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The Emergence of Tuscany as a Wedding Destination: The Role of Local Wedding Planners

ABSTRACT This study concerns the development of Tuscany as a destination for wedding tourism. The focus is on local entrepreneurs – specifically local wedding planners – and the aim is to describe and discuss their role as coordinators and innovators. The findings suggest that local wedding planners act as coordinators of teams of local practitioners. Beyond the local level, wedding planners experience difficulties in finding collaborative partners; in relation to this, a recently developed regional project could prove supportive. The wedding planners' role as potential innovators seems to be limited due to the lack of market orientation by some local authorities, the newness of wedding planning as a form of employment in the Italian context and the related lack of recognized legitimacy, the presence of some improvising wedding service companies and the absence of certified professional associations.

Keywords: wedding tourism, destination lifecycle, networking, collaboration, innovation, entrepreneurship

Introduction

This study concerns the role of local entrepreneurs, in particular wedding planners, in the development of wedding tourism as a new form of tourism in Tuscany (Italy). The research aims to identify and discuss the challenges that these actors face in the early stages of wedding destination development and in relation to the formation of collaborative networks and innovation. Weddings are the source of various forms of tourism, including pre-wedding and honeymoon travel (Eldridge & Roberts, 2008; Kim & Agrusa, 2005; Ryan & Martin, 2001). Although strictly related to the wedding event, these forms of tourism are not included in the definition of wedding tourism that is adopted by this study. The term “wedding tourism” here is used to indicate the flows of tourists who travel to participate in weddings that are celebrated in a destination where neither the bride nor the groom lives (Daniels & Loveless, 2013).

Few scholars have investigated wedding tourism from a planning and management perspective. Among those who have, Del Chiappa and Fortezza (2012) investigate and discuss the potential economic benefits of wedding tourism at the local level. According to these authors, wedding tourism can imply a considerable number of people travelling to and staying at the wedding destination, including the couple, their families and their friends. This can lead to economic benefits that can be direct, indirect and induced. Some examples are the costs related to the expenditure of the wedding participants on their accommodation, the expenditure of local businesses on serving the increased demand for products and services and the expenditure of the businesses’ employees in relation to their increased income. These potential benefits, as well as noneconomic benefits related to sociocultural contributions at the local level, can also be related to other forms of tourism and events (Getz, 2008). However, as a form of tourism that is essentially a means of gathering together friends and relatives, wedding tourism tends to be particularly meaningful for the tourists and is thus less sensitive to possible economic crises than other forms of tourism (Olwig, 2002). Moreover, it can be argued that wedding tourism has the potential to make a considerable contribution through the creation of a strong bond between the tourists – especially the couples – and the destination, with the result of initiating and supporting positive word-of-mouth and increasing the possibilities of revisits (Knudsen & Waade, 2010; Tauer & Ryan, 2005). Thus, wedding tourism constitutes a potentially lucrative form of tourism that can support and reinforce the attractiveness of a destination, not only in times of prosperity but also in difficult times of stagnation.

From the perspective of the companies involved, wedding tourism concerns some traditional tourism sectors, for example the hotel sector, as well as specialized businesses (Adler & Chienm, 2004). An example of the latter is the wedding planner, a professional figure already present in some cultures and quite new in others. Some scholarly studies have highlighted the importance of wedding planners as event managers and experience designers (AUTHOR; Blakely, 2008; Daniels & Loveless, 2013; Major, McLeay, & Waine, 2010; McKenzie & Davies, 2008; Schumann & Amado, 2010). Wedding planners are identified as having a central role in coordinating the network of local companies providing the various wedding and tourism services, the local public authorities and, when necessary, religious bodies (Fortezza & Del Chiappa, 2012). In the context of the emergence of a new wedding destination, it can be suggested that wedding planners, not unlike tour operators, can act not

only as coordinators but also as innovation drivers (Mattsson, Sundbo, & Fussing-Jensen, 2005; Rønning, 2010; Trunfio, Petruzzelli, & Nigro, 2006).

The focus of this study is on local wedding planners in Tuscany and their role in the development of a new wedding destination. The purpose is to contribute to the understanding of their role as coordinators and innovators. In order to do so, this study adopts some concepts from destination and entrepreneurship literature, in particular the concepts of tourist destination development, entrepreneurial innovation and networking.

Theoretical Background

The Concepts of Tourist Destination and Destination Lifecycle

The concept of destination can be understood in different ways (Pearce, 2013; Saraniemi & Kylänen, 2011) and the term destination is not limited to and does not necessarily indicate a specific geographical area. Destination can be viewed as a socially constructed concept, intrinsically linked to tourists' perceptions (Buhalis, 2000; Framke, 2002; Saarinen, 2004). A tourism destination can thus be conceptualized as a combination of the objective reality of a place and the tourists' imaginings linked to it (Sheller & Urry, 2004). Thus, a geographical area can mean different things to different people and can host different forms of tourism. In other words, the same geographical area can constitute different tourism destinations.

This can be related to the case of wedding tourism and the ability of a region to develop *ex novo* or change its profile according to market trends and opportunities. Such a process has been described in the literature using the concept of lifecycle and through models that describe such development as a trajectory along which some main stages can be identified (Buhalis, 2000; Butler, 1980; Getz, 1992; Hovinen, 2002; Tooman, 1997). One of the most cited lifecycle models is that of Butler (1980). According to this model the evolution of a tourist area tends to follow an S-curve developmental path, with the number of tourists growing constantly until a plateau, or phase of stagnation, which can be followed by a decline or rejuvenation. The first stages are usually characterized by a form of tourism that is quite spontaneous, with few local enterprises involved, followed by rapid growth due to the involvement of external organizations.

Some scholars have criticized lifecycle models for their assumption of linear development (McKercher, 1999). In relation to this, Pavlovich (2014) outlines the importance of entrepreneurial activity and the related ability to create and take advantage of business possibilities through local, informal collaborative relationships. From this perspective, the result of such entrepreneurial activity is the non-linear development of the destination. Based on similar considerations, Russell and Faulkner (2004) revisit Butler's lifecycle model. Their model shows how the development of a destination can take place along a continuous path characterized by cyclical changes triggered by special circumstances that are not necessarily planned by the actors involved and to which tourism operators, often entrepreneurs, tend to react by innovating their products or/and related processes. Regardless of whether the developmental path is viewed as a linear or a non-linear trajectory, entrepreneurial activity is recognized as one of the major shapers of destination development. The next sections discuss this aspect in relation to entrepreneurial innovation and networking.

Entrepreneurial innovation

Activity related to the emergence of a new form of tourism can be studied by viewing local entrepreneurs as innovators, or more specifically, as institutional entrepreneurs (Beckert, 1999; Di Maggio, 1988; Lawrence & Phillips, 2004; Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004). The term “institution” is here viewed as a socially constructed practice that emerges – sometimes informally – and produces routine-like behaviours (Pacheco, York, Dean, & Sarasvathy, 2010). As Schumpeterian-type entrepreneurs, institutional entrepreneurs innovate by creating new business models. In addition, the changes that they initiate have the characteristic of diverging from the existing dominant institutions (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009). The adoption of this institutional perspective in the case of wedding tourism is based on a conceptualization of wedding tourism as an emerging institution, i.e. a new practice involving the management of tourism and celebration of weddings that differs from other forms of tourism and celebrations. Such a conceptualization is supported by the scholarly contributions presented in the introduction. Moreover, it is also supported by this study’s results, as shown in the section presenting the findings.

The literature identifies several elements as determinants of institutional entrepreneurship. Among these, the following are described as the most influential: the presence of external pressures, the power and the legitimacy of the entrepreneurs, and the structure of the existing institutional field (Pacheco et al., 2010). In the context of wedding tourism, external pressure can concern sociocultural trends related to weddings, including those at the macro level. Power and legitimacy are two elements linked to wedding planning as an emerging profession, one which might not be recognized as such, at least in some countries. In this regard, the trait approach to professionalism, focused on work-related characteristics, such as the presence of specific skills, the nature of the work as a full-time occupation, the availability of training and adherence to codes of conduct, can be applied to wedding planners as providers of a new type of service (Burgess, 2011; Harris, 2004; Sheldon, 1998; Thomas & Thomas, 2013). Finally, the third determinant of institutional entrepreneurship is the structure of the existing institutional field, connected to the collective organization of wedding planners. Here, the existence of an association is recognized as playing an important role in the emergence of innovations that diverge from the dominant practice (Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002). In addition, the presence of other relevant actors is an integral part of the structure of the existing field. In the case of wedding tourism, this can be related to public authorities and the relationships that wedding planners have with them, both at the regional and local level.

Entrepreneurial Networking

Several tourism scholars have identified collaborative relations and networking as crucial elements in destination development (Buhalis, 2000; Bramwell & Lane, 2000; Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Enright & Newton, 2004; Selin & Chavez, 1995). Some authors explicitly link the concept of networking to those of destination lifecycle and entrepreneurship. As mentioned above, Pavlovich (2014) outlines the importance of informal social relationships between local entrepreneurs in creating and implementing tourism activities.

Zeher and Raich (2010) have also commented on the destination lifecycle in relation to the concept of tourism networking, noting that the development of a destination often starts

with the formation of networks along the service value chain. Here, the collaboration tends to be quite informal, based on strong ties and characterized by the individual providers' recognition that they cannot deliver the overall tourism product alone. Collaboration originates mainly from a common need to overcome limitations in terms of capacity and resources, but can also be characterized by other motivations, for example the desire for emotional support. This form of collaboration can be categorized as organic and can be related to several factors, among which are: the peculiarities of the specific sector, the complementarity of the various tourist products making up the experience profile and the presence of strong commitment and reciprocal trust (Fyall, Garrod, & Wang, 2012). This first stage of destination development can be also related to a type of entrepreneurship sometimes termed "serendipitous", described as the entrepreneurial response to an accidental and sometimes uncontrollable circumstance (Russell & Faulkner, 2004). For example, this might be the emergence of a specific trend and preference among customers, resulting in a new niche market that acts as a "magnet" attracting entrepreneurial people (Dew, 2009).

Continuing along the lifecycle, the development of the tourism network is characterized by the risk of increasing competition among the members and later on, by the possibility of inter-sectoral networks (Zeher & Raich, 2010). There is still collaboration and this can develop in the direction of an increasing professionalism and a strategic and realistic vision of what is needed and how to manage possible conflicts and undertake structural changes. In some cases, collaboration evolves into a mediated form, where a local organization, often a destination management organization (DMO), can act as coordinator (Fyall et al., 2012). The mediation of an organization is identified as important in providing collaborative structures, enhancing destination learning and ultimately, creating value for the providers, the customers and the host community (Gibson, Lynch, & Morrison, 2005).

Regarding the latter aspect, governmental authorities are identified as having a crucial role to play in terms of facilitating development that can contribute to the local economy. The tourism literature suggests that governance arrangements which include private and public partners may be beneficial (Beaumont & Dredge, 2010; Dredge, 2006; Vernon, Essex, Pinder, & Curry, 2005). Some scholars have outlined the relevance that vertical and horizontal networks and cooperation at the local/regional level have in relation to sustainable development (Baggio, Scott, & Cooper, 2011; Shone & Ali Menon, 2008). This aspect implies an approach to governance based on public-private collaboration in which private firms play a central role: they are linked together by strong ties that develop due to their proximity and are connected to other relevant non-local actors through weak ties, sometimes initiated and supported by the public actors involved (Baggio et al., 2011).

Method

The first phase of the research was dedicated to collecting secondary data concerning the phenomenon of wedding tourism in Italy, more specifically, Tuscany. Data were collected online, by consulting articles in the local and national press, as well as webpages and blogs concerning weddings, in particular weddings celebrated abroad. In the second phase, primary data were collected through a total of eight interviews and a survey. Three in-depth interviews were conducted with one wedding planner and two celebrants. All those interviewed had several years of experience in providing wedding services, respectively seven, 10 and 13

years. The interview with the wedding planner was preceded by several casual conversations over the years and was also the factor that triggered the research. The two celebrants were recommended by the wedding planner as two particularly experienced and active celebrants working with weddings for tourists. The interviews were conducted in person, two face-to-face and in one case via Skype.

On the basis of the insights gained from these interviews, more data were collected through an online survey targeting Tuscan wedding planners. The respondents to the survey were selected via online webpages about weddings in Italy and by also contacting *Toscana Promozione*, the economic promotion agency for the Tuscany region. The survey contained both closed and open-ended questions. The initial questions concerned the wedding planning companies and their experience in terms of the number of weddings they had organized, for how many years they had been in business, the types of weddings they arranged and the nationalities of their customers. The second set of questions concerned the wedding planners' experience in relation to the customers' preferences regarding destination and location/venue. Finally, questions were asked in relation to the wedding planners' collaboration with local authorities, with a focus on the local level. In total, 183 wedding planners were identified as operating in Tuscany. In total, 49 responded to the survey and of these, 20 sent also an email thanking the researcher for contacting them and asking to be updated on the research results. Four of these respondents also added more comments on their experience in terms of collaboration with the authorities. These planners were then contacted by telephone for a brief discussion regarding the content of their emails.

Data were also collected from the webpages of five Tuscan municipalities and interviewing the people at the registry office. These interviews were conducted by telephone and email. The municipalities were selected on the basis of the results of the survey, choosing those that were indicated to be particularly "wedding friendly". In addition, an in-depth face-to-face interview was conducted with the person in charge of the tourism section of *Toscana Promozione* and informational material regarding wedding tourism in Tuscany was provided after the interview.

Findings and Discussion

The Context: Italy and Tuscany

In Italy, the phenomenon of wedding tourism is usually referred to as "matrimonio per stranieri" ("weddings for foreigners", where "foreigners" here has to be understood as "tourists"). This denomination is indicative of the recognition by Italians in general and those working with wedding-related services in particular of the differences between the weddings of Italians and those of families from other countries. Italy is among the favourite destinations for wedding tourism and data from the national statistics agency show that the most representative countries of origin are the UK, the US, Russia and Japan (ANSA, 2013; Daniels & Loveless, 2013; Major et al., 2010). In 2012, more than 6,000 couples from abroad celebrated their weddings in Italy out of a total of more than 220,000 tourists (ANSA, 2013; TTGITALIA, 2013).

Although Tuscany is among the most popular Italian regions hosting weddings, wedding tourism is considered a new form of tourism (ANSA, 2013). The phenomenon of wedding

tourism in Tuscany includes people with a relatively modest budget, wealthy people and also celebrities. It can be assumed that the latter type of weddings have contributed to Tuscany's profile as a particularly attractive wedding destination, together with other factors such as the local cultural attractions and its enogastronomy.

The Development of Wedding Tourism in Tuscany

The data show that the development of Tuscany as a wedding destination is characterized by many of the elements described by the destination lifecycle models. The data enable identification of the current stage of development and the related critical factors, as well as consideration of the role of the local entrepreneurs and the challenges they face in relation to innovating and networking.

Specialized or improvising wedding service providers? One of the main challenges to emerge from the data is related to the entrepreneurs' specialization. The data show that there are numerous tourism providers offering wedding-related services. Several respondents explained this as related to the emergence of interest among tourists resulting from pop-culture trends originating from films and books about weddings in general or showing Tuscany as a particularly romantic destination. Among these, the following were mentioned: *Father of the Bride*, *A Room with a View* and *Under the Tuscan Sun*.

The secondary data show that some of the wedding services are part of a broader spectrum of services that the providers offer. This is the case for a number of event organizers and companies providing accommodation, catering, music and decorations. Only some of these providers work exclusively with wedding tourists as Tuscany is already a well-developed tourism destination hosting large and small events. Equally, some of the existing generic tourism and wedding services are also relevant to wedding tourists. However, from the languages used on the companies' webpages, it can be assumed that particular types of wedding service providers target only tourists. This is the case of wedding planners and to a lesser degree, photographers.

The representative at the regional office of *Toscana Promozione* remarked on the different degrees of specialization of the wedding service providers. He commented that not all the people working with wedding tourism are specialized in international markets and/or in weddings. He cited in particular cases in which the accommodation providers function partly as wedding planners, arranging the wedding party and conveying the contacts to possible celebrants or, in the case of symbolic ceremonies, also celebrating the ceremony itself. During the interview, he also linked this aspect to the lack of professionalism of some providers, which poses a potential threat to the development of Tuscany as a high-quality wedding destination. Similarly, a celebrant commented on "improvising wedding providers" and expressed some concern:

Some celebrants are very young, with no experience. They stand there ... in front of the couple, with a piece of paper in their hands, reading to the couple a not particularly well-prepared speech in not particularly good English ... We have to remind ourselves that this is an extremely important moment for the couples and the families ... we have the moral obligation to make it a special and unique and high-quality experience for them

and for us, for our identity as professionals. I have chosen my work, it's my passion and I realize that isn't the same for all the people working in the sector.

As with the number of wedding service providers, the number of wedding planners is also quite high and according to the respondents, it seems to be constantly growing. This is in part confirmed by the survey data, which show considerable variation in the years of experience of the companies: 25% of the companies responding to the question about years of experience in planning weddings reported a period of one to three years. However, several were quite experienced. The average age of the companies responding to the survey was approximately seven years, which could be explained by the greater interest experienced companies might have in taking part in a survey targeting their profession and also the possibility that very new companies might not yet have appeared on any of the webpages consulted.

It can also be assumed that in the case of the wedding planners, similarly to the celebrants, some people enter the wedding business without being particularly prepared or dedicated to it. For wedding planners, who have a key role in the creation of the event, this aspect is particularly negative as it can clearly compromise the whole experience.

The presence of many providers recalls the "magnet" effect commented on in the literature concerning the emergence of a niche market. As noted above, wedding tourism is seen as a business opportunity associated with a new trend in the market. The pop-cultural products originating this trend can be viewed as exerting external pressure that influences entrepreneurial activity to develop new wedding services and products. The innovativeness and the quality of the new services and products depend on the type of enterprises that enter this business. In the specific case of the wedding planning companies, it seems that several are micro companies. The data from the websites show that in many cases the only person involved is an entrepreneur, often a woman, who presumably wants to turn a hobby or personal interest into a business. It can be assumed that many such businesses will have a short life because of lack of time and previous experience and only a few will develop professionally.

Local and international networking. The wedding planning companies commented quite extensively on networking and in particular the entrepreneurs' capacity to create a network of partners. The comments in the survey seem to confirm this aspect. At the local level, the collaboration among the different entrepreneurs has developed along the value chain and can be qualified as organic. The data show that strong ties are often developed among these providers. The wedding planners refer to the suppliers of wedding services as "my" photographers, "my" florists, etc., suggesting that wedding planners tend to work in "teams" that they develop through personal contacts and years of practice. This was also the case for one of the celebrants interviewed, who had previously worked as a wedding planner. Such collaboration is perhaps indicative of the role that wedding planners play in involving local small enterprises, acting as coordinators and also introducing them into a new area of business.

With regard to international partners, several remarked on the challenge of finding partners, such as foreigner tour operators, travel agencies and also journalists, in the countries in which the tourists reside. The kinds of contacts that the wedding planners aim to develop

with these actors can be described as weak ties that could help the companies especially in the promotional phase. One of the most difficult tasks identified by the wedding planners is establishing effective and inexpensive communication and distribution channels. A wedding planner commented on having many local contacts with suppliers but finding it difficult to reach the customers. The challenge of reaching international markets was also noted by other wedding planners, who referred explicitly to the regional authorities and the possibility of developing Tuscany's profile as a wedding destination. One wedding planner cited the case of the town of Verona, arguing that the Tuscan region should do as Verona did. There, the public authorities published a brochure about getting married in the specific area, presenting it as particularly suitable for wedding holidays and also featuring some of the local wedding service providers.

Those responsible for the tourism section at *Toscana Promozione* have a clear role to play in the development of wedding tourism and therefore a project has very recently been formulated (not yet launched at the time of data collection). The project is called "Welcome Wedding Planners 14TUR041" and includes a plan for developing some promotional material concerning Tuscany as a wedding destination. Unlike the case of Verona, this material adopts an experiential approach to its treatment of weddings. The intention is to create positive associations rather than providing practical information. Linked to this, a number of concepts are currently being studied to support the theme of "Love me in Toscana", chosen as the leitmotif of the promotion. Other central elements of the "Welcome Wedding Planners 14TUR041" project are the establishment of direct contact with local wedding planners to plan together future steps in developing the destination. Another important aspect of the project is the possible mediation by the region between local operators and international tour operators, wedding journalists and bloggers. As confirmed by those interviewed, these first steps towards the development of Tuscany as a wedding destination indicate a sort of governance approach.

It can be noted that *Toscana Promozione* has adopted an approach in which it aims to create favourable conditions for the local enterprises to grow and develop. During the interview, the person in charge of the "Welcome Wedding Planners 14TUR041" project was very explicit about this, saying that *Toscana Promozione* seeks collaboration with international companies but does not want these to dominate the wedding tourism market as, ultimately, it should contribute to the economy of the territory. Furthermore, there are some conflicts between the wedding planners and the public authorities. A number of these conflicts probably arise from the still limited engagement of the regional authorities in the development of wedding tourism or, as shown by the data concerning the comparison with the case of Verona, on different views about such engagement.

The new business of wedding planning. Other conflicts concerning the public authorities are at the local level and can be linked to the newness of wedding planning in the Italian context and the consequent lack of recognition of the professional status of wedding planners. The data show that at least three Italian wedding planner associations exist. These associations offer courses and organize seminars and meetings. No wedding planner in this study reported belonging to any of these associations, or receiving help and support from them. From these data, it can be supposed that the associations' role in the professionalization of the figure of

the wedding planner is quite limited. It also seems that, at the moment, several of the elements that are usually associated with a profession are lacking in the case of the wedding planners, for example internationally recognized certification and full-time occupational status.

Lack of recognition of the professional status of wedding planners at the municipality level also emerged during the interviews, in which some wedding planners were quite negative about the way they were perceived by certain municipality employees. One wedding planner commented:

They don't consider us professionals; it seems sometimes that they are doing us a favour, giving the information about the procedures and such like. We bring them tourists, it's our job and they [the municipalities] also get some benefits, tourists visiting and leaving money there ... but, still, it is almost as though they do not take us seriously.

Many wedding planners remarked on what they saw as a lack of interest on the part of some municipalities in creating favourable conditions for hosting wedding tourists. There was broad agreement among the wedding planners that weddings for tourists are different compared to Italian weddings. For example, some of the regulations that are usually applied for weddings are not suitable in the case of weddings involving tourists, but some municipalities do not seem to share this view. An example mentioned by several planners concerns the timing of the ceremony. As one put it:

Having the ceremony in the morning is not a good idea for tourists. Most of them prefer the afternoon. It has something to do with the fact that with a ceremony in the morning you have a lot of empty hours before the party. I tried to tell this to the municipality in [xxx], but they just don't see it. They follow the standard procedure and that's it!

From the data, it seems that there is a degree of frustration among the wedding planners, who feel the necessity to explain their business and their role. This is likely to be related to the newness of the phenomenon of wedding tourism, the existence of some "improvising wedding service providers" and a lack of professionalization on the part of those wedding planners. This leads to a lack of recognized legitimacy and power.

Towards a mature stage of destination development. Based on these data, the development of Tuscany as a wedding destination has passed the very early stage and is evolving to a new stage. Here, a mediated form of collaboration, with the region as the main mediator and the local public authorities as the main partners, is recognized by the local actors as crucially important. This was quite evident during the interviews with *Toscana Promozione* and several of the wedding planners.

With regard to the municipalities, the wedding planners indicated that the following elements were vital to ensure good collaboration: the availability of a person who can give clear and correct information concerning requirements and procedures, coherence in relation to possible agreements and some flexibility regarding possible special requests from tourists or particular needs. With regard to some of these elements, larger municipalities appear to be

better organized. An example is the Municipality of Florence, where relevant information is collected and distributed online as part of the project “Sì a Firenze”.

On the other hand, several wedding planners referred to larger municipalities being “overbooked” and “unreasonably expensive”. The price factor was mentioned by a minority of wedding planners and sometimes also commented on in the case of smaller municipalities. This aspect and the resistance by some providers to recognizing the need for different price levels is associated with the novelty of wedding tourism and the lack of recognition that there are various market segments with different levels of financial resources and willingness to pay.

In relation to smaller municipalities and communication issues, several wedding planners commented that they tend to be less structured when it comes to providing the information needed, but this can be compensated by the presence of polite and helpful personnel. A number of wedding planners reported that small municipalities can be particularly “wedding friendly”, due to an exceptional level of interest and market orientation and also the presence of many beautiful and available venues, both public and private. An example is the Municipality of Montecarlo (Lucca) which has recently started arranging open days to show wedding planners the venues available in the territory. In addition, the Municipality of Montecarlo seems to be quite open to new products, for example the implementation of various new regulations that allow family pets to participate in the wedding.

Some of the comments of the wedding planners concerning the municipalities were confirmed by the secondary data collected from the municipalities’ webpages and also by the interview data. One employee interviewed stated that “flexibility is out of question” as wedding tourism is not among their (the municipalities’) tasks. In another case, it was quite evident that communication might be quite slow and not always coherent as there was no written information available to the public and several people in different offices were in charge of providing information about wedding procedures.

Conclusion

Tuscany is still in the early stages of its developmental path as a wedding destination and the role played by local wedding planners in collaboration with other local enterprises, as well as regional and local public authorities, can be crucial. This study concludes that wedding planners act as coordinators among several small local enterprises (sometimes organized informally in teams) and also, to a certain extent and with greater difficulty, with public authorities. On the other hand, their role as innovators seems to be limited due to several factors.

As coordinators, wedding planners collaborate with local actors. Organic collaboration exists at the operative level and along the service chain. At this level, the vast majority of the enterprises are small and the collaboration is very often at the personal level. This form of collaboration is characterized by strong ties and by the creation of teams of practitioners with the wedding planner acting as a sort of leader. The wedding planners’ role as coordinators concerns mainly local actors. This aspect seems somewhat limiting and the way in which this is managed in the future might determine the success or otherwise of the development of Tuscany as a wedding destination. At the time of this research, the region had started to work

towards broadening its horizons, developing a project characterized by an experiential understanding of tourism and a governance approach to collaboration.

The wedding planners' rather restricted role as innovators would seem to be related to the newness of wedding planning in the Italian context, arising from the emergence of new products and services in response to the external pressure exerted by a new trend in weddings: wedding tourism. In particular, their innovative contribution in terms of creating a new institutional field is limited. The data suggest that – with the exception of a few isolated cases – there is no shared understanding among the entrepreneurs and local public authorities of what wedding tourism is and could be. The cause of this lies in a lack of market orientation on the part of some municipalities and/or a lack of resources to invest in this area. Moreover, wedding planners seem not to be recognized as professionals and legitimate actors; therefore, they lack the power to enter any form of dialogue and collaboration. This factor, arising largely from the novelty of wedding planning, is aggravated by the presence of some improvising actors and the limited role played by the national wedding planners' associations.

Many elements in the literature concerning destination development and entrepreneurship have been confirmed in this study. An element that has emerged as particularly relevant to the future development of wedding tourism is related to the professionalization of the wedding planners. The findings also suggest that public–private collaboration is critically important as the public authorities' willingness and capacity to innovate varies. These aspects could be studied further, going into neo-institutional theory in greater depth, integrating it with contributions from the lifestyle entrepreneurship literature and drawing on the insights provided by Sundin and Tillmar (2008) concerning the entrepreneurial processes that take place in the public sector.

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