	The unit of analysis is the tourist destination.
Content elements of relationships	The content elements studied focus on the formalisation and intensity of relationships.
Dimensions of the analysis	The key dimension of analysis is the functioning, in productive terms, of tourism activity in a specific territory.
Scope of the study	The focus is almost exclusively on single case studies.
Aim of the analysis	The analysis conducted in this line of research aims to ascertain whether the productive interactions taking place between the components of the tourism offer function effectively and, therefore, improve tourism performance in the territory.
Research techniques	The methodology used in these papers is fundamentally qualitative, based on interviews with stakeholders, either through the use of surveys with the general population or their representatives, and through the analysis of secondary documentation.
Main authors	Leiper (1990, 2008), Laws, Scott, and Parfitt (2002), Beesley (2005), Vernon, Essex, Pinder, and Curry (2005), Novelli, Schmitz, and Spencer (2006), Michael (2007), Nordin (2003), Jackson and Murphy (2006), Lazzaretti & Petrillo (2006).

(Source: Authors.)

with which it shares several characteristics in terms of its dimensions, is the unit of analysis. Whereas the *Stakeholder Approach* focuses on tourism policy as the unit of analysis, the *Tourism Cluster* line of research analyses the tourist destination.

Authors in the *Tourism Cluster* line of research conceptualise the relationships between tourism stakeholders by considering the entire productive activity of the tourist destination and not only tourism policy. They focus, therefore, on ascertaining the importance of the formalisation and intensity of productive relationships between tourism stakeholders in a destination for improving how the destination functions. The problem is that they do this by focussing their research on single case studies, thereby making it impossible to compare different destinations, an essential part of ascertaining how different characteristics of productive relationships generate differences in the functioning and/or management of destinations.

## 2.6. *Tourism Networks*

Another important analytical advance comes from the application of mathematical properties to the study of tourism through the theoretical-methodological principles of Social Network Analysis (Scott & Laws, 2010). This line of research is called *Tourism Networks* due to the value it places on the concept of the network. As a theory and methodology to study relationships as a basic characteristic of social phenomena, Social Network Analysis has undergone major development in the Social Sciences in general in recent decades through its capacity to analyse the mathematical properties of patterns of social interaction, shaping structural research on social phenomena (Freeman, 2004).

The aim of Social Network Analysis is primarily to emphasise the idea that a network is a web of stakeholders that establish relationships among themselves, so that the stakeholders (nodes) and interactions (ties) shape the network of tourism activity.<sup>1</sup> This idea of tourism (which is specified in terms of a plan, project, policy or a destination for each line of research) conceived as a network with more metaphorical than analytical value had already been dealt with in the scientific literature. Since the mid-2000s, a series of papers have been published in this line of research that, as is the case with the previous lines described, are a response to the application of theoretical-methodological trends from the field of Social Sciences to the study of tourism. In this case, Social Network

Analysis has been used to study tourism and has become an important topic in the scientific literature on the subject (Scott, Cooper, & Baggio, 2007).

From this perspective, the application of the theoretical, methodological and technical principles of Social Network Analysis to the study of tourism has represented a major scientific advance in terms of using relationships as a mechanism for explaining the characteristics of the tourism phenomenon because it has enabled the dynamic dimensions of relationships to be incorporated into scientific knowledge about tourism, as opposed to the static dimensions used by other lines of research outlined above. In other words, it has enabled the structural characteristics of networks to be identified, less in terms of the factors or dimensions that make the existence of relationships possible, but rather in terms of the study and consideration of relationships themselves as structural components of the networks of links produced between tourism stakeholders (Gibson, Lynch, & Morrison, 2005). It is therefore a case of incorporating into the analysis of the tourism dimensions of relationships that are not situated so much on the plane of stakeholders and their strategies for intervention in, or the production of, relationships, but rather within the relationships themselves, their structures and patterns, taking the network as a series of components and indicators that can provide knowledge about the functioning of the tourism relationships that exist in a specific territory.

Hence, approaches and indicators from Social Network Analysis have been incorporated, such as the density of relationships in tourism networks (McLeod, Vaughan, & Edwards, 2010), the centrality of networks and the stakeholders in tourist networks (Bras, Costa & Buhalis, 2010; Pansiri, 2009), the degree of betweenness that can facilitate the connectivity of tourist networks (Bhat & Milne, 2008; Ramayah, Lee, & In, 2011; Zach & Racherla, 2011) and the importance of cohesion in tourism networks measured through indicators of cliques or subgroups (Bendle & Patterson, 2010).

The *Tourism Network* line of research represents a significant advance in analytical terms in that it has facilitated a better understanding of the phenomenon of tourism by revealing new characteristics of relationships, highlighting the mathematical properties of tourism networks in reticulated and structural terms (density of relationships, centrality, betweenness, etc.). Hence, the application of research techniques and the analysis of mathematical properties long applied in the field of Social Sciences to analyse the relationships that characterise different social phenomena, offer new elements in relationships that had not previously been considered in the studies that are characteristic of previous lines of research. As shown in Table 7, the unit of analysis used in this line of research comprises tourism plans and tourism policy as well as the tourist destination. The research focuses predominantly on

<sup>1</sup> There is also a precedent in the application of Social Network Analysis to the study of tourism by using Social Network Analysis to explore how information is passed between tourists when choosing places to visit; in other words, the influence of relationships on the consumption of tourism (Stokowski, 1992; Stokowski & Lee, 1991; Urry, 2003).

**Table 7**Description of the *Tourism Networks* line of research.

Analytical advance	The major analytical advance made by this line of research consists, precisely, of conceptualising the relationships produced between the tourism stakeholders of a specific territory as a network, in other words, as a system of interactions between tourism stakeholders. It enables, therefore, the reticulated structure of the way tourism activity functions to be analysed.
Unit of analysis	The unit of analysis is the tourism plan, tourism policy, specific tourism project, and mainly destination.
Content elements of relationships	The content elements of relationships are, exclusively, the mathematical properties of the main indicators and analysis parameters of Social Network Analysis.
Dimensions of the analysis	They focus on studying and establishing the necessary foundations for relationships to be created between tourism stakeholders. Work is starting to appear that focuses on the tourism results of relationships.
Scope of the study	The scope of this line of research is chiefly dominated by the case study.
Aim of the analysis	The aim of the analysis is fundamentally descriptive since, because this line of research occurs at a seminal moment, it focuses principally on showing the analytical possibilities of Social Network Analysis for tourism. However, gradually, work is starting to appear that focuses on setting out elements of good practice for the reticulated functioning of tourism.
Research techniques	Social Network Analysis methodology is used, establishing the main reticulated indicators used within the framework of this theoretical-methodological trend of Social Sciences, such as the structure of the network, density, the degree of centrality, etc. Therefore, mainly quantitative analyses are used, derived from the application of mathematical properties to the study of social interactions.
Main authors	Pavlovich (2003), Pforr (2006), Baggio, Scott, and Wang (2007), Scott et al. (2008), Bhat and Milne (2008), Bras, Costa & Buhalis (2010), Bendle and Patterson (2010), McLeod et al., 2010, Beritelli (2011), Arnaboldi and Spiller (2011), Zach and Racherla (2011), Ramayah, Lee, & In, 2011, Baggio (2013), Pansiri (2009).

(Source: Authors.)

describing the mathematical properties of relationships found in a single case study. Consequently, it is not possible to ascertain how the structural properties of relationships impact the characteristics of the tourism activity analysed, and because there is no comparison between cases, we cannot see how different mathematical properties of tourist relationship networks could generate different effects on the tourist activities studied.

### 3. The research agenda on relationships in tourism: present and future proposals

In general terms, the study of relationships as a key element in explaining the phenomenon of tourism, and more specifically for the management of tourist destinations, requires the consideration of four fundamental aspects: i) the factors and conditions that make it possible for interactions between the different stakeholders involved in tourism activity to occur; ii) the structure of the relationships between said components, or their mathematical properties; iii) the productive bonds of tourism (as an economic activity) in the destination; and iv) the effects and impacts of the characteristics of relationships on tourism activity and, in accordance with those effects, the assessment and proposal of actions that will affect these relationships with a view to improving the functioning of tourism activity.

To set the content of the research agenda on relationships and tourism, it is necessary to show the connection between these four key components (factors and conditions, relationship structure, productive bonds and effects) and the scope of analysis used to classify the lines of research described in this work (Table 1). Table 8 shows this association and how each of the analytical dimensions contributes to the characterisation of the key components of the research agenda on relationships and tourism. This makes it possible to observe the configuration of the current research agenda and examine future needs.

The criteria set out in Table 8 show how the research agenda on relationships in tourism has been shaped until now and highlight which aspects should be examined in the future agenda. To this end, the following section identifies the type of analytical advance made in each of the different lines of research presented above. In this way, a “historic line” can be constructed that shows how the different lines of research contribute to the current shape of the fundamental elements contained within the research agenda on relationships and tourism. It will also be possible to identify which aspects should form the core of the future research agenda. A clarification must be made at this point, to the effect that this

advance cannot be understood in strictly chronological terms, following the appearance of different contributions. The scientific literature related to each of the research lines has not followed a time sequence, and this makes it impossible to analyse the influence of certain authors on others. Therefore, this “historic line” can only be understood on the basis of the interaction between the different lines of research, through the dimensions of analysis presented in Table 8 and in Fig. 2.

As shown in Fig. 2, the first of the fundamental elements in the research agenda on relationships and tourism (factors and conditions that make it possible for interactions to occur between the elements or components of tourism activity) has been considered in several of the lines of research analysed. Hence, the first step in advancing the research agenda was made possible by the *Social Science* line of research, establishing that the relationships found between the different components of tourism activity are fundamental to understanding the characteristics of tourism as a complex phenomenon; the formalisation of interrelations between tourism stakeholders is key to understanding tourism.

This first issue in the agenda, as a continuation of research from the previous line, has been improved on by the *Community Approach* because this line provided an operational definition of the formalisation and intensity of relationships between the components of tourism activity in a specific territory by developing specific research that applied both qualitative and quantitative information gathering and analysis techniques. This operationalisation of the formalisation and intensity of relationships has had a significant influence on the research conducted as part of the *Stakeholder Approach* and *Tourism Cluster* line.

Fig. 2 also shows that the second fundamental element in the research agenda (structural elements of relationships) has been considered by the *Tourism Network* line of research. This line offers another significant advance in the research agenda. For the authors, the content elements of relationships are their mathematical characteristics. Through the application of Social Network Analysis, they identify the mathematical properties of relationships.

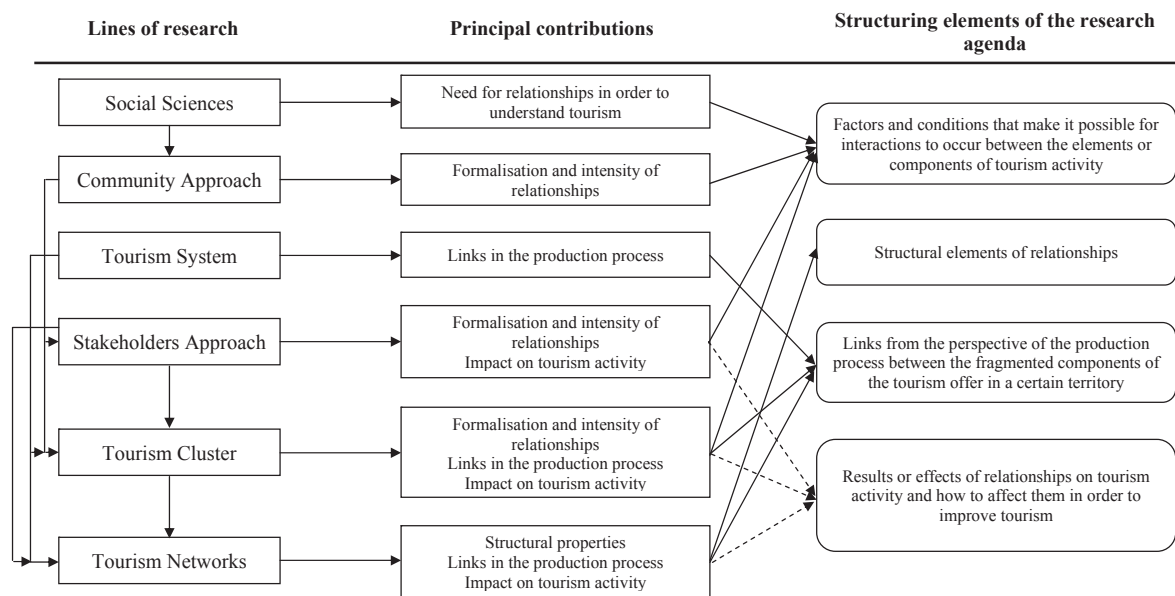
The third of the fundamental elements in the agenda (links between the fragmented components of the tourism offer in a certain territory from the perspective of the production process) has also been examined in various lines of research. In this respect, the *Tourism System* line of research enabled this advance in the research agenda because, prior to that, the *Community Approach* and *Stakeholder Approach* lines of research had studied relationships in specific areas (tourism planning and tourism policy, respectively). Hence, it was not possible to conceptually establish



**Table 8**  
Structuring elements of the research agenda about relationships in tourism.

Structuring elements of the research agenda	Dimensions of analysis	Justification
Factors and conditions that make it possible for interactions to occur between the elements or components of tourism activity.	Content elements of the relationships	Know the extent to which the formalisation and intensity of bonds are key elements for relationships to be effectively established between the components of tourism activity.
Structural elements of relationships	Content elements of the relationships	- Examine the factors that make interactions possible. - Highlight the mathematical or structural properties of relationships.
	Research techniques	Identify the information gathering and analysis techniques applied. These are key to reporting on the more qualitative properties, or the more mathematical –quantitative– properties of relationships.
Links from the perspective of the production process between the fragmented components of the tourism offer in a certain territory	Dimensions of the analysis	- The bonds that exist between the components of the tourism activity correspond to the exchange of information or resources for a specific tourist action. - The bonds are a consequence of the need to interconnect in order to be productively operational, in other words, to generate an integral offer that can be consumed as a product or tourist destination.
Results or effects of relationships on tourism activity and how to affect them in order to improve tourism	Aim of the analysis	- The research focuses only on describing the characteristics of the relationships between the components of the tourism activity. - The research focuses on determining how the properties of relationships have an effect on the characteristics of tourism activity.
	Scope of the study	Know whether the research compares different case studies and, therefore, whether, through this comparison, it is possible to determine how certain characteristics of relationships have different effects on tourism activity or on the functioning of tourism in a certain territory.

(Source: Author.)



NOTE: The dashed lines indicate that those lines of research have to date made very limited contributions to the shaping of those elements of the research agenda (since the number of case studies analysed is still very small).

**Fig. 2.** Evolution of the research lines and their contribution to shaping the fundamental elements of the future research agenda. (Source: Authors.)

links within the framework of all of the activities that make up the production process of tourism in a specific territory and thereby enhance our understanding of all of the components of the destination. This comprehensive vision provided by the *Tourism System* line of research is completed by and analytically influences the *Tourism Cluster* line of research with regard to the formalisation and intensity of relationships, as well as the *Tourism Network* line in terms of studying the mathematical properties of relationships.

Regarding the fourth element of the research agenda (links between the fragmented components of the tourism offer in a certain territory from the perspective of the production process), the contribution to date by each line of research has been limited, as

represented in Fig. 2 by the dashed lines. The *Stakeholder Approach*, *Tourism Cluster* and *Tourism Network* lines have achieved advances in the agenda with regard to the effect of relationships on tourism activity. The treatment of this aspect has been partial, however, because the studies in these three lines concentrated on analysing how the characteristics of relationships influence the results of tourism activity in specific case studies. This analysis of only a limited number of case studies (between one and four cases) makes it difficult to draw extensive conclusions that reinforce principles about how different characteristics or properties of relationships can affect a specific aspect of the reality of tourism. In the specific case of this paper, it would be in relation to tourist destinations.

Taking into account all of the above considerations, the matrix provided below (Table 9) contains the contributions made by the different lines of research reviewed with a view to determining the current development of the research agenda with respect to the dimensions considered for the study of each line (Table 1). This will show which research lines have or have not contributed to each of the analytical dimensions considered in this analysis, consequently enabling proposals for new orientations for the future research agenda.

Taking into account the matrix of contributions made by the different lines of research (Table 9) and the considerations mentioned above based on the “historic line” that has shaped the research agenda on relationships and tourism for the management of tourist destinations (Fig. 2), several proposals can be made regarding the future research agenda on relationships and tourism. In this respect, subsequent advances should probably focus on the fourth of the fundamental elements of the research agenda, in other words, on the results and effects of relationships on tourism activity and proposals for improvement. The future research agenda should be structured around four fundamental pillars.

The first of these pillars pertains to some of the mathematical properties of relationships established through the *Tourism Network* line of research. The first section of this paper established that the application of Social Network Analysis to the study of tourism has enabled different characteristics to be uncovered regarding the reticulated structure of tourism stakeholders. Hence, the research undertaken in this line has characterised relationships through different analyses based on a set of indicators. Some studies use cohesion measures for networks of relationships, such as the analysis of centrality, density of relationships or degree of intermediation (Pavlovich, 2003; Pforr, 2006), while other studies have contributed clustering measures, with indicators such as the analysis of subgroups or cliques (Luthe, Wyss, & Schuckert, 2012). There are also studies that examine measures of structural equivalence (Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2010; McLeod et al., 2010) and the construction and application of algorithms (Ahmedi, Rrmoku, & Sylejmani, 2012; Baggio, 2013).

The development of these papers situates the analysis of tourism by applying Social Network Analysis at the same level of development and complexity found in Social Network Analysis, in general, as a theoretical-methodological framework for the study of social phenomena (Newman, 2010). However, research papers that use indicators of subgroups, structural equivalence or the construction of algorithms have thus far only endeavoured to describe these properties of relationships. They have not been explanatory, and it is therefore impossible to ascertain how such mathematical properties impact the characteristics of the specific tourism reality studied. Consequently, as argued by Baggio (2013), these indicators must be applied to see how they are linked to the results of tourism development in a specific territory. Hence, the future research agenda should focus on exploratory research applied to a few case studies (three or four) that would indicate how the mathematical properties of relationships impact the reality of tourism.

A second pillar in the future research agenda on relationships and tourism is linked to the need to further analyse the relationship between the use of the qualitative properties of relationships, referred to here as properties of formalisation and intensity, and the mathematical properties of relationships obtained through the application of Social Network Analysis. This is a classic debate in other spheres in which the study of relationships has been used to explain social phenomena, such as in the field of public policy analysis (Dowding, 1995). The combination of the qualitative and mathematical properties of relationships becomes a very

**Table 9**  
Matrix of contributions in the lines of research identified.

	Unit of analysis		Content elements of the relationships		Dimensions of the analysis		Scope of the study		Aim of the analysis		Research techniques		
	Plan-programme	Policy Destination	Intensity and formalisation	Mathematical properties	Foundation of relationships	Productive functioning	One case study	Limited number of case studies (2–4)	Broad selection of case studies <sup>a</sup>	Descriptive	Explanatory	Qualitative	Quantitative
Social Sciences	∅	∅	✓	∅	∅	✓	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅	∅
Community Approach	✓	∅	✓	∅	✓	∅	✓	∅	✓	∅	✓	✓	✓
Tourism System	∅	✓	∅	∅	∅	✓	✓	∅	∅	✓	✓	✓	∅
Stakeholders Approach	✓	∅	✓	∅	✓	∅	✓	✓	∅	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tourism Cluster	∅	✓	✓	∅	∅	✓	✓	✓	∅	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tourism Networks	✓	✓	∅	✓	✓	∅	✓	✓	∅	✓	✓	✓	✓

∅ Element not developed.

✓ Element developed.

<sup>a</sup> Allows for comparative statistical analysis.

(Source: Authors.)

important element for the future research agenda on relationships and tourism to ascertain how the effect of the impact of relationships on tourism activity in a certain territory.

From this same perspective, there is a need to ascertain how qualitative and mathematical properties combine to analyse their impact on tourism activity, for example, whether a higher degree of formalisation in relationships can decrease their density or whether it impacts the creation of subgroups in the network structure because these factors can have a direct influence on the results of the tourism activity analysed. To advance the research agenda, the recommendations of [Luthe and Wyss \(2014\)](#) could be followed with respect to the combined use of qualitative techniques that are capable of providing explanations about why mathematical properties have a specific influence on the results of tourism activity in a specific territory.

The third pillar in the future research agenda is linked to an issue flagged in [Table 9](#) above. There is a significant gap regarding the scope of the research conducted to date as a result of the lack of research that compares a large number of case studies. It is in relation to this issue that we feel the future research agenda should make progress. A significant number of studies that enable comparisons through the application of complex quantitative techniques must be made available to obtain statistically significant conclusions about the impact that different characteristics of relationships may have on the characteristics of the tourist destination. Thus far, the research has only analysed the differences in relationships through a small number of case studies (of the research papers reviewed, only five include three or more cases) ([Merinero-Rodríguez, 2011](#); [Merinero-Rodríguez & Pulido-Fernández, 2009](#); [Prat, 2013](#); [Scott et al., 2008](#); [Timur, 2012](#)). This substantially limits the possibilities of analysis and, above all, decision-making regarding the management requirements of tourist destinations. Therefore, research must be undertaken based on a large number of cases that is capable of providing statistical significance to considerations of how the properties of relationships affect the characteristics of tourism activity. This could generate significant advances in the research agenda on relationships in tourism on the basis of studies that establish a clear and statistically significant correlation between the characteristics of relationships and their productive effects in a tourist destination ([Tremblay, 2000](#)). This justifies the scientific literature beginning to advocate the need to incorporate comparative studies that link the characteristics of these relationships with the results or efficiency of the tourism sector into the research agenda ([Baggio et al., 2010](#)). To achieve such progress in the research agenda, research must be undertaken in two fundamental directions, in accordance with the dimension of the relationship content. First, studies are needed that operationalise relationships in terms of formalisation and intensity, applying this model of analysis to a large number of cases, so that the way in which the formalisation and intensity of relationships between tourism stakeholders affect tourist destinations can be determined with sufficient statistical significance. Second, research that operationalises relationships through the structural characteristics of networks must be promoted. Through the application of Social Network Analysis, different mathematical properties could be obtained for tourism relationships (centrality, intensity, intermediation, etc.) so that, subsequently, research involving a large number of studies can be undertaken, allowing us to determine how the different structural properties of relationships between tourism stakeholders affect tourist destinations with statistical significance through comparison.

The fourth pillar of the future research agenda on relationships and tourism is tied to the applied nature of the research. In other words, how it is possible to act upon and improve the characteristics of relationships to enhance the functioning of a specific

tourist destination? By obtaining statistically significant conclusions about the bonds between the properties of relationships and their effects on tourist destinations, further progress can be made with regard to another of the structuring elements of the research agenda to understand tourism, namely, the proposal of measures and actions aimed at affecting relationships between tourism stakeholders to provoke change and improve the functioning of tourist destinations. The aim is to promote the transfer of knowledge about how these relationships ought to work to produce effects on tourist destinations so that practitioners in the area of destination governance can enrich their toolsets with new research techniques and find ways of improving their strategy and policy formulation ([Baggio, 2013](#); [Baggio & Sainaghi, 2011](#)).

As set out in the introduction to this paper, through the application of Social Network Analysis, the *Tourism Network* line of research plays a fundamental role in the debate surrounding the research agenda on relationships and tourism. This is not only because this line of research has brought in the study of the mathematical properties of relationships but also because, as indicated above, this line of research has a direct impact on three of the four pillars set out for the future research agenda, as well as being present indirectly in the fourth pillar.

As maintained by [Hall and Page \(2010\)](#) in their article on Leiper's contribution to the study of tourism, the configuration of tourist activity (characterised by its systemic functioning based on its *partial-industrialisation*) requires and valorises the need to take a strategic focus on tourism management in which collaboration and cooperation are key elements in the tourist destination. Therefore, progress in the analysis of relationships takes on significant value because relationships are the basis on which cooperation and collaboration – and the collaboration that characterises this strategic focus – rests.

#### 4. Conclusions

This paper has reviewed the scientific literature on the analysis of relationships that attempts to explain and understand tourism and tourist destinations. This review has highlighted the diversity and differentiation of the literature, which makes it difficult to structure contributions chronologically because there is no longitudinal pattern by which to group and classify them. This circumstance led to the proposal to structure the reviewed literature on the basis of the concept of the lines of research, identifying a set of dimensions of analysis (analytical advance, unit of analysis, content of relationships, scope of study, aim of the analysis, research techniques) that allow the content of these lines to be systemised.

From this perspective, the different complementary lines of research have been presented in accordance with the characteristics adopted by each of the dimensions of analysis used, producing an analytical advance in their capacity to explain the relationships in tourism, and shaping a research agenda that covers four fundamental aspects: the factors that make relationships possible, the structural characteristics of relationships, the bonds in the tourism production process and the results or impacts of the characteristics of relationships on tourism activity.

An interesting pathway is shown in this field of research. First, the more generic proposals of the lines of research referred to here as *Social Sciences* and the *Community Approach*, display the basic aim to understand the tourism phenomenon on the basis of the relationships produced between the different types of stakeholders involved. Second, the more elaborate contributions of the *Tourism Network* line of research, which makes a much more developed analytical contribution and conceptualises the tourist destination as a system of interactions between tourism stakeholders, facilitate the management of the destination.

As seen in this paper, there have been major advances in the scientific literature in terms of the analytical capacity to approach tourism through relationships. Hence, there has been a clear shift from a perspective that considered relationships more in metaphorical terms towards accounting for the complex nature of the tourism phenomenon segmented into a series of parts or components, to an approach that systematises relationships as links between those components, and then to an even more advanced approach that takes the network as the object of study, establishing its components and limits of configuration in terms of a clear unit of analysis.

Similarly, it has also been seen that from an analytical perspective, the lines of research identified in this paper have changed from a general conception of tourism, which is approached through relationships (the concept of the tourism system and complex phenomenon), to other more specific conceptions to systemise analyses that focus on the concept of destination, tourism project, tourism product or tourism policy. It has also been shown that an important advance has been made in considering the components of the relationships that are worthy of research attention. This advance has been based on a shift from the factors that condition, enable or limit relationships to the reticulated structure of these interactions.

In spite of the considerable advances made at a theoretical and analytical level, there is a clear predominance of isolated case studies, a scope that is limited to a small number of case studies, making it difficult to tackle comparative studies in broad terms. This circumstance makes it difficult to establish extensive conclusions beyond the value that they hold for the specific cases studied, which determines how different properties of relationships differently impact the characteristics of the tourism activity or tourist destination. Therefore, further advances are also needed to provide greater clarification regarding the effect of relationships on the tourism phenomenon or event analysed, that is, the relational effect on the reality of tourism in clear terms of improvement or deterioration.

This advance in the research agenda can only be achieved by fostering research that encompasses numerous case studies that are capable of determining with statistical significance how the formalisation and intensity of relationships, or the mathematical properties of the relationships obtained on the basis of the application of Social Network Analysis, impact tourist destinations and are therefore capable of generalising the learning achieved from this linkage beyond the few cases studied, as is the case with the current research agenda.

The significance of the potential conclusions and therefore their generalisation would also enable the proposal of improvements in the management of tourist destinations, acting on the properties of relationships and developing mechanisms that affect the relationships at a specific destination to improve its function, which could be articulated on the basis of the effective knowledge of the intended impacts and effects.

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